

IS GOD LISTENING?

Habakkuk 1:1-11

Two boys are staying the night with Grandma. Before going to bed they are saying prayers. One shouts, "Please, dear God, give me a new bike for my birthday." His brother says, "You don't have to shout. God isn't deaf!" To which the first replies, "Yeah, I know, but Grandma is." I wonder if his prayer was answered!

What do you pray for? What if your prayer isn't answered?

Today we begin a series looking at the book of Habakkuk. I'll tell you more about him next time. He was an Old Testament prophet in Jerusalem before exile to Babylon.

Here we see Habakkuk's prayer:

"² How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!', but you do not save?" (1:2)

Habakkuk has been praying but his prayers have not been answered. Maybe there is something you have desperately prayed for but not received: for a sick child, a parent, a job, for a partner in life or for a child. These might be times when you could echo Habakkuk's words, *"How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?"*

God seems to be inactive; he is not listening, not responding. You pour out your heart and nothing happens.

How does that affect your faith? Is God uncaring? Is he not powerful enough? Is he not there at all? I'll come back to this.

The other question is: What do you pray for?

Habakkuk prays to God about the evils in his own society. Israel has been called to be God's holy people but among God's people there is "violence", "injustice", "wrongdoing", "destruction", "strife and conflict abounds", "the law is paralysed", "justice never prevails", and "the wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted."

He has been pleading with God about these issues but nothing has changed. What sort of God would ignore these evils among his own people?!

What do you pray about? A new bike for birthday?!! Probably not, but look at last week. What things were on your prayer list? Stop and think of what you

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prayed for: a sick loved one, a job, a partner, a child It is important to bring all our concerns to God.

But are you concerned for evils in society or in the church? The ICAC findings of corruption in high places? The plight of asylum seekers? Organised crime and gun violence in our city? The use of chemical weapons in Syria? Child abuse in the church? Do you pray about this sort of thing as Habakkuk did?

Remember Jesus taught us to pray, *"Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

Do you pray about moral issues in society, and above all for the spread of the gospel, that it will transform our world? Remember Jesus said, *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things (your needs) will be given to you as well."* (Matthew 6:33) What are the things you seek first?

God's answer to Habakkuk

Some time ago we went to a Chinese restaurant, spent time studying the menu and choosing 2 dishes. Soon the meal arrived but it was totally different from what we ordered. We might have ordered honey chicken but received beef in black bean sauce. There was only one other couple there and they were already eating so the orders had not been mixed up! It was nice food but not what we ordered. It was quite unexpected!

God's answer to Habakkuk's prayer totally unexpected. Different from anything he might have imagined. God says to him, ⁵ *"Look at the nations and watch - and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told."* ⁶ *I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people.* (1:5-6)

God tells Habakkuk that he is raising up the fearful Babylonian army to deal with the evils Habakkuk has been praying about, that the invasion and exile to Babylon is the way God is going to purify his people of the sins in their society. This is the answer to Habakkuk's prayer.

What do we learn?

1. **God is active.** Habakkuk couldn't see what God was already doing but God had heard and was answering his prayer.

We need to trust God even when nothing seems to be happening.

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God has promised to hear prayers of his people. It can be hard when we have been praying for a long time for something. But it is obvious Habakkuk has been praying about these evils for a long time. He cries out, *"How long, Lord, must I call for help."* But God is already active.

2. **God is powerful.**

It might have seemed as if God was not able to change the society.

I wonder if you have given up praying for some things because you don't really believe God can change the situation; an illness, problems in life or in society. Maybe you have given up praying for someone in your family or a friend to become Christian. You don't believe God will really change them.

But here we see that God is able to use this world superpower to do his will. He is all powerful.

3. **God is vitally concerned about evil.**

We see that he was prepared to use such drastic means to bring about change. He is concerned about evil and is above all concerned that we be made more like Jesus, more holy.

He is concerned about evil in our lives and in his world. He is so concerned that he sent his only Son to go through crucifixion so we could be saved from sin.

4. **God's answers can be totally unexpected.**

"... be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." Even when he is told Habakkuk can hardly believe that this is what God would do. God's answer is right out of left field.

Habakkuk has been asking for an end to "violence", "injustice", "destruction" ... But God tells him Babylon is "impetuous", "a law to themselves", "bent on violence", "guilty men whose own strength is their god." This wasn't just beef in black bean sauce instead of honey chicken. It seemed to be the complete opposite of what he was asking.

Yet this is the way God is going to deal with the evils among his own people. And God's way of dealing with sin in the New Testament is just

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as unexpected. Who would have guessed God would send his own Son to die on a cross to save us?!! We wouldn't have done it that way!! Perhaps we might think God would send bolts lightning to strike down evil.

We need to be open to God answering our prayers in ways that we don't expect. In ways that are different to the thing we are asking for.

We might see that God's answer is much better than we could have imagined; or like Habakkuk it might make us ask how God can do that. God's answer leaves Habakkuk with more questions which we will look at next time.

But we need to trust God as he works out his will.

1. God is active - even when nothing seems to be happening.
2. God is powerful - he can move mountains.
3. God is vitally concerned about evil - this should shape our prayers.
4. God's answers can be totally unexpected - be ready.