

# Learning to Lament

## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>1</sup>The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

<sup>2</sup>O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save?<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

<sup>5</sup>“Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. (Hab. 1:1–5)

### Another Minor Prophet

- A. As God would have it, both Joey and now myself have taken up the task of preaching sermons through two books in the OT referred to in each case as minor prophets. He’s in Jonah and I’ll be in Habakkuk.
- B. So these two are similar at least in this sense. And yet they are quite different in many other ways. For example . . .
  - 1. Jonah, it is understood, came a good century or more before Habakkuk.
    - a. Habakkuk himself arrives on the scene somewhere near the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.
  - 2. Jonah was a prophet in the north to Israel and was commissioned beyond that to bring the word of God to the Gentiles even in Nineveh.
    - a. Habakkuk, on the other hand, takes up his mantle long after the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria (722 B.C.) and is therefore a prophet particularly focused in on the southern kingdom of Judah, where, of course, the kings in the line of David were in power.
  - 3. Regarding Jonah as a man, we know a great deal. The whole book is a sort of biographical account of his own story. He, perhaps more than any other prophet, is drawn up in portraiture and given three-dimension for us. We don’t always like what we see, but we feel like we come to know him by the end.
    - a. But concerning this man Habakkuk, perhaps less is known about him than any other OT prophet. Whatever we do come to glean about him is all by way of inference and implication from his discussions with God here. But that’s the best we can do. We can just patch a few ideas together. He’s a Judean man of mystery.

- C. Now, though we don't know much about Habakkuk himself, there are some pretty well-known, oft-quoted verses he's penned here. I bet some of you are already familiar with his words.
1. Take, for example, [Hab. 1:13](#) where he writes of God: "You . . . are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong . . ." I learned it first in the NASB: "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor."
    - a. I remember first being taught that verse for use in evangelism. You're trying to help a person realize they can't just walk into God's presence as a sinner and expect heaven's gates to open. "He can't look upon you with favor." "Why?" they object. "Because his eyes are too pure. His heart too holy. You need Jesus. You need the cross."
  2. Or what about [Hab. 2:4](#)—a verse quoted directly three times in the NT and used by Paul in particular to build out his doctrine of justification by faith in both Romans and Galatians. It reads: "[T]he righteous shall live by his faith." There's perhaps no more significant verse in all the OT than this.
  3. Or what about the majestic sweep of [Hab. 2:14](#), where God tells Habakkuk what's coming at the end of time: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."
    - a. What a window into God's plan for the cosmos! All redemptive history is marching towards a world sopping with glory. It's a sneak-peak into that which is further unveiled for us in the closing chapters of the book of [Revelation](#).

## Habakkuk 3:17-19

- A. But, truth be told, one of the main reasons I wanted to take us through this book in the first place is because of the stunning verses that close it out. Have you ever read [Hab. 3:17-19](#)? If you have, I would wager you'd never forget them.
1. There's something so picturesque, so staggeringly beautiful, so raw and rugged, and yet so lofty and sublime.
- B. Here's the great crescendo of everything we'll be looking at in the coming weeks. Here is where this book is taking us.
1. As we'll see, the prophet looks out at the prospect of God's coming judgment with the Babylonians, he looks at all the hardship and the suffering and the loss, and he says essentially: "Yes, this will be hard, but if I have God I have all that I need."
- C. Listen to this: " <sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, <sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. <sup>19</sup> GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places."

1. Did you hear that? These verses are the reason I'm calling this sermon series **Habakkuk: Belief amid the Barrens**.

a. When all around you seems hopeless and lost, drought-stricken and barren, when you go looking for fig on the branch or grape on the vine, and there's nothing, can you still have joy?

i. Have you learned the secret of this sort of faith? How do we get this? Where does that come from?

D. Well, on my read, that's really what the whole book is about. It seems to me we're invited into this journey with the prophet.

1. We move from his struggling and lamenting at the beginning of the book, to his singing and praising by the end of it. It begins with a cry and ends with a song. And we learn how to take this trip ourselves along with the prophet as we read. There's a certain pathway laid out in these pages.

E. In some ways it's like the book of Job in miniature—as if the whole 42 chapters of Job have been distilled and condensed down into 3.

1. It's a godly guy struggling with the problem of evil and suffering. "If God is good, why is this place so hard? If he's just, why is there so much injustice? Why does it seem like the wicked are flourishing and the righteous are suffering? If God is the referee of the universe, why are nice guys always finishing last?" That sort of thing.

2. And, in both Job and Habakkuk, God comes and helps them along in this. But, what we'll find, I think, is that, though the book of Habakkuk is much smaller in size than that of Job it actually takes us much deeper into the matter than Job ever does.

a. You see, the book of Job ends with him getting more stuff, more immediate blessing. He had more livestock, more kids, more days, and so forth. And we could get the wrong idea that if you follow God you just get more health and wealth here and now.

b. But the book of Habakkuk corrects that false inference. Job comes out with all this stuff, but Habakkuk comes out with nothing, save God. That's all he's got. And he's come to find that's all he needs.

i. And, you know, that's the point. God is our treasure, our delight, our strength, our joy—no matter what's going on in our earthly circumstances, if we have him, we have enough.

(1) And this is what I want for us. That's why we're in this book. I want us to have, with Habakkuk, belief amid the barrens.

- F. So this morning we're just look at the first four verses really, and I'll just use that fifth verse to open the door into something we'll consider more next time. We'll make our way through three headings: (1) The Occasion; (2) The Lament; and (3) The Response.

## (1) The Occasion

### Habakkuk's "Burden"

- A. The first thing we need to spend just a little bit of time on is the occasion. In other words, we need to know something of what's going on with Habakkuk at this time, what's happening in Judah and in the world. This provides the context for his prophetic ministry and things and will guide us a bit in our interpretation as well.
- B. As a way of setting us up for this, let me first draw your attention to that opening verse: "The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw" (v. 1).
1. I want you to be aware of the fact that that word "oracle" in the Hebrew it's *masa* and it means oracle, that's a fine translation, but it also means "burden."
    - a. Elsewhere in the OT it's a word used to describe the sort of thing people would put on the backs of animals, beasts of burden, as they're called. You're carrying something. It's heavy.
- C. And I just think that image is important for us here at the start. Habakkuk is a man weighed down. God has given him something to carry, a weighty word. And he's struggling under the poundage of it, at least at first here.

### A Time of Turmoil

- A. You see, Habakkuk has been commissioned by God to minister in and around Judah during a time of great turmoil—both politically and religiously. Here's what I mean . . .
- B. On the broader political scene, the powers of the day were shifting, like tectonic plates colliding and redistributing, and there were seismic ramifications rattling all across the Ancient Near East.
1. So the Assyrians, who had enjoyed political and military dominance in region for over a century now, around 625 B.C. they begin rapidly declining, just as Babylon is rising up to fill the void under vicious men like Nabopolassar, and later his son, the infamous, Nebuchadnezzar.
- C. In the midst of these things, the people there in Judah, religiously, had just become a disaster, starting with the kings, really.
1. Men like Manasseh (cf. [2 Kings 21](#)). Trying to appease his Assyrian overlords, he set up Assyrian cult objects in the temple there in Jerusalem alongside the furniture of YHWH. He used fortune-tellers and omens, and dealt with mediums and necromancers. He even burned his own son as an offering to one of these false gods.

- a. There was momentary reprieve with King Josiah, but things quickly devolve again after his death. So, on the whole, this period in which Habakkuk is ministering, is marked by rampant idolatry, spiritual rebellion, and the inevitable flagrant injustice that comes along with it.
- D. It's thought that Habakkuk was likely a contemporary with the prophet Jeremiah at the time. And Jeremiah's much longer book, fills out a bit more for us what was going on in Judah. He's called "the weeping prophet" for a reason. Let me read you a few texts:
1. Here he is in Jer. 9:1-6: " <sup>1</sup> Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! <sup>2</sup> Oh that I had in the desert a travelers' lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men. <sup>3</sup> They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the LORD.   
<sup>4</sup> Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. <sup>5</sup> Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. <sup>6</sup> Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD."
  2. Later he talks about one the kings in particular—Jehoiakim, one of the sons of Josiah. Listen to what he says concerning him on behalf of the Lord, Jer. 22:13-17 " <sup>13</sup> Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages, <sup>14</sup> who says, 'I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms,' who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion. <sup>15</sup> Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. <sup>16</sup> He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the LORD. <sup>17</sup> But you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence."
  3. There was actually another prophet around in Habakkuk's day. His name was Uriah. And I'd wager you've never heard of him. Do you know why? Because Jehoiakim killed him, because he didn't deliver the kind of message he wanted. He spoke for YHWH not for the king. And so he paid for it at cost of his life (see Jer. 26:20-23).
- E. And so Habakkuk's looking out at all this political and religious turmoil and going: "Where's God? What confidence do I have that you're going to come through for me in this mess? Look at this!"
1. If you noticed, in the opening verses of our text, in an effort to express the severity of the situation so far as he perceives it, he just starts stacking up the synonyms: "I look out and I see 'violence' (v. 2), 'iniquity' (v. 3), 'wrong' (v. 3), 'destruction' (v. 3), 'strife' (v. 3), 'contention' (v. 3), injustice (v. 4). That's what I see. I tell you the one thing I don't see: God doing anything about it!"

## What about Us?

- A. And with all of this, of course, we are invited to consider our own story, our own circumstances. We look out and things are not well. Things are obviously broken.
  - 1. Whether you want to talk about the state of the church or the state of the world—there's plenty to make a person weep and wonder: where is God?
- B. The sheer number of mass shootings lately has just been staggering, hasn't it? The news cycle can't even keep up. Before they can process and wrap up one story, another one breaks.
  - 1. And after a while, you start wondering when it's going to be you in the mix of one of these tragedies. Am I the only one now tempted to look suspiciously around at other people? Is that the guy? Are you the one? He looks a little off, is he hiding a weapon? Is it going to be at my kids' school, or my church?
    - a. You just start wondering, because it's all so precarious, so frighteningly possible, because it seems like stuff is out of control and God isn't around.
- C. And, of course, this is just the stuff that makes national news. What about the stuff in your life that's going off the rails as we speak? NBC isn't going to be rolling in with their cameras to cover it, but it's devastating your little world. It's tearing you apart.
  - 1. The threat of cancer. The loss of a loved one. The crushing pressure at work. The bank account that's drying up. The significant other that left you for someone else.
    - a. It's just broken. Your life, and your heart, it's just broken. Where is God? It's feels like he's too slow to the scene.
- D. So what do you do with all this? I'll tell you what you do: you do what Habakkuk does. You lament .  
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## (2) The Lament

### A Surprising First Step

- A. I said at the beginning that in this book we really are being invited to journey along with the prophet from a place of despair to a place of joy. And the interesting thing is that what we have in these opening verses really is the first step.
- B. You see, when you look out upon suffering and evil and injustice and you wrestle with that, you have a few options so far as God is concerned.
  - 1. On the one extreme, you could just give into a bit of denial and just blindly trust. That's a simplistic faith, where you believe God without really wrestling. It's a little plastic and, therefore, a little superficial. The roots don't go deep.

- a. You just “trust God” and you brush it off with those silly little slogans: “Too blessed to be stressed.” But inside you’re dying. But you feel like you shouldn’t be wrestling with it. So you stuff it down for another Sunday. It’s a simplistic faith.
  - 2. But on the other extreme, I’d call it simplistic skepticism. Here is where you see the problem of evil and suffering and so you just off-the-cuff discard the idea of God and his Word and things. It can’t be true, look at this. Christianity is a joke.
    - a. God is either in control but not good or he’s good but not in control. But he can’t be both or my life wouldn’t be playing out like this. The God of the Bible doesn’t exist.
- C. But Habakkuk is leading us right through the middle of these two extremes, keeping them both in tension.
  - 1. On the one hand, he’s not given to simplistic faith and blind belief. He’s being honest about his doubts and struggles.
  - 2. But on the other hand, he’s also not given to simplistic skepticism and a quick discarding of God and his word. For, as we’ll see, he’s talking to God about it all.
  - 3. You see, he’s honestly wrestling.
    - a. Perhaps this is why Paul would call it a “fight for faith” (cf. [1 Tim. 6:12](#); [2 Tim. 4:7](#)). It’s not something that just happens. We fight for it. We wrestle for it. We fight and wrestle even with God himself for it.
    - b. And we come out the better because of it. Our relationship with God is richer, our trust is deeper, our joy is a bit more resilient.
      - i. But you don’t get there if you skip this first step. What I’m calling here: lament.
- D. I love what commentator F.F. Bruce says at this point: “Habakkuk is not content to say, ‘What’er my God ordains is right,’ and leave it there in a spirit of resignation. Like Job, he argues with God and expostulates with him, and thus reaches a clearer understanding of God’s character and a firmer faith in him. The old, easy assurances that peace, health, long life, and prosperity were tokens of divine approval have collapsed in the face of experience, but Habakkuk, in hardship and privation, comes to know God more fully and to rejoice in him for his own sake and not for the benefits he bestows.”
  - 1. To be clear, we may still come out at the end and say those same words Bruce mentions at the top: “What’er my God ordains is right.” But we’ll say them with a renewed sense of confidence, with an honest authenticity, with a simple, but not simplistic, faith.
    - a. We’ll say them with a childlike faith, like that “weaned child” in [Ps. 131](#) who has learned, even in the face of mystery and things too wonderful for him, to trust his mother.

## Mere Complaining vs. Biblical Lamenting

- A. Now, before we go any further on this, let me be sure to clarify something. The biblical notion of lamenting is much more than mere complaining or grumbling or murmuring.
  - 1. We've all been around those people who are always complaining, nothing's ever good enough for them, they're marked by past hurts and see everything through that lens, they act like all the world ought to bow in service to them, like they're owed something, and so forth.
    - a. There's nothing particularly godly or Christian about this, you can sense that. In fact, in many ways, it's the opposite of what Jesus would call us to.
- B. Biblical lament is not the clay finding fault with the Potter, as both Isaiah and Paul would condemn (cf. [Isa. 29:16](#); [45:9](#); [Rom. 9:20](#)).
  - 1. This is the sort of thing that marked Israel in the wilderness, with their grumbling against Moses and God ([Exod. 16-17](#)). They were not commended for their actions there. They were condemned for it.
    - a. Their grumbling was not just a wrestling with God in hope, it was accusing him in rebellion: "You brought us out here to kill us"—even though he'd already proven his love for and commitment to them in the Exodus.
- C. So biblical lament as we see her modeled by Habakkuk is not mere complaining. It is, if I could flesh it out further, complaining in God's direction, on the basis of God's Word, with an expectation of God's response and help. That's biblical lament.

## The Three Elements of Biblical Lamenting

But let's consider those three elements bit by bit here. And I'll show you how they play out in Habakkuk's opening words.

### Element #1: In God's Direction

- A. Biblical lament is complaining in God's direction. This is unmistakably the case with Habakkuk, right? So he opens up: "[O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?](#)"
  - 1. Did you catch what's happening here? It's quite profound. Habakkuk is complaining about the God who doesn't hear his cry to the very God whom he says doesn't hear his cry.
- B. It's a wonderful thing. It reminds us that there is often doubt tucked within our faith and faith tucked within our doubt.
  - 1. We think of faith in the positive charge only, when we're on the mountain top.
  - 2. But there is a negative charge to faith, and it shows up here, in the valley.

- a. Habakkuk could've given up on God because he doesn't feel like he's answering, but instead he doubles down and cries to God all the louder about it.
- C. It's like that father of the demon-possessed boy who cries out to Jesus: ["I believe; help my unbelief!" \(Mark 9:24\)](#). "I believe in you but I don't believe in you. Help me!" You ever been there? It's a sort of spiritual schizophrenia, and I know it well. That's what's happening here.
- 1. It's not just complaining. It's complaining in God's direction. It's not just crying in self-pity to any who would hear and coddle. It's crying out to God. Which is itself an act of faith.
- D. I remember that story Russel Moore tells in his book [Adopted for Life](#).
- 1. He talks about how he was visiting an orphanage in Russia while they were in process of pursuing an adoption. And he mentions that there was this haunting silence in the nursery, though it was full of little babies. He says they never cried, not because they didn't have needs, but because they had learned that, even if they cried, no one ever came.
- E. Listen, crying out to God about God as Habakkuk does here, is a backdoor expression of confidence in God. If you don't believe he doesn't hear, you don't cry. But Habakkuk does.
- 1. There's doubt tucked within his faith, but there's faith tucked within his doubt. So he complains in God's direction.

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- A. And so, considering ourselves now, let me just invite us to be honest with God. We live in a broken world. There's a lot to lament about.
- 1. In fact, I would dare say, so far as life on this side of heaven is concerned, we're either lamenting or we're lying. If there's no doubt tucked within our faith, we're simply not being honest.
- B. I don't mean to say we're to be in a constant state of distress, but I do mean to say, we're always going to be wrestling with stuff, facing hardship, fighting for faith.
- 1. We don't strut from one mountain peak to another on our way to glory. We bear the cross, we grow acquainted with Gethsemane's shadow, we suffer and wrestle with God in the valley. We lament.
- C. And we've got to know, we won't get to the heights of faith and joy with Habakkuk in [ch. 3](#) if we don't pass through the depths of pain and lament with Habakkuk in [ch. 1](#).
- 1. So this is where we start. Are you hurting? Are you struggling? Are you wondering where God is and what he's doing? Lament. Pour out your grievance . . . in God's direction.
    - a. And do so on the basis of his Word . . .

## Element #2: On the Basis of God's Word

- A. Remember, we're not just grumbling because the Potter is doing something with us we don't approve of. We're not grounding our complaint in our own unchained, self-centered desires. We're ultimately grounding our complaints in God's Word.
1. In other words, we're looking at our open Bibles, and then we look out at the world and our lives—and it seems off, misaligned, like it doesn't fit.
    - a. If God says this, then why this? And so we cry to him about it. We ask him to help make sense of the seeming disconnect.
- B. This is clearly what Habakkuk is doing here. And it's marked off straightaway by the opening address: "O LORD" (v. 2), he says.
1. Notice the capital L-O-R-D. It's our English version way of identifying the covenant name of God, YHWH. It's the name God first disclosed to Moses on Mt. Sinai in [Exod. 3](#) when he was bringing him and the people out of Egypt and into covenant with himself.
    - a. So for Habakkuk to use this name at the outset of his prayer, it shows he knows whom he's talking to. And he's calling on this covenant God to uphold the very covenant he's made—with all its attendant self-disclosures and promises.
- C. Here's a very interesting thing to note about Habakkuk . . .
1. Most of your prophets in the OT, when you read them, they'd been commissioned by God to appeal to and even accuse Israel on the basis of the covenant. The people had broken the covenant and the prophet's job was to call them back to it. The prophet were to engage in covenant lawsuits as it were.
  2. But in Habakkuk the line of action runs in precisely the opposite direction. Here the prophet is not approaching the people with a concern for their breach of covenant, but God himself. God is on the dock, as it were.
    - a. The prophet is crying out: "God you have said this and that about yourself, you have told us this and that about what you'd do, who you are—your holiness, your sovereignty, your justice, your goodness, your love, your grace, your mercy . . . God, YHWH, LORD, where is it? I don't see it? Have you forgotten? Have you forsaken?!"
- D. That's the concern here. It's complaining in God's direction on the basis of his Word and self-revelation, on the basis of his covenant and promise.
- E. That's what stands behind all of this lamenting for Habakkuk. Presupposed behind every one of his complaints is a biblical truth—an understanding of God as he's revealed of himself that's not lining up with the way things appear:
1. So he says, v. 2: "[H]ow long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?"

- a. God has disclosed himself to Israel as the God who hears and acts. That’s how the whole Exodus got started. He heard their groaning and it moved him ([Exod. 2:24](#)).
  - i. Habakkuk knew the story. And he’s saying: “Where is that now? I’m crying out while the people who bear your name are making a wreck of all this, and you’re doing nothing. You’re just letting the wickedness roll on.”
- 2. And he goes on, [v. 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.”
  - a. You’re the God who sees. You see so much more than I do, but even what I see, I cannot stomach. How can you?
- 3. And then [v. 4](#): “So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.”
  - a. This law he speaks of here, it’s not just some generic, impersonal law, like the laws of our land.
  - b. This is the Torah. This is, again, God’s Word. It’s law as derived from God’s character and delivered to us by way of God’s finger on those tablets of stone on Sinai. He said: “Write it down. Keep it on record. Be sure to uphold it . . . or it won’t go well for you.”
    - i. And yet here people are not upholding it. And there seems to be no consequences at all. It’s just same old. Life goes on. And not only that, but it would seem life gets better. The wicked are not just getting by. They are flourishing.

(1) So the law is “paralyzed”—it has no power. And justice is “perverted”—it’s twisted and bent.

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- A. Have you ever been in this place? You open your Bible and read and then you overlay it onto your life and the world around you and you just think: “Really? You’re sovereign, you’re just, you’re good, you love me? If that’s true, why am I hurting like this?”
  - 1. What do you do? You lament. You complain in God’s direction, on the basis of his Word.
    - a. But more than that, you do it with an expectation that that he hears and will respond and help . . .

### Element #3: With an Expectation of God’s Response

- A. In our text this idea is implicit. As we’ve said, he’s talking to God because, however battered his faith is, he still believes God hears him and can help.

1. But this idea of expecting God to respond is explicitly stated elsewhere, when he's still yet struggling with where God is and what he's doing in Judah and in the world: [Hab. 2:1](#), "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 . . . concerning my complaint."
  - a. He knows God's going to answer. He knows God's going to help. Do you?

### (3) The Response

#### An Ironic Salvation

- A. All this leads to the last heading here: The Response. For this now we can just only scratch the surface of God's response and look at [v. 5](#).
  1. (Truly his response carries on down to v. 11, but it opens up a whole new can we don't have time to address this morning. We'll take it up next time.)
  2. For now I simply want to distill this singular verse down to its basic principle and show you how Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of it, the ultimate response to our struggling and crying out and disjointed dilemmas.
- B. So here's how God's response begins: "[Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told](#)" ([v. 5](#)).
  1. Now he goes on to talk about the surprising way he's going to go about making wrong right and delivering Habakkuk and the righteous remnant and things.
    - a. But here's the distillation: Even when we don't think God is present and working, he is. Even when we don't think God hears nor cares, he does. Even when we can't find it in us to believe such things are true, they are.
- C. You know, Paul grabs this verse and quotes in [Acts 13:41](#) applying it to what God did with Jesus at the cross, to the gospel. What God is doing with Habakkuk here ultimately finds its fulfillment with Jesus there.
  1. Paul would say in a similar vein in [1 Cor. 1:18](#): "[For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.](#)"
- D. So many were left standing around the cross that day, scratching their heads.
  1. "We thought he was the one. We thought he'd bring deliverance. We heard all those mockers around the cross, the wicked surrounding him: 'If God really is with you, come down from there!' But he never came down. Because, I am left to assume, God wasn't with him. God's not here. He's not in this. It was just foolishness after all. The wicked won."
  2. But they didn't. The cross looked like foolishness and weakness. But truly it was the wisdom of God and the power of God to save.

- a. God wasn't abandoning us, he was delivering us. The very moment we thought he had left us most alone, he was truly most present. He was entering into our lament, experiencing it, so he could come out the other side in the resurrection with a song to sing. And he shares it with us.
    - i. That's the gospel. That's the paradigm that we now run everything else through. We run all of our hardship and suffering through the grid of the gospel. God is working. God does care. God will make the wrong right. God will turn it all for good in the end . . . however long it may take.
- E. You may have heard about that shooting that took place outside a church just a couple days ago now in Iowa. A young man opened fire on his ex-girlfriend another girl she was with, killing them, and then he turned the gun on himself.
1. When they gathered for prayer as a congregation the next day, this is the truth that got them through. The lead pastor shared a few words. I can't reiterate them all, but here's a few that stood out.
    - a. As he was calling people to prayer he said: "We want to grieve in such a way that says we have a hope beyond our grief. Because we do know that for two precious sisters that were lost last night, they had already been found by Jesus, which means death won't be the ultimate word over their life and it won't be the ultimate word over this church. This place can't be marked by the message of death when we have the One who conquered death that we worship. And so what we're going to do today is we're going to celebrate the resurrection with tears. We're going to trust in the God who is bigger than our pain. We aren't going to act like our pain isn't real—it is. But we also aren't going to act like God isn't real—because he is."
    - b. Near the very end of the service he he quoted from John Stott's book *The Cross of Christ*. And that's where I wanted to end this morning. Just listen to this. Stott writes: "I could never myself believe in God, if it wasn't for the cross. . . . In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world of brokenness. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in Godforsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of his. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross that symbolizes divine suffering. . . . 'The other gods were strong; but thou wast weak; they rode, but thou didst stumble to a throne; But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak, And not a god has wounds, but thou alone.'"

- F. You may think at times, God isn't present in the pain. But the cross of Christ, the wounds of Jesus, the scars of our resurrected Lord, they tell another story. He's right here. And he invites you to talk to him, to grieve, to complain, to lament.
  - 1. He'll weep with you like he wept with Mary and Martha outside Lazarus' tomb. But he'll also let break in his resurrection power. And he'll give you a song to sing.