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SERMON TITLE: Don't Forget to Pray Against Evil
SCRIPTURE: Habakkuk 1:12-2:20
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Have you ever heard people say, "My God is not like that . . . he's like this!" And then they say some character trait that they believe or expect God to have.

For example,

- 'My God is love, thus God will not judge people.'
- 'If this is God's plan, God's a terrible planner!'
- 'God's plan is always the best. . . . When God is silent, he's working on something great for you.'
- 'God will only give you what you have asked for if you knew everything he knows.' (Timothy Keller)
- God is good . . . (all the time)

How do you expect God to be?

What do you do when God does not act like you expect God to be?

An example would be Jonah. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach that they should repent. God wanted to turn them around and forgive them. That made Jonah mad and he sat fuming about it beneath a large bush.

Jonah expected God to judge the worst nation on earth, (Assyria) but God had mercy instead.

How do you expect God to be?

What do you do when God does not act like you expect God to be?

Habakkuk believed God would fulfill God's promises! But he heard that God was raising up the Babylonians against them. How could he? Habakkuk expected God to save God's people.

"Surely, Lord, you do not plan to wipe us out?" he pled in disbelief.

What do you do when God does not act like you expect God to be?

Have you been shocked when God is other than you expect? Let's read God's Answer to Habakkuk's second question. READ Habakkuk 2:2-4:

Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of

the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

Keep that in mind—The righteous live by their faith. It is a clue for how to live in the tension when things go drastically wrong.

Let's continue now with verses 5-13 (selected) for the Consequences of False Choices:

Moreover, wealth is treacherous; the arrogant do not endure. . . . They gather all nations for themselves, and collect all peoples as their own. Shall not everyone taunt such people and, with mocking riddles, say about them, "Alas for you who heap up what is not your own! . . . Because you have plundered many nations, all that survive of the peoples shall plunder you—because of human bloodshed, and violence to the earth, to cities and all who live in them. . . . You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. . . . Alas for you who build a town by bloodshed, and found a city on iniquity!" Is it not from the LORD of hosts . . . that nations weary themselves for nothing?

These people were drunk on their own power when they conquered the nations. They live for their own position. But, they will have consequences for all the evil that they have done because even though they may accomplish their own agenda at that time, eventually:

The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (v. 14)

God's truth is all around you because **God has the real power**. It is like the saying, "what goes around comes around." People who live for themselves but don't know God will eventually forfeit their success.

Knowing God is the way to security, even when expectations about God fail.

It's like the man in Jesus' parable who had more than enough possessions so he built bigger barns. But then his life came to an end as soon as he finished building—and his wealth could not save him.

So Habakkuk reflects (Hab 2:18-20):

What good is an idol carved by man, or a cast image that deceives you? How foolish to trust in your own creation -

- a god that can't even talk! What sorrow awaits you who say to wooden idols, 'Wake up and save us!' To speechless stone images you say, 'Rise up and teach us!' Can an idol tell you what to do? They may be overlaid with gold and silver, but they are lifeless inside.

But the LORD is in his holy Temple. Let all the earth be silent before him.

Let us be silent out of respect and reverence in the presence of the living God!

Habakkuk was trying to figure out how to interpret God when God does not meet our expectations; when God's plan points to failure and loss in our eyes.

Last week the question was,

Are you going to do anything about the violence, destruction, strife, and contention in our nation, God? The answer God gave Habakkuk made him tremble. He was not expecting such a negative answer:

"Yes, I am raising up the Babylonians, a cruel and tyrannical agent."

This week the questions are:

- 1) Does God really use evil for good? Can God pull off a victory against these powerful people? Is God indeed in charge and able to accomplish God's purposes for God's people?

Justice is so perverted in the world that evil, not God's sovereignty, seems to be victorious. Babylon is so wicked they will swallow up God's people. So Habakkuk is anxious about God's providence.

Habakkuk boldly makes his complaint. He says to God, "Who are you? Aren't you the God from of old, the one I have always known?" This facilitates the troubling question – *then why is this happening?*

- 2) What about your promises, God?

The subject matter here is called theodicy. Theodicy means why does a good God permit evil? This is a major question for many people. Persistent evil is a fact in this world. Where does God fit in?

- 3) Does God answer prayer?

Habakkuk had confidence in prayer: "I'm going to stand at my watchpost to see what God will say to me and how he will answer my complaint."

Habakkuk was praying against this evil nation. He was totally confident that God heard him and he could hear God.

What was coming from the nation of Babylon was very clear. They had no god as guidance; no living god anyway. No God who said:

- *Love the Lord who created the heavens and earth for you.*
- *Worship him so he can give you his Holy Spirit.*

- *Set aside a day to do this—away from commerce so you know there is more to life than things you do or make.*
- *This God is not a token or a good luck charm or a raffle ticket. He is not visible so don't try to make an image.*
- *PRAY to Him instead.*
- *Love and be faithful to your wife or husband.*
- *Don't envy and overpower others with greed.*
- *Instead, wait on the Lord. Wait by faith.*

Good things are coming. Watch for them. Be patient.

The enemy that was coming was filled with the very opposite of these tenets, but the promise of God was that this enemy would not prevail.

What in your life is pulling you off track from trusting God in the hard times?

What is deceiving you into thinking it is other than God which will provide a better life?

Where are your struggles?

- Faithfulness?
- Possessions?
- Following false philosophies and worldly opinions?

Ask the Lord, "What do I need to learn to trust you in the hard times? That takes prayer.

Whenever you are distressed about the evil around you, never forget to pray against evil. And then go to your "watchtower," your quiet place where you seek God and talk to him. Tell him your complaint. Thank him for teaching you to live by faith. Once again remind yourself to do exactly like that. For God is going to WIN!

AMEN