

Living by Faith in God's Good Justice

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[0 : 00] Okay, great. If you're visiting, my name's Kevin, and great to have you with us. We're going to spend a few minutes in prayer together. And often during this time, we pray for ourselves and our church and also our city and different churches or ministries in our city and broader field.

So will you join me as we spend a few minutes in prayer together? Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning empty-handed, and we confess our deep need for you.

God, we love you and we adore you. We are amazed by your grace and your mercy. God, your holiness and your justice humble us.

Your grace and your mercy invite us in. And God, this morning we confess we need you. Father, it's so often that we go running after so many false gods in our cities, in our lives that promise so much, and yet in the end they just make demands on us.

More and more demands, and they can never fully satisfy. Father, this morning we confess that you are the one true God, the one living God that can deeply satisfy us. Father, we often try and feast on other things that are like crumbs from your table, and yet God, you invite us to come and feast on you this morning.

[1 : 18] And so we really do, God. We want to meet with you. We ask your Holy Spirit to come and be here through the rest of our service. As we look at your word, as we continue to sing songs of devotion, as we come to the communion table, Holy Spirit, draw us in and come and open our eyes to see you and to meet with you.

God, this week as we go into our works and our universities, and as we look after kids and we engage with people, God, we need you. Come and have your way in our lives, we pray, God. Father, this morning we want to pray for our friends at Sons and Daughters, that fantastic ministry. We want to pray for the staff and the leaders and the volunteers and everyone involved with Sons and Daughters ministry.

God, we pray that you will strengthen them and encourage them. We pray, God, for just glimpses of your grace, where maybe they're feeling discouraged, feeling downcast, feeling like, how long, oh God?

Lord, won't you remind them of the great work that they're doing and how you are with them every step of the way. God, we pray for those that they are meeting and encountering, some of the ladies in One Chai.

[2 : 25] We pray for those searching for the truth that you, God, even today, won't you, God, draw near to them, Lord. Open their hearts, God, and we pray that they'll come to know you and find your amazing grace and love, God.

We pray for the men and the gangs that are holding so many of these ladies captive. God, we pray that your justice will come and you'll break in, Lord God, and you'll disrupt those gangs, God.

We pray for freedom, Lord. God, we want to pray for the bazaar that's coming up. We pray that it'll be hugely successful. Lord, for every bit of detail, we pray for the sons and daughters bazaar. Won't you look after it, God, and bring many ladies to the new safe house.

Father, this morning, we also want to pray for Amelia in Taiwan, our dear sister there, and we pray for you to really look after her and guide her, God. We pray for her health. She's had some health challenges.

We pray, Lord, for your healing and your protection over her. Right now, God, we lift Amelia to you, and we ask that you cover her with your grace, and she'll feel your grace, and she'll feel encouraged in her work there.

[3 : 28] We pray, God, for her Mandarin studies, and that you encourage her in that, and that she continues to grow and learn so that she can reach out to the Taiwanese people.

We pray for friends, God, and deep heart friends, those that she can share her heart with and feel at home with. We pray for real deep gospel friendships for her. And Father, we pray for opportunities for the gospel, for Amelia, Lord.

Won't you burn the gospel deep in her heart that she cannot help but just share it with everyone that she encounters? Lift her up this morning to you, God, and we pray bless her in your wonderful and powerful name.

Jesus, we pray all these things knowing that you're good and gracious, majestic and sovereign. And so we pray these things in your name. Amen. Amen. Great.

Let's listen to the reading of Habakkuk chapter 2. Thank you. The scripture reading comes from Habakkuk chapter 2 and 3.

[4 : 28] Please follow along in your bulletin or on the screen. And the Lord answered me, Write the vision, make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.

For still the vision awaits its appointed time. It hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come.

It will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not a pride within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed, it is wide as sheol. Like that, he has never enough.

He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples. Shall not always take up their taunt against him with scoffing and riddles for him and say, Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own.

[5 : 34] For how long? And loads himself with pledges. Will not your debtors suddenly arise? And those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoiled for them, because you have plundered many nations.

All the remnant of the people shall plunder you for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm.

You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples. You have forfeited your life.

For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond.

Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity. Behold, it is not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations wear themselves for nothing.

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink.

[6 : 47] You pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness. You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink yourself and show your uncircumcision.

The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory. The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them.

For the blood of men and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. What prophet is an idol when its maker has shaped it?

A mental image, a teacher of lies. For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols. Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake to a silent stone.

Arise, can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple.

[7 : 55] Let all the earth keep silence before him. A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, according to Shigeonot. O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear.

In the midst of the years, revive it. In the midst of the years, make it known. In wrath, remember mercy. This is the word of God.

Great, thank you guys. Well done. A tricky passage. Lots of big words and woes and all that. So, well done. Theo, for your first time reading on a Sunday, you got a very easy passage.

So, well done, Jonas. This morning, we continue looking at this strange little book in the Old Testament called Habakkuk, or Habakkuk.

And it's right at the end of the Old Testament, just before the New Testament, and it's a book in which this man called Habakkuk wrestles with God around the big questions of life.

[8 : 58] Where are you, God? Why do you seem absent? Why are you not hearing any of my prayers? And so, last week, we looked at chapter one. And chapter one starts off with Habakkuk complaining to God.

Because everywhere he looks around him in Israel, there is violence, there is wickedness, there is corrupt leaders, there is injustice. And he says, God, where are you?

Are you not doing anything about it? And God replies, and he says, funny ask. I actually am doing something about it. I'm busy raising up the Babylonians, that hasty and bitter nation, and they will be my instruments to come and discipline you and to teach you not to be like that.

And Habakkuk says, what? You've got to be joking. The Babylonians are even more unrighteous than us. How are unrighteous Babylon going to teach righteousness to Israel?

How is unjust Babylon going to restore justice to Israel? Where is the justice in that? And so, Habakkuk is confused and he's confounded by God's ways.

[10 : 04] And at the end of chapter one, he ends off by saying, I'm going to take my stand on the watchtower and I'm going to see what God has to say about my complaints. And today we get to chapter two.

And we don't know how long, there's some period of time, but God does respond. And that's what we're going to look at today. And so the question today is, how do we make sense of God's justice? When it appears that God allows evil and wickedness and injustice to run rampant in the world, and he doesn't seem to be doing anything about it, how do we make sense of that?

What do we do with the perceived injustice in the world? Now, this is Habakkuk's dilemma and we're going to look at it. Now, in this passage today, we're going to look at four things. I know a real sermon only has three points.

God and his sovereignty has given us four points today. Okay. And so today we're going to look at God's good news to Habakkuk, God's bad news to Habakkuk, God's bad news to us, and then God's good news to us.

[11 : 08] Okay. So let's dive in and look. Firstly, God's good news to Habakkuk. God answers Habakkuk and he says, Habakkuk, I've got good news. God's justice is coming.

And he responds by giving Habakkuk a vision. And he tells Habakkuk, write the vision down. Make it clear. Make it plain. And the reason is because God knows that all people throughout all generations are going to ask the same questions.

And so he's saying, Habakkuk, the answer I give to you, write it down. Make it clear. So that in future generations, when people are asking the same questions, where are you, God? They've got an answer.

And so look at what he says in verse two. He says, write it down. Make it plain. And what is this message that God's given him? It's a vision of what's going to happen to the unbridled wickedness of Babylon.

And God's answer is this. He says, Habakkuk, I've heard your questions. I've heard your complaints. I've answered you. Justice is coming. Look at verse six with me.

[12 : 15] Now in verse six and onwards, there are actually five woes, five pronouncements of judgment upon Babylon because of their wickedness and the evil one. And in each one, God is going to pronounce this judgment, but then he's going to show them how the very thing that Babylon is guilty of is actually going to be put upon them and it's going to come upon their own heads.

So for instance, let me think of an analogy. I don't know if any of you remember 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea in Ukraine.

I know in 2014 in Hong Kong, we had our own things going on here, but there were other things going on in the world as well. And I remember reading the newspapers when Russia annexed Crimea.

Crimea was a province of Ukraine. And I remember thinking, how on earth does that happen? That one nation just decides, we're going to take that province back and make it part of our nation.

And so they just rolled the tanks in and the army did their thing. And overnight, Crimea was now no longer part of Ukraine, is now part of Russia. And so at the time, all these world leaders stood up and said, you know, we condemn this in the strongest possible terms and this shouldn't happen.

[13 : 27] This is so unjust. And they said all these things, but at the end of the day, there's not a whole lot you can do about it. And so five years later, Crimea is now part of Russia.

In other words, sometimes people stand up and they say, woe to these people. This is bad. And we condemn this judgment. It shouldn't happen. But there's not a whole lot you can do about it. But that's not what God says. Look at what God says. He says, woe to Babylon. And then he's going to show them what's going to happen when they continue in their ways. Look at verse six. Look at the first one. He says, woe to him who heaps up what is not his own, who loads himself up with pledges. In other words, God's telling Habakkuk that he's not ignorant about Babylon's unjust economic practices.

The fact that they plunder poorer nations, stealing all their goods and taking them back to Babylon. The fact that they've built their nation, their empire on extortion, stealing from the poor and plundering those that are weaker than themselves, enslaving people.

[14 : 30] And so look at what he says in verse seven. He says, you think you've got away with it Babylon, but will not your debtors suddenly arise? You see what he's saying? In other words, Babylon thinks that they're going and stealing all this gold and plundering other nations.

And God says, actually you're just borrowing from them and they're going to soon call in their debts. With interest. They're coming back to take what you've just taken from them. In other words, think of this.

I don't know if you remember, you're at school and you've got some lunch money, okay? And some bully comes and steals your lunch money, right? And he thinks he's got away with it. Only on for later on in the day, a whole group of people surround him and say, we'll take that back, thank you very much. And your own lunch money for interest. In other words, Babylon thinks they're stealing from others and God says, it's just a matter of time before the nations call in their debts. Will not your debtors arise and those awake who make you tremble? Then you will be spoiled for them because you have plundered many nations. They shall plunder you.

[15 : 38] Look at else what he says, verse nine. He says, So here are the Babylonians.

Again, the unjust economic practices. They are stealing from the poor. They are plundering nations. They are using this money that they've taken and the slave labor in Babylon.

And what are they doing? They're building bigger and better houses for themselves. They're building themselves castles that they think are going to keep them safe from harm's reach. And so they think that their economic strength is their safety and their security and they trample on others in order to get it.

That's the Babylonian way. But look at what God says, verse 10. You have devised shame for your house. You've cut off many people. You have forfeited your own life.

See the irony there? You've planted others and you think this is going to make you safe. Don't you realize that in doing so you have forfeited your own life. The very thing you're trying to keep safe.

[16 : 40] For the stone will cry out from the wall. The beam from the woodwork will respond. God says, Habakkuk, I've seen what's happening. I've heard your cries. My justice is coming.

Maybe I'll skip over the last one. Verse 12. He says the same thing. Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity. Talking about slave labor.

And then, let's look at it. Verse 13. He says, Is it not from the Lord of hosts that all these people labor merely for fire? In other words, you're building this empire on slave labor. You've got these people and you're treating them as less than human to build your great city, your empire.

Don't you realize your empire is going to end up in the fire? Everything you've built is going to end up in ashes in your hands. And then he says, verse 14.

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Now here's a question. What percentage of the sea is covered by water?

[17 : 43] Okay? A hundred percent, right? So look at what God's saying here. You build yourself this empire that you think is going to last forever. It's just a matter of time before it's going to be ashes in the ground.

But there is an empire. There is a kingdom coming and it will last forever and it will cover the whole earth like the waters cover the sea. I am building an empire that will never get demolished or torn down.

Habakkuk, I've seen, I have heard, my justice is coming. And this is God's promise. Things look evil today. Things look like wickedness just is rampant, unchecked.

It has an expiry date. My justice is coming. Now look at verse 6 with me if you've got your bulletin or your Bible. Verse 6 says this. Shall not all these, okay, underline these, take up their taunt against

Babylon, scoffing and with riddles for him, saying woe to him.

So the question is this. These five woes, woes Babylon for this and this and this and this, who is issuing this woe? Who is it that's mocking them and saying you think you're building a castle in the sky?

[18 : 57] Don't you realize the stones are going to fall on your own head? You think you're building this empire. Don't you realize it's going to end up in ashes? Who's mocking Babylon with this taunt?

Is it Habakkuk? No. Is it God? No. Who is it? It's the victims that are being run over by the Babylonian army.

So Babylon is this unjust, wicked nation that plunders other nations and God says it's just a matter of time that these people that you think you can just march over from another perspective in history, they're looking down in history and they're laughing at you because your wickedness has an expiry date.

Maybe an example is this. It's a silly example but let's see if it makes sense. I don't know how many of you like soccer, also called football, outside of America. When my team is winning, I love soccer. When they're not winning, I lose interest. In 1999, there's this amazing game of soccer. There's this league in Europe called the Champions League which is the best teams from all the best countries in Europe play against each other.

[20 : 08] So it's called the Champions League because it's the best of the best. And so 1999, Champions League final, the two very best teams, Manchester United and Bayern Munich are playing a game together.

Six minutes into the game, Bayern Munich score a goal and so they're ahead. And for almost the rest of the game, Bayern Munich is winning. They just, they're one goal ahead but they're just running rampant over Manchester United.

And it seems like they're just going to score goal after goal. Manchester United have a chance every now and then but really Bayern Munich are in charge of the entire game. And so three minutes before the end of the game, the organizers, there's this massive big trophy.

It's like this big. They start to tie the ribbons of Bayern Munich club onto the trophy because as soon as the game finishes, the camera crews are going to fall onto the trophy and they want the ribbons of Bayern Munich on there.

And the stands where the Bayern Munich fans are, they're letting off fireworks and flares and the stand is bouncing with enthusiasm. You know what happened, right?

[21 : 14] One minute, two minutes before the end of the game, Manchester United score a goal. It's now 1-0. Bayern Munich stunt but it's okay, they got this thing. The game then goes into injury time which is like an extra two minutes at the end of full time and Manchester United score another goal and as they score, that's the end of the game, it's done and they win the Champions League final.

And so quickly the organizers are cutting off the ribbons and tying new ones on and that's what God is saying here. He's saying Babylon, it looks like you're winning. Wickedness, injustice, it looks like it's running rampant.

It's just a matter of time. Your expiry date is coming. The very people that you thought you had demolished are standing back from history and they are taunting you, they are mocking you saying your time is coming to an end.

So, that's the good news, okay? Habakkuk, the good news, justice is coming. Secondly, that was the longest one, okay? Secondly, God's bad news to Habakkuk.

Justice is coming, says God, but it's coming in my timing, not in your timing. So, let's go back to the beginning of chapter two and see what God says.

[22 : 27] And, when you hear God's good news, sometimes we can think, well, all's well that ends well. Everything's just rosy. But, look at how things work out. Look at verse two. God says, write the vision down, make it plain.

Then he says, for the vision awaits its appointed time. It hastens to the end, it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it, it will surely come.

Now, I'm not sure how many of you know that feeling of waiting for something and it feels like it's never coming. Maybe you've run a marathon, okay? I've never run a marathon, but let's just pretend I have.

And you get to 30 kilometers and your legs feel like jelly and you feel like my life sucks. And this is never going to end, right? You've got 12 kilometers ahead of you and you feel like I'm never, ever going to get to the end.

Or maybe you're a PhD student or a master's student and you're in the abyss of drudgery feeling like this thing is never going to end, right? And, in many ways, that's how Habakkuk felt.

[23 : 32] God gives him this vision of how the story is going to end. He tells them it may seem slow, but it's coming, but it doesn't seem like it's ever coming. And, in fact, this is something that Habakkuk had to wrestle with his entire life because the Bible, or actually history tells us that justice did come.

Babylon was overthrown. A few years later, 70 years later, Babylon is smashed by the Persians and they never recovered. That's the end of the Babylonian empire.

Except, it happened after Habakkuk is dead and buried and in the grave. In other words, the justice he waited for came, but it didn't come in his lifetime.

And Habakkuk starts off with this question, how long, oh God? He thought, apparently, God does not act. And what God was showing him was that God had just not yet acted. And Habakkuk was correct to think that God ought to act in response to the injustice in the world.

and he's quite right. But he also thought that he knew how and when God ought to act. And in this, he was quite wrong. And so God is teaching him this important lesson of patience.

[24 : 46] That the life of a Christian follows one of faith. And so that leads us to verse 4, in which we looked at last week. God says, the righteous will live by faith. And friends, this really is the greatest description of the Christian life.

that the life of a Christian is that the righteous will live by faith. Trusting God's ways. Trusting his timing. Trusting that he knows best, even when things don't make sense to us.

And this is what God is saying to Habakkuk. It seems slow. Wait for it. It's coming. It seems like it's delaying. I know what I'm doing. Habakkuk, my appointed time is coming.

This is the quintessential verse for the Christian. The righteous will live by faith. And so friends, tomorrow when you go to work, some of us might be challenged by the fact that a colleague that makes all sorts of unethical decisions, cuts corners, backstabs people, they get promoted and you don't.

Where's the justice in that? The righteous will live by faith. And friends, for some of us it seems like evil's on the rise, people are becoming more and more corrupt, unethical behaviors everywhere.

[25 : 56] The righteous will live by faith, knowing that your hope and your life is not found in getting ahead in the rat race, it's being found in who Christ is in your life in him. And so this is the most succinct description of the Christian life.

Because this world is not our home and therefore cannot give us what we long for or hope for.

Christ says, the vision awaits its time. It hastens to the end. It seems slow, wait for it.

It will come, it will not delay. Habakkuk's bad news, God's timing is not necessarily his own. And that leads us to the third point, our bad news.

Now, God's justice in the world, the fact that justice is coming, is good news. It means that there's no wickedness that is ever perpetuated which is left undone. It may not get justice in our lifetime, but there is coming a time, God says, I know about it, I'm sovereign, I will bring my just judgment to bear.

Now that's good news, but it's also bad news. And I'm going to let my friend, John Injoroche, who I actually don't know, he's not really my friend, but let's just pretend, let him answer this question for us.

[27 : 05] John, who is part of the RZIM speaking team, this is what he writes. He says, when our sense of justice is threatened, we are quick to demand answers.

This is nowhere more evident than the attacks on God's character based on his administration of justice, especially in the Old Testament. So things go wrong, we say, God, where are you?

This doesn't make sense, we demand answers to this. But at the root of this reaction lies the failure to appreciate the full implications for what one really asks for when we demand justice.

If justice is to be absolutely served, the guilty cannot go unpunished. Whenever we demand justice, we affirm the same standard that also condemns ourselves.

You see that? In other words, we say, God, we want justice. This is not right that evil reigns. But what about when we are guilty of doing the same things?

[28 : 04] Don't we condemn ourselves? So in chapter 2, verse 6, we read it earlier, the first of these five woes. Look at what Habakkuk says. He says, Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own.

And then as Habakkuk's writing this down in the scroll, he almost cannot help himself. He throws in these three words, How long, O God? And then he continues and loads himself up with pledges. He can't help himself. God, how long shall the Babylonians continue like this? But remember, last week, in chapter 1, he starts off and says, How long, O God, will you not hear my cries? And in that instance, he's not talking about Babylon, he's talking about Israel. He's talking about God's very people. You see that? On one instance, he's saying, God, how long shall the Babylonians go on like this?

But just the chapter before, he's saying, God, how long shall your people go on like this as well? In chapter 2, he writes and he says, The Babylonians, they're violent. They're violent.

[29 : 04] Where's your justice, God? In chapter 1, he says, God, I look around Israel and I see violence everywhere. He complains about the perversion of the Babylonians.

In chapter 1, he talks about the perversion in Israel. In other words, the very things that rile Habakkuk's sense of injustice about the Babylonians are just as present in the people of God themselves.

And that's bad news for us. Tim Mackey is the guy, the genius behind the Bible Project. If you've ever seen the Bible Project, it's amazing. Tim Mackey's the guy behind it.

And he makes this amazing point that at the end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, God condemns Babylon. But what's interesting is Babylon is long buried by the time Revelation is written.

It's 600 years later. Babylon doesn't even exist. And yet God has some very strong words to say for Babylon. Why is that? Tim Mackey makes the point that every city, every successful, wealthy city, every civilization has the temptation to become Babylon all over again.

[30 : 14] And the reason is because the seeds of Babylon are in each one of us. Or as Salman Rushdie said in one of his books, the barbarians are not only out at the gates, they are in our own skin as well.

And friends, this is the story of the world. In fact, this is particularly the story of Africa, the continent that I come from. Africa is a continent of revolutionaries and freedom fighters and coup d'etats and independence fighters.

But as soon as the revolutionaries get into power, it's just a matter of time before they start doing the very thing that they shed blood to overthrow. The revolutionaries become power hungry themselves.

Why? Because the barbarians are not only at our gates, they are in our skins as well. And friends, that's true for every civilization and every one of us. And so in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, he writes in Romans and he says how everybody in the world, the Jews and the Gentiles, the religious and the irreligious, all of us, if we try to stand before God in our own merits, we stand condemned.

And so he says, are the Jews, the religious people any better off because they have God's law? Not at all. Are the irreligious any better off because they're not constrained by some system?

[31 : 33] Not at all. All people everywhere, their mouths have been stopped. It's an amazing picture. I don't know if you remember when you were a little kid and you get caught for doing something wrong and you stand and your teacher or parent is scolding you and you've got no defense.

You're speechless. Your mouth has been stopped. And that's what Paul says. Every human being in all the world before the holiness and the justice of God, our mouths have been stopped.

Now look at what Habakkuk says. He says the same thing in chapter 2. He says, The Lord is in His holy temple. Therefore, let all the earth keep silent before Him.

You see, friends, in our pursuit of justice, when we look at the world and especially those in power and we throw our fists and we say, how on earth could you be like that? How could you behave like that?

The truth is, given half a chance in the same conditions, if we were in the same positions of power or were part of the same culture, how different would we be? I remember as a teenager going to my parents and saying, Mom and Dad, talk to me about apartheid in South Africa.

[32 : 40] You were adults. Why didn't you fight apartheid? Why didn't you stand up for injustice? How could you just go on with it and benefit from it? But the haunting question is if I was there as a white South African, would I have done anything different?

Would I have done anything different? And so Charles Spurgeon says it like this. He says, the man or the woman who clings to his own morality to justify himself before God is like a man who grasps a massive stone in order to prevent himself from sinking in a flood.

Friends, we stand before God with nothing in our hands. We stand before His holy justice, condemned. And so the question is, where is our hope? Where do we turn when we see injustice all around us and we see injustice in our own hearts?

What hope do we have? And so fourthly, the good news of the gospel is where justice and mercy meet. At the end of his vision, Habakkuk, he does the only legitimate thing that he can do.

He gets on his knees and he prays. He says, God, I don't know what to do. I don't know where to stand. And so he prays. And he prays this amazing prayer and we're going to look at it next week. But I want to look at just the first verse.

[33 : 52] Look at what he says here. He says, Lord, I've heard the report of you. Your work of God do I fear. In the midst of the years, revive it. In the midst of the years, make it known.

In your wrath, remember mercy. In your wrath, remember mercy. You see, earlier Habakkuk praised and says, God, where's the justice?

God, Israel's running rampant. What are you doing about it? And God says, I'm going to do something about it. And now he's seen, oh boy, God, if you do something about it, that's serious. And so he gets on his knees and he says, God, bring your justice. Bring your justice. But God, in your wrath, remember mercy. Habakkuk knows that if only God brings his justice, his just judgment, then what hope do we have?

But he knows that God is not only just, he's also gracious. In your justice, remember mercy. And so friends, the question is, where do we find justice that doesn't just sweep wickedness and sin under the carpet?

[34 : 56] It doesn't just turn a blind eye to the injustice in the world. But where do we also find a mercy and a grace that doesn't condemn us and crush us and the guilt in our own hearts? Is there a way for God to decisively deal with wickedness in the world and yet not decisively deal with the people in whom sin dwells?

Well, again, my friend, John in Joroghe says this. The biblical solution to this conundrum is uniquely ingenious, both logically and relationally. It is at the cross of Jesus where God's perfect justice is perfectly administered and yet his eternal mercy is publicly displayed.

Friends, in the cross of Christ, we are confronted by the holiness and the justice of God. In the cross of Christ, God tells us that sin isn't just a social construct to make us feel bad about ourselves.

sin is a reality and the consequences of sin is just judgment and death. But in the cross, we are also confronted with the mercy of God who says, I will take the punishment of your sin upon myself so that you can go free if you come to me in faith and repentance.

In the cross, we find God's justice and his mercy. He deals with wickedness by crushing Christ on the cross and yet he pours out his mercy by saying, welcome my sons and my daughters.

[36 : 20] In the cross alone, justice and mercy meet. And so, fifthly and finally, the question is this, what do we do with this? What do we do with the sense that God's passionate about justice but justice alone isn't good news for us, we need mercy as well.

Friends, the degree to which we understand how these two things come together will change our entire lives. This week, in this broken and sinful world of ours, there are going to be many reasons to be bitter and angry at the injustices of the world.

You see the way that people are treated and a part of our heart will rile and say, God, that's not right. Justice should be done. We look at corrupt leadership around the world. We look at income inequality in our own city.

We look at how companies and cities and empires are built on the back of slavery and slave labor. Maybe you're a parent and you feel angry about the fact that your children never respect you, never show any appreciation.

Maybe you feel angry at the way your parents never showed you any appreciation or love. Maybe you feel angry at your boss who makes your life misery. Irresponsible leaders that crash the stock

market and lose all your life savings.

[37 : 31] A spouse who doesn't show you any appreciation or love. Maybe a romantic relationship that turned wrong. Friends, this very week you're going to look at injustice in the world and there's going to be a temptation to feel angry and bitter about it.

Michael Ramsden from RZIM said this recently. He said, if our drive for justice is bitterness in our hearts, even when you get justice, you'll still feel bitter and angry.

But if on the other hand our drive for justice is fueled by compassion and love, whether you get justice or not, you'll still have love and compassion in our hearts.

Friends, the degree to which you see the justice of God and the mercy of Christ on the cross poured out for you, to that degree we'll be able to stand up for justice and yet do it with compassion and gentleness and mercy in our own hearts.

Let me land with the story. Many of you will know South Africa, the country I come from, many years ago we had this thing called apartheid which was when the government legislated extreme racism and prejudice against anyone that essentially wasn't white.

[38 : 44] and it was horrific. Many people were killed and the justice system was broken. Police could do almost anything and just a horrific time.

And so in 1994 just the apartheid is overturned. A new government is in place. Nelson Mandela is the new president and Nelson Mandela did something very wise.

He started something called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which is where people that had been victims of injustice could come to this commission and seek truth for what happened to their loved ones.

And so what often happened is people were killed but people didn't know what happened to their loved ones. And so the Truth and Reconciliation Commission said anyone that perpetrated injustice could acknowledge their fault, speak the truth, those that were victims could come and hear the truth and hopefully that would be the seedbed for some kind of reconciliation.

There's an amazing story about what happened at one of those meetings. There was an African lady sitting at this meeting and years previously a police officer by the name of Mr. Funderbrook went to her house and her son was accused or thought of being part of a terrorist organization to try and overthrow the apartheid government.

[40 : 05] And so they grab her teenage son, they drag him out the house, and she never knew what happened to her husband's body.

She didn't know if they'd taken him away, she never knew what happened. And so 10 years later, this lady is now facing the man that did this to her son and her husband in the same room and he's telling the story saying this is what I did.

And so at the end of this hearing, the commissioner turns this lady and says, what do you think we should do? What do you want done? How should justice be served?

And this lady says, I want three things to happen. The first thing is, I want to be taken to the place where my husband's body was burnt so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial.

My husband and my son were my only family. Second thing, she says, I want Mr. Thunderbrook to become my son. I want him to come to my house twice a month and to have tea with me so that I can pour out on him what love I still have in my heart.

[41 : 38] And thirdly, she says, I want Mr. Thunderbrook to know that I offer him complete forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive. This also would be the wish of my husband.

And so, she says, now, will somebody help me get up and walk across the courtroom so that I can put my arms around Mr. Thunderbrook and show him that he is truly forgiven?

Friends, in our world, there is incredible injustice. There is incredible wrongdoing. And if justice is the only recourse, what hope do we have?

If justice is the only thing that we do, we will cause vendettas and vigilantes and one group will forever hate another. But in the midst of this, God pours out his mercy and he says, let justice be met by mercy.

Here, this lady says, I want the perpetrator of the crime to become my son so I can pour out my love upon him. Friends, in the cross, God poured out his love on us in Jesus Christ.

[42 : 42] And Jesus died on the cross that we could become his sons and his daughters so that God could pour the love in his heart upon us, that God could welcome us into his family forever.

Friends, part of our role in calling as a church is to be part of God's redemption story in the city. And that means we're going to stand up for justice. It means we're going to fight for justice in our city. It means we're going to stand up against injustice. We're going to stand up for the poor and the marginalized. We're going to stand up for those that are treated less than human. We're not going to be those like the Babylonians that just build a nest egg in the sky and think we're safe and secure.

But we're going to stand up and fight for those that don't have and against inequality. But friends, how are we going to do it? In our world, justice is a thing that people feel entitled to. But friends, the church is called to stand up for justice, not arrogantly, not shaking our fists, but with compassion and mercy in our hearts, with conviction and love, with grace and empathy, knowing that in the gospel, we too are sinners, deserving of justice, and yet recipients of his amazing mercy. [43 : 50] And so let's come before him now and pray and ask God to make us that kind of people. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, Father, God, I don't know what to say.

Lord, God, God, when we look at the injustice in our world, our hearts recoil and our hearts say, this is not right. Father, we long for our true home.

We long for your kingdom to come, that kingdom which will be established on the earth, that will cover the world like the waters cover the sea, God. Your kingdom where there's no more tears and no more pain and no more sin and no more wickedness and no more injustice.

God, we long for that. We long for our true home, Lord. Jesus, we say, come quickly, God. Come quickly, God, and deal with the injustice in our world.

And yet, God, we also say, thank you, God, for your patience because if you dealt with us too quickly, God, we would have had no hope. Thank you for your patience, God, that is so patient you give us a chance to come to our senses, to humble ourselves before you, to throw ourselves at the foot of the cross and say, Jesus, have mercy on us.

[45 : 16] Forgive us, God. Jesus, thank you for the cross. Thank you for that place where justice and mercy meet, God. God, won't you show us, God, just how much your mercy costs.

Show us, God, what our sin really costs you. God, show us your glory, we pray. Father, we don't want to be followers of Jesus and go through the motions.

God, we want our hearts to be moved by who you are. Come and write your justice and mercy, your gospel deep in our hearts, we pray. Father, pray that as a church we really will become agents of hope and healing, justice and grace in our city.

God, I pray that Hong Kong will be better off, more like heaven because we as a church are here and because our brothers and sisters across Hong Kong are here. Come help us, we pray.

Make us more like you. Make our city more like heaven, we pray. Father, I pray especially this morning for those of us maybe that have been victims of great injustice.

[46 : 25] And God, sometimes a sermon like this can make, can be like salt in the wound. And when we hear that justice will come but it is often delayed, Father, it's so hard.

God, won't you give us grace? God, those of us that have been hurt and abused and mistreated, God, won't you give us grace? Father, won't you put your arms around us?

Pour your love into our hearts, we pray, God, and help us to forgive, I pray. Jesus, we're so hard, help us to forgive. Help us to have grace and compassion.

Do you give us compassion? Joë,