

HANGING IN THERE

Habakkuk 1:1-3, 2:1-4

Gas prices may have gone down a little, but we are told by many experts that we may soon undergo a great recession and even food shortages. The war goes on in Ukraine which brings the threat of possible nuclear war. Politics has always been ugly, but think of what it will be like for the mid-terms in November.

Listen to what Habakkuk wrote and see if it sounds anything like our world today:

How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but You do not listen? Or cry out to You, “Violence!” but You do not save? Why do You make me look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds . . .

We know little about Habakkuk. He seems to have lived after the Assyrians had wiped out the ten northern tribes of God’s people Israel and soon the Babylonians were about to destroy the remaining kingdom of Judah. The Assyrians invaded in 722 B.C. and the Babylonians conquered in 587 B.C. We are told that the war against terrorism will last a long time, like the cold war which lasted about 40 years. Imagine 130 years of invasions and the threat of war. Think of what all those years of war must have done. It is no wonder that Habakkuk cried out, “How long, O LORD?”

We too are under the threat of invasion. We may not be starving or refugees to another land or overrun by terrorists, but the threat is real. And at that same time other forces, perhaps even more threatening, invade our lives.

What am I talking about? Listen to this description of our world from the late comedian George Carlin:

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers, wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints. We spend more, but have less. We buy. But enjoy less.

We have bigger houses and smaller families, more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees, but less sense, more knowledge, but less judgment, more experts, yet more problems, more medicines, but less wellness.

We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too little, spend too much time in front of a screen, and pray too seldom.

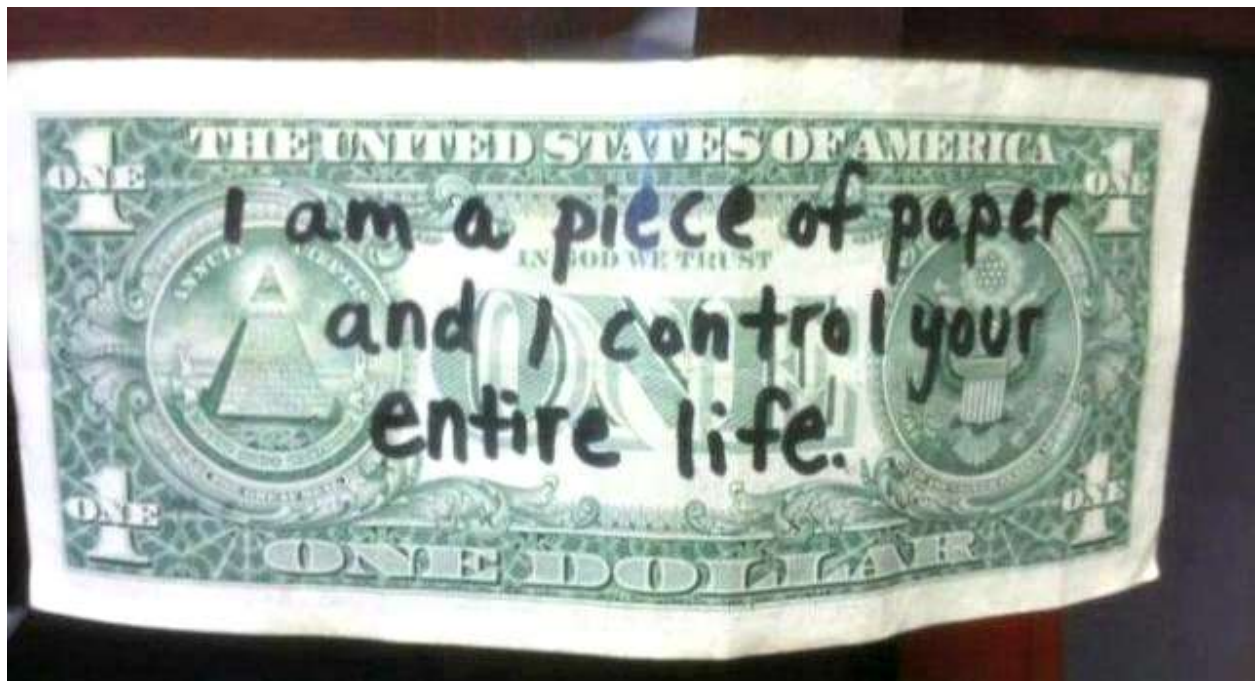
We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, listen too seldom. We've learned how to make a living, but not a life. We've added years to life, not life to years.

We have been way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet a new neighbor. We conquered outer space, but not inner space. We've done larger things, but not better things. We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul. We've conquered the atom, but not our prejudice. We write more, but learn less. We plan more, but accomplish less. We've learned to rush, but not to wait.

We build more computers to hold more information, to produce more copies than ever, but we communicate less and less. These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion, big men and small character, steep profits and shallow relationships. These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce, fancier houses, but broken homes. These are the days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throw away morality, one night stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheer to quiet, to kill.

It is a time when there is much in the showroom window and nothing in the stockroom. A time when technology can bring this letter to us, and a time when we can choose to either share this insight—or just delete it.

We are under assault by the materialism and commercialism of our times. The idea is not to logically convince us that we need this or that, but to bombard us with image after image so that we are convinced that we need to buy. This result is often this:



Habakkuk saw threats from foreign invaders. But he also saw threat from within. He complained to God, “Therefore the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails.” It was bad enough that pagan nations threatened the land. But what made the matter worse was that people who were supposed to be in charge were dishonest and unfaithful to God’s law. That’s what we see in our world. Think of how our families are assaulted. Cursing was rarely done in public; now it is so commonplace that no one seems to care. Families used to be the core of society; now they are breaking apart. People had respect for the church; now churches are seen as being out of touch with reality. Like Habakkuk we are as threatened from within our culture as we are from outside terrorists.

Usually the prophetic books of the Bible begin with the words, “The Word of God came unto such and such . . .” In contrast Habakkuk begins with the complaint, “How long, O LORD must I call for help, but You do not listen?” Habakkuk may seem brash talking to God that way. But the point is that he was not looking the other way when people went astray from God. Nor should we. When we see how we are under assault by a world that wants to trap us in “things”, then we too should be asking, “How long, O LORD?”

God gave to Habakkuk a list of “woes.” He said, “Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion!” “Woe to him who builds up his realm with unjust gain!” “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!” “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin until they are drunk!” “Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’” All of them will get their due.” But when?

We may look in this life for world peace, justice for the oppressed, and everyone living in democratic freedom. But the fact of the matter is that there will always seem to be as much evidence that seems to convince people that God is not there as there is evidence to convince us that He is.

That is why God tells Habakkuk:

The revelation awaits the appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and not delay. See he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith.

We walk by faith. It is not that in every moment in our lives we are going to see clear evidence that God is there—that He is going to zap all the bad guys and reward us with easy lives. As we are sitting in a hospital waiting room, going through a divorce, trying to work out a relationship with a man or woman, or wondering on Sunday morning where our children are, we need to live by faith, not by what makes clear sense to us.

A family was on a cruise off the coast of Alaska. As they sailed into Glacier Bay, one of the children noticed how the ice floes went in the direction of the current, but the icebergs went the opposite direction. They asked the captain about it. He told them, “The floes are carried by

the currents on the surface; but the icebergs, which are much deeper in the water, are carried on by deeper currents which cannot be seen.”

We stand on the “surface” like Habakkuk and ask, “How long, O LORD, must I call for help but you do not listen?” From where we are God can seem to have forgotten us or that He is irrelevant. But in His Word God leads us by “deeper currents”—by the faith God has given to us. And as we look in those “deep currents,” we see the rock, Christ Jesus, on whom we base our faith. We can know that in the end God will put an end to evil. His justice will prevail. But even more His mercy will conquer as he takes us to be with Him forever.

The evidence that Habakkuk saw all seemed to point to a God who was not there. But as he poured out his frustrations, God strengthened his faith. Habakkuk trusted in the promises of God that we know have already been fulfilled in Jesus. That faith led Habakkuk to conclude:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will be joyful in God my Savior.

God grant us that faith.