

Woe #1: The Plunderer Plundered

Introduction

The Text

⁶ Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, “Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— for how long?— and loads himself with pledges!” ⁷ Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. ⁸ Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. (Hab. 2:6–8)

Jumping Back in

- A. Last week, if you were here, you’ll recall, in a sense, I got us all in a plane and we went up in the sky, and we flew over most all of [Hab. 2](#), and we got an aerial view of it, from [v. 4](#) all the way to [v. 20](#).
 - 1. Normally I’m an “on the ground” “in the trees” kind of teacher, but last week I wanted you to get a broader perspective—I wanted you to see how the landscape in this book has started to shift.
 - a. In particular, I wanted you to see how there’s this emphasis in these verses now on the judgment of God.
- B. You remember, Habakkuk has bemoaned the fact that God seems to be permitting, even siding, with all these evil folks.
 - 1. Now it’s the Babylonians in view. God says he’s going to use them to discipline the people of Judah for their sin. He’s going to let them come in and sack the city, burn down the temple, and lead the people out into exile.
 - a. And Habakkuk can barely stomach it. How is this justice? Okay so God is punishing the sin in Judah, but what about the seemingly even graver sin in Babylon?
- C. Well, here is where we are now. God reassures Habakkuk of coming judgment for these Babylonians which will amount to the ultimate redemption and restoration of his people.
 - 1. As I said last time: God’s judgment (whether we initially realize it or not) is actually good news. We all long for justice, for the wrong that’s been done to us to be made right, for evil to be snuffed out, for peace and shalom—and only God can truly make this happen.
 - a. This is why in [Hab. 3:16](#), the prophet, considering all of this, says: “I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rotteness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.”

- i. Do you hear it? He's waiting for, he's longing for the day of God's judgment. Because the day God judges his enemies will also be the day God saves his people. It's good news.

- D. So God is here in [Hab. 2](#) now giving his people a "taunt song" (cf. [v. 6](#))—words to, in effect, mock the Babylonians.
 1. They can be so sure of God's coming judgment and salvation, that they can look at that colossal force called Babylon and trash talk.
 - a. It's like Levi, my five year old, trash-talking Steph Curry. It seems foolish, but not if God is on your side.

- E. And this taunt song, as we saw, is composed of what we might call five "woe oracles." "Woe to him . . ." ([v. 6](#)); "Woe to him . . ." ([v. 9](#)); "Woe to him . . ." ([v. 12](#)); "Woe to him . . ." ([v. 15](#)); "Woe to him . . ." ([v. 19](#)). If this comes off a little strange, let me just be clear: you do not want to hear God saying that to you.
 1. A modern day equivalent might be when your mama used to use your full name to call you out: "Nicholas Ross Weber, you get in here this instant." Normally, I'm just Nick, but if I hear that, I know it's on. "Woe to you," right? I'm in big trouble.
 - a. I'm just kidding, my mom never really did that. But maybe yours did.
 - b. I know when Levi's in trouble I try to call him Leviticus, not because that's his full name, it's not, but because Leviticus is the book in the Bible where God gives much of the Law, and I want Levi to know he better watch out or I'm about to go Old Testament on him ;)

- F. So God delivers these five words of woe that all seem to be interconnected and building on one another.
 1. But at bottom they all at least contain two elements: (1) a statement of offense; and (2) a promise of impending judgment. God sees what these Babylonians are up to. And they won't get away with it.

- G. Now, for the next five weeks, as it seems to me now, we're going to take a look at these woes one-by-one. And for each, we're really going to bring out the same three essential points (though they'll obviously take on different nuances and hues according to the particulars of the woe we're engaging with):
 1. First we're going to make note of The Reversal in each of these woes.
 - a. So the Babylonians are living high and everything seems great for them. God's people are on outs, they're in the dirt.
 - b. And then suddenly, when God comes in judgement, everything's turned upside-down. Babylon is brought down and his people are lifted up.

 2. Then we'll consider The Rescue that each of these woes points us to in Jesus.

- a. Because the bottom line is, as I said last time, we're not actually all that different than the Babylonians. And we too deserve the judgment of God for our sins. So how do we get on the right side of this?
 - b. Well, Jesus comes and throws himself in between us and these woes of wrath, they crash down on him one by one, and I want you to see it.
3. And that leads finally to The Renewal.
- a. For each woe we'll consider how the coming reversal, and the rescue in Jesus, enables us to live differently now in the present. We don't have to live like the Babylonians, we can live like Christ. We are being renewed in God's image through him.

H. (1) The Reversal; (2) The Rescue; (3) The Renewal. These three mark out the agenda for this morning as we come now to consider this first woe in particular. I've summed up the essence of it for us in the title of this sermon: **Woe #1: The Plunderer Plundered**. So let's go!

(1) The Reversal

A. It's under this heading that I really want to bring out those two elements I talked about: (1) the stated offense; and (2) the promised judgment.

The Stated Offense (v. 6)

"Heaps Up What Is Not His Own"

- A. The offense is what's brought out most clearly for us there in the latter part of v. 6, where it begins this way: "Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own . . ."
1. This recalls what God already said of the Babylonians in Hab. 1:6, that they are a "bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own."
 2. This is unrestrained greed. They've set their hope on money and stuff, because they're trying to fund and build an empire, thinking they'll make a name for themselves, get glory and all of this. So they just roll through city after city, plundering without any concern for the needs or even the lives of others.
- B. We get a sense of the violence that marked this whole endeavor when we drop down to the latter part of v. 8 where God speaks of how they shed "the blood of man and [brought] violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them."
1. The idea, simply put, is that human life seemed to them cheap and expendable. They were willing to dispose of those made in the image of God in their vain attempts to be like God.

"Loads Himself with Pledges"

- A. At the tail end of v. 6 there, God puts a metaphor on all of this for us: “Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own . . . and loads himself with pledges!”
1. This is going to connect later to the judgment that is coming, but what’s essentially happening here with this idea of loading themselves up with “pledges” is the Babylonians are seen as getting into massive debt.
 - a. A “pledge” was something you would give as security in case you default on a loan.
 - b. But truthfully the Hebrew word here can just be translated as “debts”: literally: “Woe to . . . the one who makes himself heavy [by] debts.” So the NASB translates it: “Woe to him who . . . makes himself rich with loans” [NASB].
- B. Now I say all of this is a metaphor because it’s clear the Babylonians didn’t actually strike up legal or financial arrangements with these other nations. They just went in and took it all.
1. But, in God’s economy, they were just borrowing. They didn’t own any of it. They took and took and took and they would soon have to pay back a sum they could never afford.
 - a. Because God would hold them accountable. Because it’s ultimately all his. As he says in Ps. 50:10, “[I own] the cattle on a thousand hills.” “It’s all mine at the end of the day. And these nations, these people, they’re all just called to steward what truly belongs to me.”
- C. So, when it’s all done, to their great dismay, God is the one they’ve been robbing and plundering. And, in their greed and idolatry, they’re getting in over their heads in debt, and that bill is going to come due.
1. Listen to the way one commentator puts it: “The first of the five woes pronounced on the enemy has to do with the wealth accrued in the effort to build an empire. The oppressor has been enriched with the plundered wealth of others, but such ill-gotten gain is short lived. The oppressor is compared to a borrower who, having pledged repayment, goes on borrowing more and more until all possibility of repaying the debts is forever ruled out. Such a person would inevitably end up in bondage for debt. So by that divine judgment that operates in the course of world history the oppressor will be oppressed in turn” (Bruce).

Close to Home

- A. Now, with this metaphor of credit and debt, it brings this whole discussion uncomfortably close to home, does it not?
1. When we are talking about the Babylonians killing and pillaging and things, we feel a bit safer, like this word of woe is certainly not concerning us in any way.
 2. But when we start talking about debt and creditors, we know something of that, don’t we?
 - a. We’ve even been seeing it in the headlines lately, right? “President determines to pay off student debt.” They took out loans they couldn’t pay it back.

- B. Now I'm not saying we can't take out loans or buy things on credit. But I am saying this kind of stuff may expose our hearts a bit. It gets at something underneath and we may find we're not all that different than the Babylonians after all.
1. We've got to talk about greed, and consumerism, and love for money, setting our hope on it, making friends with the world, all of this. This is big in Silicon Valley.
- C. You know with buying things on credit, sometimes the idea is: "I want what I want and I want it now."
1. I might not have the resources yet, but I want it. Why shouldn't I have it? It's immediate gratification. Just wanting the pleasure and satisfaction. Maybe I want something so I can project an image. "No, of course, I can't afford this car, but I want people to see me behind the wheel."
 - a. I just saw an article the other day that said in the headlines: "[Buy Now Pay Later Is Coming Due—for All of Us.](#)"
 - i. It's talking about that new way of purchasing things that's not exactly credit but it's essentially the same thing, and it's wreaking havoc on the finances especially of younger people.
 - (1) But we're drawn into this because we want what we want and we want it now. We amass things that don't even truly belong to us.
- D. So we've got to consider our own relationship with money, and wealth, and possessions.
1. The Babylonians set their hearts on it. "With this we can build an empire, get security and stability, carve out a name, get the glory"—that's what we'll see as we go along with these woes.
 2. But, you know, we can do the same thing, right?
 - a. We may not be killing or cheating people to get it.
 - b. We may not even be racking up big credit card bills or taking out huge loans or whatever.
 - c. Maybe we're just hard-working people, but our hope is set on money and what it promises us: comfort; security; identity; status.
 - i. It's just as problematic. Because, you see, money could never deliver on these things, only God can. So it never goes well . . .

The Promised Judgement (vv. 7-8)

"For How Long?"

- A. And this leads to the promised judgment which is where we see that reversal I've been referring to. This is what's brought out in [vv. 7-8](#) in particular.

- B. But before we go there I wanted to draw your attention to that little parenthetical note I skipped over back in v. 6. There again it reads: “Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— for how long?”
1. Now this could potentially be an expression of pain and exasperation on the side of the oppressed.
 - a. You remember this is essentially what Habakkuk has been asking throughout this book. “How long are you going to let evil go on Lord?”
 - b. In fact, that’s how the whole thing begins, Hab. 1:2: “O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save?”
 - i. So it’s possible here, the oppressed interjects with an expression of exasperation and longing.
 2. But I think that unlikely, only because, in the context, remember, this is a part this oracle of woe. These are some of the lyrics to this taunt song that God is calling his people to mock the Babylonians with.
 - a. Therefore, I don’t think this is an expression of pain from the side of the oppressed. I think, instead, it’s a sober warning being issued to the oppressor.
 - i. In other words: “So you heap up what is not your own, and you think you’re awesome, you’re something to behold, you’re untouchable, listen, there’s an expiration date, and it’s not that far off.”
 - (1) Babylon would take Jerusalem in 586 B.C. but by 539 B.C., less than 50 years later, they’d be done. “For how long?” Don’t get cocky. God is coming!
- C. And you know, more broadly again, it speaks to the vanity of setting your hope and heart on wealth, on material gain—whether from dishonest or honest means. There’s a futility to it.
1. I thought of Prov. 23:4-5 at this point: “⁴Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. ⁵When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.”
 - a. You work and work for it, but it doesn’t last. It sprouts wings and there it goes along with the bull market that you had your hope tied to. In comes the bear, now what?
 2. Or Hag. 1:6, when the people are prioritizing their own wealth and comforts over God, he says: “You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.”

- a. As quickly as you store it up it slips away. You put it in your pocket and it falls to the floor. There's a transience to it, an impermanence. It's not a place to attach your hope. That'd be like trying to set your anchor in a cloud.
- D. Jesus speaks to this as well, on no uncertain terms (he's uncomfortably clear!): “¹⁹ Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. . . . [He goes on to conclude, therefore . . .] ²⁴ No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt. 6:19-21, 24).
- 1. But is Jesus just trying to be mean here? Like he's just like a jealous spouse who wants all our attention from selfish motive or something?
 - 2. No! You saw it, right? He says don't put your hope on earthly wealth, why?
 - a. Because it's vulnerable. Because it's transient. Because moths and rust can destroy it and because thieves can break in and steal it.
 - b. If you set your hope there, well give it time and you'll be left hopeless, or another word for it, despairing.
 - c. Money can't sustain your hope. Money won't be there for you in the end. Only God will. So he's saying: “Enough with that!”
 - i. Don't you see? He's not concerned for himself here, he's concerned for you. He's not trying to take your hope, your peace, your joy from you. He's trying to give these things to you, in a way that will actually last, in God.
- E. Is it any wonder he goes from here to talk about anxiety: “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life . . .” (v. 25).
- 1. If God is your God then nothing can destroy your peace.
 - 2. But if money or wealth is your god, then even a little moth poses a threat. And you'll never be able to rest. Because you'll sense it. “For how long?” How long until it's gone?
 - a. This is why Paul would say in 1 Tim. 6:9-10: “⁹ [T]hose who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”

“Will Not Your *Creditors* Suddenly Arise”

- A. Vv. 7-8 now speak more directly to God's judgment on all this and spell out the ironic twist and reversal of fortunes: “⁷ Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. ⁸ Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.”

1. I know the ESV says that Babylonian's "debtors" have risen up, but that's because it seems they have taken a certain line of interpretation.
 2. Many other commentators push back against this, and I'd agree with them. The more natural rendering of the Heb. word is actually "creditor" or "lender" and that fits just fine with the line of interpretation we've taken up here—with the metaphor of Babylon taking on debts and then finally drowning in them.
- B. So here it's Babylon's creditors that are coming to sink their teeth in. "You owe us. Justice. We've been wronged." All of that will be made right.
1. As we said at the beginning, the plunderer here is plundered. God will settle accounts. Those who were once on top, now find themselves on the bottom. And those who were once on the bottom, now find themselves on top. It's the reversal.
- C. And it all happens "suddenly" did you catch that? "Will not your creditors suddenly arise . . ." (v. 7).
1. I thought of what Paul says in 1 Th. 5:2-5: " ² [Y]ou yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day."
 - a. The return of Jesus will be like the breaking in of a thief for some, but it will be like the arrival of the bridegroom for others. And it all has to do with where you set your hope.
 - i. If you are building your house on the sand that is wealth and money and earthly possession, when the hurricane comes, it will not hold.
 - ii. But if you are building your house on Christ, you're on a rock!
- D. And this leads us to that second heading . . .

(2) The Rescue

Jesus Paid It All!

- A. How do sinners like us get on the right side of judgment day? Again, if we're honest, we're not all that different from the Babylonians, right?
1. We may not lop off heads or limbs or burn down cities to get at money.
 2. But we can pursue it in other ways that are destructive.
 - a. We can set it on the throne of our hearts, we can bow down in worship, we make sacrifices to it: sacrifice our family, our friends, our health, our integrity, God's Word. We can put ourselves and our comforts and luxuries and things above everyone else. We hardly even think of this as wrong because everyone does it.

- i. We deserve this first woe—to be judged for our worldliness and rebellion against God. We owe him a debt in our sin, we could never pay back.
- B. Oh but here's what God does: he sends down his Son to pay it on our behalf. It's the gospel. It's what the Scriptures call "redemption." The Bible says that Jesus has "redeemed" us.
1. Well, that's language that's at least partially drawn from the idea of debt-bondage and debtor's prison (cf. [Lev. 25:47-55](#); [Matt. 18:21-35](#)).
 - a. When you were buried under so much debt that you had no chance of paying it back anymore, well you had nothing left to offer but your life. You became a slave or something like this.
 - b. And the only way out was to be redeemed—for a family member or someone else to come in and pay what you couldn't. Redemption.
- C. And that's what the cross is. It's Jesus coming in to pay back what you and I can't . . .
1. [Titus 2:14](#): "[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us . . ."
 2. [Col. 1:13-14](#): " ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."
 3. [Gal. 3:13](#): "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."
 4. [1 Pet. 1:18-19](#): " ¹⁸ [Y]ou were ransomed [Gk. *lutroō* = 'redeemed'] from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ . . ."
- a. The blood that the Babylonians spilled cried out for their judgment.
 - b. The blood that Jesus spills cries out for our pardon—as the author of Hebrews says: it speaks a "better word" ([Heb. 12:24](#))—it's a word of grace, a word of redemption.
- D. If you look closely at our text, you realize: all that God says will come rightly for Babylon, that's what comes for Jesus at Calvary.
1. He's "trembling" in the garden of Gethsemane.
 2. He's treated like the debt-slave, as he's tied up and dragged towards the cross.
 3. He becomes "spoil" for Jew and Gentile alike.
 4. All these vicious folks, like dogs, gathered around, "plundering" him. They're casting lots for his last possessions. They've stripped him naked. He's got nothing left.
- E. But he's not guilty. He's not given himself to unjust gain; he's not set his hope or heart upon money; he's not been unfaithful to his Father; he's not pillaged and plundered nor even hurt other people; he's done nothing but love and serve and care for them.
1. And yet here he is suffering the woe of Babylon, the woe you and I too deserve. This isn't the plunderer being plundered. This is the perfect one being plundered. Why?
 - a. So that he can rescue us. So that he can redeem us. So that he can pull us out from under that debt.

F. That's why his last words on the cross as they're recorded in John, do you know what they are: "It is finished" ([John 19:30](#)).

1. Three words in the English, just one in the Greek: [tetelestai](#).

a. In the lexicon, here's what that word means: to bring something to completion; to carry out an obligation or demand; to pay what is due in full.

i. Jesus finishes his work of redemption by paying what we owe to God in full.

G. It's the reverse reversal. He was truly high but is made low, so that we who were truly low can be lifted high.

1. Or as Paul puts it in [2 Cor. 8:9](#): "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

H. And this leads us to the third heading now . . .

(3) The Renewal

Walking Out from the Debtor's Prison

A. When you truly get what Jesus has done; when you walk out from that debtor's prison a free man or woman; when you understand that he took on your debt so you could have his riches . . .

1. . . it changes you—in one sense all at once as we're born again, but in another sense it takes time to work out little by little. But, in any case, at bottom, it changes you.

B. If you know the love of God for you in Jesus; if you know that all that's his is yours; if you know he's going to provide for and protect you; and all will be well with your soul in the end . . . you can let your stuff go.

1. You don't have to heap up more and more of it with the Babylonians, finding your life and identity in it, sacrificing relationships and even God to get it.

2. You can let it go in love for God and neighbor.

a. You can live like Jesus and lay your stuff and even your own life down for others. Instead of sacrificing them for you, you become the living sacrifice for them.

C. Let me come at this both negatively and positively, and then we'll close . . .

D. On the negative side, I'd lead you back to [Heb. 10](#) that we looked at a few weeks ago now.

1. These people were plundered because of their association with Jesus, all their stuff was stolen. Moth, rust, thief. It was gone.

2. But their peace and their joy and their generosity wasn't. They didn't grow bitter and vindictive. They didn't get mad at God. They didn't give up on Jesus or his mission.
 - a. Why? Do you remember?
- E. “³² [Y]ou endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” (Heb. 10:32–34).
1. Jesus already paid your debt. Jesus already secured your inheritance. Your treasure is wrapped up in him and nothing can touch that. Therefore, even when your stuff is plundered, in one sense, you don't even care. Because you know God. Because you have God.
- F. But that's the negative sense, you can handle persecution and plundering without lashing out. Then in the positive sense, when you see what Jesus has done for you, when you get what's now freely yours in him, you don't just refrain from taking vengeance on those who steal from you, you go off looking to bless and give to whoever you can. There's a radical generosity that flows from the gospel-renewed person.
1. I just quoted from 2 Cor. 8:9, how Jesus became poor so we could become rich in him. But you know the context for this verse?
 - a. Paul is talking to the Corinthians about the needs of others in Jerusalem and he's saying, if we get the cross, we will be radically generous people.
- G. Here's how he opens that chapter: “¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us” (2 Cor. 8:1–5).
1. That's the kind of person the gospel creates! The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, moves in and changes some things.
- H. Listen . . .
1. We don't have to be like the Babylonians and go down with the ship—white-knuckling our stuff to the grave. Miserable here and even worse after.
 2. We can be like Jesus, and lay our lives down in love, knowing that, even if we give ourselves to death, he's going to raise us up in glory on that last day. He's paid it all. He's got us! We can have peace and joy here and more than we can even fathom in the world to come!