

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the book of the prophet Habakkuk beginning in the first chapter beginning with the first verse:

The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. ² O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save. ³ Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises.

I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected. ² Then the LORD answered me and said: "Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. ³ For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will

surely come, It will not tarry. ⁴ "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

In our Epistle lesson for this week Paul is talking to young Timothy, informing Timothy that though he was in chains, Timothy should still praise and thank God. For any one of us that might be a more difficult task to do. If your child were to call you and tell you that they are in prison, you might be more than a little burdened. Or suppose you are sitting at home one day and you get a call that your parents are in prison; again I suppose this would be more than a little burdensome to you.

While I pray that none of us or our families are in prison, each of us is indeed facing our own burdens. How many of us have worries or concerns about a family member in pain or

tribulation? How many of us are suffering through financial issues? How many of us are facing, really, anything that can cause grief or pain or agony?

And it is in times like these that Paul is writing to Timothy. Wanting Timothy to not fear because Paul was in prison. Wanting Timothy to not fear though he was a young man. Wanting Timothy to focus on the cross and not on his own troubles. Dear friends, it is in this example of Paul, and more aptly for us today, and in this example of Habakkuk that we learn, know and understand that ***the righteous live by faith.***

Habakkuk is a prophet of God whom many remember by his opening question and then his constant “questioning” of God. Habakkuk first asks, “How long O Lord...” How long God will you allow this hardship, this violence, this agony, this pain to continue? How long God, how long?

How long must I wait for God to step in and help me? I think this is a question that we hear

and ask many times throughout the day and throughout our lives. How long must I wait for God to help me? God there is a rough spot in my life, why aren't you helping? God there is pain in my life, why aren't you helping me? God... why aren't you helping me?

This is a question that, when asked, can begin to show a lack of trust in God. God, why aren't you helping me? Sort of implies that maybe God does not know what He is doing, doesn't it? And that is what Habakkuk is doing... he is looking around and seeing all of the hardship and terror around him and he asks God, how long?

Can we not do this ourselves when we look at the world? We see the world going further and further from trust and faith in our Savior Jesus Christ and we ask God, why? We see our family beginning to drift away from God and His Word, and we ask God, why? We see countless people around us suffering: hunger, pain, injury, and we ask God, why? God why is there so much going wrong in the world today?

Habakkuk is living in a time in which there is great turmoil. Jerusalem was being besieged and was about to be taken. Habakkuk saw the destruction that has been caused. He saw the loss of life, he saw the utter devastation, he saw the pain and struggle... and he cried out, “How long, O Lord?” How long must we endure hardship? How long must we see this pain and destruction? How long...?

And this plagues us constantly. How long, O Lord, must we endure all of this? We ask this question almost wanting God to just take away all our pain and suffering and problems... but God does not promise us this at all.

In fact, when we think about suffering, we think about ourselves. We think about the pain and struggle that we go through but maybe when we think about suffering or when we think about pain, we should start to think about Christ.

Jesus lived a life of utter contempt, of pain, and of struggle. He was not a “rich man” while He lived on this earth, in fact we are told He had

no home, no place to lay His head. His own brothers and family did not believe in Him as their Savior initially. He and His followers were constantly harassed on every side. Near the end of His life, He endured so much pain and suffering for us: beaten, scourged, whipped, thorns jammed into His head, hatred from those around Him, scorn towards Him, and then He was hung on a cross. As He was hanging there He was cursed and left to die... all for doing NOTHING wrong. Once dead, He was buried in a tomb and left for dead, though as we know, three days later Christ rose from the dead. He rose to proclaim the victory that He has won over death, hell and Satan.

And He has also defeated suffering. He defeated pain. He defeated hardship. Jesus defeated all those things which we turn to God and ask How long? This, of course, does not mean that we will not suffer anymore but it does mean that when we do suffer, when we do hurt, we can turn to God, we can turn to Christ and He promises to take all our pain and suffering away.

And this is all well and good, this is great information to have... but what does Habakkuk remind us of in his last verse, “the just shall live by faith.” It is by faith that each and every one of us shall live. When, through faith, we believe in all that Jesus Christ has done for us, then we can know that we have heaven waiting for us.

And no, not everyone has heaven waiting for them. Though every person suffers, though every person endures hardship, though every person sees horrors... not everyone will have heaven waiting for them. Though Christ died for all people, not all people will have heaven waiting for them. Though they may have heard the Gospel once, not all people will have heaven waiting for them. As Habakkuk says, the just, the righteous, shall live by faith.

Without faith in all that Jesus Christ has done, without faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, without faith that He lived, died, and rose again for your salvation then you will not have heaven waiting for you. But through faith

in all that Jesus Christ has done, then we have heaven waiting.

And Habakkuk has a warning for pastors, but also for hearers of His Word, “***Then the LORD answered me and said: "Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. ³ For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry.***” God wants us to make this message as clear as possible. God wants us to take His message to people.

He does not want us to water down His Word. He wants us to take His Word to all people. Though it appears to tarry, as He notes, though it seems to be taking a long time, though it seems to be going slow, though it seems to be delayed... God’s Word works as he wants it to.

And when we want to ask God, How Long... we should wait for God. How long God must I suffer... wait for Him. How long must I see the world continue to fall... wait for Him. How

long must I not see any growth in my church... wait for Him. How long must I be without my loved one who died... wait for Him.

God knows what He is doing. God's plan will come about in God's time. Consider again, His Son. Jesus came at the appropriate time, Jesus came to live and die for all people, Jesus came to be our Savior. God's plan is perfect. While we do not understand it and while we might be wanting to ask "How Long, O God?" We can trust in Him.

Dear friends in Christ, times can be tough, things can get difficult, there will be suffering, hardship, and pain... But when we know our Savior Jesus Christ, when we know all that He has done for us, and when we are able to thank God for the faith that He has given to us, then we can know that the just, the righteous, shall live by faith.

How long, O Lord, must we live on this earth? How long, O Lord, must we live with pain and suffering? How long, O Lord, must we...? As long as God needs us to. Friends, thanks be to

God for what He does allow us to persevere through, thanks be to God for what he allows to happen in our lives, and thanks be to God for the love that He has showered upon us.

Thanks be to God, for His love and His Son.
Amen.