

August 2, 2020

Majoring in the Minors  
Habakkuk: God's Mysterious Ways  
Habakkuk 1:1-11

**Opening Words:** Where is Jimmy Hoffa? That is one of the great mysteries in our country. The other day was the 45th anniversary of his disappearance. The teamster union leader disappeared on July 30, 1975 in Oakland County, Michigan. His involvement in organized crime is well documented. The police and forensic anthropologists have searched several sites in Detroit and Oakland County to no avail. One popular theory is that his body is under Giants Stadium in New Jersey. I think about him every time I watch a game from that location. As the years have gone on it appears Jimmy Hoffa's body will never be found. Finding Jimmy Hoffa is one of our country's great mysteries, but it is nothing next to understanding God's mysterious ways.

This is sermon number nine in my thirteen-part sermon series, *Majoring in the Minors*. They are not considered minor because they are unimportant. They are considered minor because they are brief. To date, we have looked at Joel, Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, and Nahum. Next week, we look at Zephaniah. Today, we look at Habakkuk. Today's issue is faith or trust. Never forget, the Minor Prophets remind us of the great qualities of God. Our scripture reading for today is Habakkuk 1:1-11. I have called this message *God's Mysterious Ways*.

**Habakkuk 1:1-11** The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received.

### **Habakkuk's Complaint**

<sup>2</sup> How long, LORD, must I call for help,  
but you do not listen?  
Or cry out to you, "Violence!"  
but you do not save?  
<sup>3</sup> Why do you make me look at injustice?  
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
there is strife, and conflict abounds.  
<sup>4</sup> Therefore the law is paralyzed,  
and justice never prevails.  
The wicked hem in the righteous,  
so that justice is perverted.

### **The LORD's Answer**

<sup>5</sup>“Look at the nations and watch—  
and be utterly amazed.  
For I am going to do something in your days  
that you would not believe,  
even if you were told.  
<sup>6</sup>I am raising up the Babylonians,  
that ruthless and impetuous people,  
who sweep across the whole earth  
to seize dwellings not their own.  
<sup>7</sup>They are a feared and dreaded people;  
they are a law to themselves  
and promote their own honor.  
<sup>8</sup>Their horses are swifter than leopards,  
fiercer than wolves at dusk.  
Their cavalry gallops headlong;  
their horsemen come from afar.  
They fly like an eagle swooping to devour;  
<sup>9</sup> they all come intent on violence.  
Their hordes advance like a desert wind  
and gather prisoners like sand.  
<sup>10</sup>They mock kings  
and scoff at rulers.  
They laugh at all fortified cities;  
by building earthen ramps they capture them.  
<sup>11</sup>Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—  
guilty people, whose own strength is their god.”

Many years ago, before man walked on the moon, before a civil war threatened to divide America, or before Columbus discovered a New World, there was a man who spoke for God. His name meant “Embrace,” but we just call him Habakkuk. He lived in the year 605 BC. He was well rooted in the traditions of Israel, so many have concluded he lived in Jerusalem. His book does not contain any proclamation to Israel. His book, only three chapters long, is a dialogue between himself and God. Verses two through four are Habakkuk’s complaint to God. Verses five through eleven are God’s response. The prophet is trying to understand God’s mysterious ways.

That is what we hear in the reading for today. According to verse six, God is going to use Babylon to punish Israel. The Babylonians were a mighty power at that time. Winning their independence from the Assyrians in 626 BC and destroying the Assyrian Empire in 612 BC. Those words seem benign to our generation, but to Habakkuk’s generation it seemed like sheer insanity. Why would God use this evil foreign power to command his will? It is a good question. Have you ever tried to understand God’s mysterious ways? I will admit it, I have.

Our world seems to be broken. I am not just talking about the coronavirus. Our world seemed broken before the pandemic. Our world was and is facing some massive problems. Things like world hunger, climate change, violence, inequality, poverty, and corruption. Our denominational, the United Methodist Church, was on the verge of splitting over the LGBTQ debate. Both sides are filled with arrogance. What a mess! Then, the co-vid 19 entered our world and the simplest things got complicated. It is difficult to do anything. It is a hard time to have surgery. It is a hard time to get married. It is a hard time die. It is a hard to time travel. It is a hard time to own a business and be a preacher. It is a hard time to be a teacher or educator. It is a hard time to be with loved anyone because everyone has a different opinion, and everyone listens to different people. The rules keep changing. We have never seen anything like this, and we thought things could not get worse. Then, things got worse. George Floyd died, and racism grabbed the front page. Race riots and protests are common and not a single rioter was wearing a face mask. Statues have been torn down because some are trying to rewrite history. I was taught we were to learn from history, not worship history. Do not forget the national election is coming. Both sides will do anything to win. They are passionate about their candidate, but no one seems to care about what is best for the country. It is obvious to me. Our world is broken. We are not much different from Habakkuk's generation. His world was broken too. We believe God is in charge, but his ways are a mystery to us. If God ways are a mystery to you say, **"Amen!"**

Freddy Fritz has been the minister of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church for many years. In 2006, he wrote a sermon called *Understanding Today's News*. In that sermon, he says there are several reasons we do not understand God mysterious ways. Each one is found in this morning's reading. Consider these three things with me.

1. God ways seem mysterious to us because **God's inactivity** is frustrating to us. Verse one quotes Habakkuk. He says, *"How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?"* Have you ever wondered why God does not do something? We are not patient people. We want problems solved instantly, but God never seems to be in a hurry. God's inactivity bothers us.
2. God's ways seem mysterious to us because of **God's unexpected providence** confuses us. Verse 5 quotes God. The Almighty says, *"Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told."* We do not like surprises. We try to be organized and we like agendas. God often answers our prayers in unexpected ways. God's unexpected providence confuses us.
3. God's ways seem mysterious to us because of **God's unusual instruments**. Once again God is quoted in Verse 6. He says, *"I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the*

*whole earth to seize dwellings not their own.* "The unwilling are often part of God's plan. The disliked are often part of God's plan. God use of unusual instruments baffles us.

I hope you do not feel special. You are not the first one to be confused by God and ours will not be the last. Habakkuk, himself, was confused by God. It is important to remember God is not accountable to us. However, we are accountable to God. It is equally important for you to remember it is not necessary for you to understand God's ways. It is only important that you trust God. It has been said: FAITH IS TRUSTING IN GOD EVEN WHEN YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND HIS PLAN. How far do you trust God? That is an important question to answer in our broken world. It has always been important to answer that question.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895-1960) was pastor of the famous Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA from 1927 until 1960. In 1939, he was invited to preach at two preaching conferences in Britain. The first was in Edinburgh, Scotland. The second was in Belfast, Ireland. There was a week off between the two, so he decided to visit his family, who were staying in Normandy, France.

As he set out for France from Edinburgh officials urged him not to travel to France. Europe was in political turmoil because Hitler had just signed his nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union and was threatening to march into Danzig, Poland. Barnhouse did not listen. War seemed to be remote. As he traveled there was a frenzy of military activity. Nevertheless, he was able to join his family in Normandy on Sunday evening. Most of the time was spent on the beach, though the atmosphere was tense with uncertain anticipation for what was about to happen.

On Thursday morning word came that there would be no more flights to England. Dr. Barnhouse took a train to Paris and a boat to England. When Dr. Barnhouse arrived in England, he caught a train to London. From there he caught another train to the coast of Scotland, from where he was to take a boat over to Ireland. He spent all day on Saturday traveling, along with thousands of frightened children who were being taken out of London and harm's way. Dr. Barnhouse finally arrived in the train station in Belfast at about three o'clock on Sunday morning. The committee that had arranged the Belfast preaching conference met him at the train station. After a short prayer they took him to his hotel. It was four o'clock in the morning and worship began to eleven o'clock. In parting, one of the men said to Dr. Barnhouse, "I hope you have a good sermon. It may well be the last sermon that some of the men will ever hear. The Prime Minister is declaring war on Germany tomorrow morning."

When Barnhouse arrived at the church, he expected it to be empty. He was wrong. The church was full. Barnhouse knew that was a historic moment. Just moments earlier Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared war on Germany. It was September 3, 1939. He read Matthew 24:6. Jesus said, "*You will hear of war and the rumors of war:*

*Do not be troubled.*”Dr. Barnhouse then recounted the series of experiences that he had had on his way to Belfast. After each account he repeated his text: Do not be troubled! He told of the church bells sounding: Do not be troubled! He told of the mobilization of soldiers: Do not be troubled! He told of the frightened children: Do not be troubled! He told of the millions of homes that would be destroyed: Do not be troubled! The tension was mounting in the sanctuary, but then Barnhouse suddenly stopped. A minute later he said, “These words are either the words of a madman or they are the words of God.” But then, after a long pause, came the answer.

There are no troubles because Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is the Lord of history. Jesus Christ is the God of our broken world. Jesus Christ has always been the Lord of our broken world. Jesus Christ is the God of every detail. Nothing has ever happened that did not flow in the channel that God has dug for it. No event has ever astonished, bewildered, or confused him. He is our God and he is in control. It is a lesson for the ages. That is what God taught Habakkuk years ago. That is what God is trying to teach us today. The question is how far do you trust God? Do you remember the slogan? FAITH IS TRUSTING IN GOD EVEN WHEN YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND HIS PLAN. And all of God’s people said, “**Amen!**”