



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 17
October 2, 2022

The Righteous Live from Faith

Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4

¹ *The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.* ² *O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save?* ³ *Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.* ⁴ *So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.*

¹ *I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.* ² *And the LORD answered me: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.* ³ *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.* ⁴ *“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.”*

There was a fellow in Toronto – this is supposed to be a true story – he was the top window salesman in his company. He sold windows for high-rise office buildings and no one came close to matching his success.

Apparently, he would take his prospective customers to a building that had his windows and he would tell them at length of their beauty, clarity, and strength. But the real clincher was when he came to tell them about the safety and security of his windows – which is important if you work in a high-rise office building; you don’t want to stumble and fall against the window, only to find yourself plummeting thirty stories to your death! Right?

So, when he came to the safety of his windows, he would walk across the room, run as hard as he could, and hurl himself at the window. After bouncing back from the unbroken glass, more often than not, his clients were ready to sign a contract.

Sad to say, this man is no longer the top window salesman at his company. It seems that one day, he was showing his windows to a group of prospective clients at a high-rise office building in downtown Toronto, and he told them of their beauty, their clarity, and their strength. And when he came to their safety, in customary fashion, he walked across the room, ran as hard as he could, and hurled himself at the window . . . only to have it shatter, and down he went, a victim of misplaced faith.

Today’s Old Testament is about faith – two different kinds of faith – faith that is properly placed, and faith that isn’t. The text is taken from the little book of the prophet Habakkuk, about whom little is known. We do know that he wrote his book to the citizens of Israel and Judah just prior to the Babylonian captivity – roughly six-hundred years before



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the birth of Christ – which makes him a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah. Like Jeremiah, Habakkuk was most probably carried off into exile with the rest of his countrymen.

The simplest understanding of this text is that Habakkuk has seen the atrocities that happen when a nation is at war. He speaks of violence, wickedness, trouble, and ruin. He says that there is already strife and contention in the land, and that there will be those who stir up more. He complains that God doesn't seem to hear his prayers, that he cries out for help, but God doesn't deliver. The good news is, he never loses faith. He doesn't really think God is ignoring him, for, as he says: "I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint" (2:1).

God does eventually speak to Habakkuk. He says: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it" (2:2). He says that the prophecy is set, and will come to pass at the appointed time. Though it seems that it will fail, it will not. Anyone who reads it must run – run away! For the events it foretells are just around the corner . . . and they are not pleasant. Death and destruction and more violence await Habakkuk and his people. Captivity and bondage are in store for them. Run, you reader; run away! For if you do not, you will not escape the coming wrath of God, the punishment for years of unfaithfulness on the part of Israel and Judah.

But God knew that the majority in Israel would not listen, for they were puffed up within themselves – arrogant, boastful, and proud. They would rather depend on their own strength, their own might, their own wit, their own ingenuity. And they will fail. And they will be taken captive. And they will die.

But not so the righteous. And it's not because the righteous are better or smarter or stronger than anyone else. The righteous *are* the righteous because they *don't* trust in themselves. They don't depend on themselves. The righteous live out of their faith. Their attitudes and actions flow out of their faith in God, faith in their Savior. They trust in Him. They depend on Him. And though they, too, will be taken captive, they will live, for their life is lived out of their faith.

So . . . what does that mean? What does it mean to live out of faith? From a material perspective, to live from faith means that we, like the righteous in Israel, do not rely on our own abilities to survive in this world. If we have faith in the Author of Creation, we understand, albeit imperfectly, that He who *made* us and this world can also *sustain* us in this world. He who created our bodies can cure them. He who designed the earth and the world can maintain it. He who set the stars in motion can certainly see to it that they do not crash into us.

From a spiritual perspective, Scripture assures Christians that God's care for us extends beyond this world into eternity. Those whose faith and trust is in Christ not only have the guarantee of provision and protection in this world; we also have the guarantee of safe passage into the presence of God in heaven.



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We have God's guarantee of both material and spiritual blessings, beloved. We may enjoy both spiritual and material blessings here and now. In this life we can have joy and peace, as well as safety and security – perhaps not to the degree we'll have it in heaven, but certainly to a greater degree than many have it now. I find it disturbing to see believing Christians walking through life as though they've been defeated. Don't let the devil steal your joy. I don't mean to minimize anyone's difficulties in life, but the fact of the matter is: you, Christian, have the promise of God that He will uplift and support you in every physical need. To live out of faith means in part to remember that we need not feel panicked every time something doesn't go our way; we needn't feel so desperate about imposing our will upon others; we needn't worry and fret about how we're going to get through tomorrow or even today. As Jesus said to His followers: "Consider the birds and the lilies of the field, how God cares for them and feeds them. Are you not much more important than they? How then will God not take care of you? Take no thought for tomorrow, as to what you will eat or what you will wear. Your heavenly Father knows you need these things. But seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you." "Oh, and by the way," He says, "the Father is pleased to give you the kingdom." It's *already* yours!

What will a life lived from faith look like? It is, first of all, a life concerned about the kingdom of God, a life engaged in seeking God's kingdom and giving Him every opportunity to feed our souls through His blessed Means of Grace. The righteous live from faith, which means they trust in God their Father for all things needful in this world – clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, animals and all that we need to support this body and life – as we learn in the first article of the Creed, and they trust in Christ their Savior for all things needful in the life to come – forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the power of the devil, everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness – as we learn in the second article.

We also learn something from the third article, namely, that this faith of ours is a gift. The Lord says through the prophet Habakkuk: "The righteous will live by his faith." But whose faith is it really? Remember what the Catechism says: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." Beloved, faith is a gift. If it's ever truly ours – for all gifts really come from God and belong to Him – [if it's ever truly ours] then it's ours because He's given it to us to use for His purpose, that being the salvation of our souls and the life everlasting.

If, then, faith is a gift, it must be managed toward the purpose for which it was given, lest the gift be taken away, as Jesus says in the parable. (Remember – the talent simply buried and not put to use for the master is taken away.) How, then, do we properly manage the gift? At the risk of sounding vulgar, permit me to borrow from the vernacular: Use it or lose it. Now, how does one *use* his faith? This is done when we employ those other gifts God has given us through His Son Jesus Christ – gifts which we call the Means



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of Grace. Holy Baptism is given as the initiating gift, which brings us into the Faith and bestows the Holy Spirit. Holy Communion – or the Lord’s Supper – is given as the on-going feast, in which Christ gives us His own body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. Holy Absolution is given as the voice of forgiveness, in which we’re reminded of the living, breathing nature of forgiveness, as well as the gift of the pastor through whom the voice of the Gospel is kept alive among the people of God. And all these things take place within the liturgical life of the Church, that great gift of God, His kingdom on earth. Here we come to meet Him who comes to us in His body and blood. Here He greets us through Word and Sacrament. Here we’re made the righteous who live by faith, for here is where our faith is kept alive.

God continue to draw you away from trust in yourself, which puffs you up and leads to death, that He may draw you to trust in Him, who purifies your heart and makes you holy by the cleansing blood of His Son, our Savior and Lord. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

i. Luke 12:27-32