

Do you ever feel like something has gone really wrong in the world? Perhaps that sense comes when someone says, “All politicians lie,” as though that excuses the lies their favorite politician tells. Perhaps it’s when you read about the tragedy that has been unfolding in Syria over the last five years. There are plenty of places where the world is off track, and it feels like we can do little to change it.

If you feel like the world has gone wrong sometimes, then Habakkuk may be your favorite prophet. All of the prophets recognized there was something wrong in their world. They usually start out by denouncing those on whom God has pronounced judgment. Habakkuk started out a little differently. He started out by asking, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen? Or cry to you, ‘Violence!’ and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble?”

Habakkuk was not only looking at the problems in Judah, though there were plenty of things going wrong there. The northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians. The cruelty of the Assyrians is not fit to speak of in this setting. For a while, it looked like Assyria would also take Judah and Jerusalem. However, the geopolitical world was shifting in Habakkuk’s time. The Chaldeans were rising to prominence, threatening even the Assyrians, and the Chaldeans were just as bad.

Habakkuk asked the Lord, “How long are you going to allow this? How long will you allow injustice in Judah? How long will you allow your people to suffer at the hands of the Assyrians? How long will you allow nations like the Chaldeans to rise to prominence?”

The Lord’s response to Habakkuk was probably not what Habakkuk was hoping to hear. The Lord said, “I am going to allow the Chaldeans to take care of the injustice of Judah. They are terrible people. Their military might is fearsome. They will take away the trouble in Judah.”

Habakkuk responded, “Lord, how can you use the Chaldeans? How can you use the less righteous to punish those who are more righteous than they are?”

The Lord responded to Habakkuk, “The spirit of the proud is not right within them, but the righteous will live by faith.” The Lord then went on to say that he would bring judgment against the Chaldeans as well.

“The righteous will live by faith.” This is a statement that was quoted in the New Testament three times, in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. It was a statement that finally brought peace to Martin Luther after feeling tormented by his sense of failure. It is a statement that is repeated often in the church today.

“The righteous will live by faith.” If you’ve been in the church for long you’ve heard it before. You may have even said it. But, what does it mean?

Faith in the Lord is trust in the Lord’s nature. Habakkuk understood some things about the nature of the Lord. He understood that the Lord was powerful enough to do something about the evils that he saw in the world. After he asked the Lord a question, Habakkuk said that he would

wait and stand watch for an answer. Habakkuk also believed that the Lord was a God of justice. He said that the Lord's eyes are too righteous to behold evil. Habakkuk believed that the Lord could and would set things right.

This was the same kind of trust that sustained St. Paul during the time he was imprisoned for telling the world about Jesus. He told Timothy that he could have assurance that the time he spent in prison, the abuse he endured for the sake of the gospel was not in vain. He pointed to the resurrection of Jesus and said that was the revelation of God's faithfulness. It was the revelation that the Lord had put an end to death, and gives us eternal life. Paul said, "I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of the resurrection." In short, Paul was saying, "Through Jesus Christ, I know what God is like. And, because I know what God is like, I can trust the Lord."

Faith is trust in the nature of the Lord. It is a conviction that our destiny is linked to the destiny of Jesus because we have trusted him. If you want to increase your faith, take time to think about the Lord's nature. Pause for a moment now and then and think about Jesus calming the storm in the sea, or welcoming those who were unwelcome, or about his appearance to Mary in the garden after the resurrection. Think about the Lord's nature.

"The righteous will live by faith." Our trust in the nature of the Lord will change the way that we live, including the way that we respond to evil. Habakkuk knew that the right response to the evil he saw was to turn to the Lord and ask the Lord to do something about it. While the Kings tried to make military alliances, Habakkuk turned to the Lord.

In prison, Paul did not complain of the injustice he suffered. He did not curse the emperor. In fact, he was looking forward to seeing the emperor so he to tell him about Jesus. Paul believed that reconciliation was possible through the gospel. He told Timothy not to be ashamed because Paul was in prison, but to keep holding on to the sound teaching of the Gospel of Christ.

When we are faced with evil, we have a few options. We can ignore it, in which case it will continue to grow. We can try to take matters into our own hands, which has proved disastrous throughout history. Or, we can share the gospel, and seek reconciliation through Jesus Christ. We can put our trust in the Lord, and believe that He is able to do something about the evil in the world.

"The righteous will live by faith." When we put our trust in the Lord's nature, and live according to our trust in His nature, we will find hope. Even though Habakkuk did not see anything change immediately, he had hope because he knew the Lord was at work. It may have been in a way that he did not understand. It was not the way Habakkuk would have chosen to handle the problem. But, Habakkuk had hope because he knew the Lord was at work.

Even from prison, facing the possibility of execution, Paul had hope. Paul had experienced the risen Lord. He had received the promise of eternal life. He knew that Jesus, not the emperor, was the Lord of all things. Paul knew that, having entrusted himself to the care of the Lord, he was secure no matter what happened next.

“The righteous will live by faith.” If you want to have hope in a world where things have gone wrong, put your trust in the Lord’s nature, and live in a way that reflects that trust. Then, you will have hope. Hope is not a denial of the things that are wrong. It is not saying that this is the best of all possible worlds. The hope that we have when we live by faith is hope because Jesus was raised from the dead, showing us the way to eternal life. It is hope brought by the conviction that the Lord is acting. We may not understand how, but He is acting. Living by faith brings hope because we can have confidence in the Lord who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.