

Why Doesn't God Do Something?

Habakkuk Series

"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. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honour. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and go on-- guilty men, whose own strength is their god." O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler. The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy? I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay." (Habakkuk 1:5 – 2:3)

As we gather to worship this evening, there are at thousands of English speakers living and working near us who have chosen not to do that. Many of them will have hardly given God much thought. But there are others who have thought about the issues of life, and decided that Christianity is not for them. They have asked the questions, and have not found satisfactory answers. I want to raise some questions for those who have chosen not to follow Christ. Then I want to raise some questions for those who have chosen to become lifelong followers of Jesus. For no matter spiritual framework we have chosen to adopt, there are always questions which we struggle with.

The Atheist.

Basically the atheist says "I'm absolutely sure there is no God". There are not many genuine atheists around, but to the genuine atheist, here is a question for you to consider.

- **How can you be so sure?**

The whole of our life is based on high probability rather than absolute certainty. If you sit on a jury where an accused murderer is on trial for his life, the Judge is not going to ask for you to be absolutely sure about the verdict. But you are asked to weigh the evidence and to be convinced beyond reasonable doubt. When you get on an aircraft to fly to London, you can't be absolutely certain it's going to get there. But more than 99% of flights get to where they are supposed to. Why is it that your palms sweat on your wedding day? It's because you don't have absolute certainty that your marriage is going to last until death parts you. When you eat at a restaurant, you don't have an absolute guarantee that you won't get food poisoning.

So if you call yourself an atheist, and say you are absolutely sure there is no God, I want to ask how you can be so certain? Einstein was one of the greatest thinkers in the world, and he lived quite a long time ago. Since he died knowledge has been increasing at a phenomenal rate. Einstein reckoned he knew less than 1% of all there is to know. Can you be so sure there is no God? Is it possible that God may exist outside of the tiny amount of knowledge you have discovered so far?

The Agnostic.

The agnostic says "I don't know if there is a God." Here's the question for the agnostic to consider.

- **Can you live with not knowing?**

I don't know about you, but I find there is a natural curiosity within me that has been there since I was very small. Those of you with little children or grandchildren will know what I'm talking about. Little kids ask a thousand "Why" questions a day. There is something within us that just wants to know the answers. My Dad gives me a toy. I want to take it apart to find out how it works. I see a snail on a wet path. Why does it leave a trail behind it? Why are the stars in the sky? Why do I feel this longing for companionship? Why was I born? Why? Why? Why? Every one of us who is a Christian has been in the place of asking "Is there a God, and does He care about me?" At some point in our journey we grappled with the question "What if all this Christian thing is all true, and I'm missing out on something that could make my life so rich and full of meaning?" So my question to the Agnostic is "Can you live without knowing?"

The Deist.

A Deist is a person who believes there is a God, but has no relationship to Him. God is somewhere out there. He made the world, but he is no longer interested in it. He no longer controls it. He exists, but he is not part of the scene. The Deist says "I need to get on with life without God". Miracles don't happen. Prayer is just talking to yourself. History runs according to social laws, political laws, economic laws, but spiritual and moral laws don't come into it. It's possible to find Deists in church. They sing the songs, read the scriptures and say the prayers, but they don't believe God is involved in what is happening down here. So here's the Deists question.

- **Why don't you find out?**

What if what the Bible says about Jesus, who is God in the flesh, who showed up on this earth and revealed what God is like – what if you invited him to reveal himself to you and see what difference he makes? Deists are like people watching bungy jumping. Their friends get strapped in, leap off, screaming their heads off all the way down, and come up looking like the cat who got the cream. In leaping off and taking the risk, they discover that bungy jumping is really fun. But you never become a bungy jumper by watching. Likewise, you never discover what God can do, until you step off the edge in faith and invite Him to do some God stuff in your world. So for the Deists, the question is "Why don't you find out?"

The Theist.

The Theist says that God not only exists, but that he created all there is and he is in control of it all. He is directly involved in every aspect of life. His desires, his intentions, his emotions are what causes things to happen. What others call the laws of nature are really the habits of God, and he can change those habits if he wants to. That all sounds cool, but the Theists have got the biggest questions of all. Here is the big question for the Theists.

- **If we say God is in control and running everything, then how come there is so much bad stuff happening in the world?**

Why does this all powerful God allow genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda? Why did he allow Hitler to kill 6 million Jews? Why does he allow monsters like Josef Fritzl to imprison his 15 year old daughter for 24 years, and have seven children by her? If God is as big and powerful as we say He is, why doesn't He show up and do something?

This is where Habakkuk comes in, because he was a Theist, with a huge problem. "God, why don't you do something about the state of our nation?" Habakkuk let fly at God, because he was living with some contradictions that he just couldn't reconcile. He believed that his nation was a nation that God had a special relationship with. The Jews were God's own people. They were special to God. He also believed God was powerful. He could see that things were turning to custard, and he couldn't understand why God didn't seem to be doing anything about it. So he harangued God about it. But the reply he got was not what he expected. Basically, this is what God said.

1. Your vision isn't broad enough Habakkuk.

You may see things about your nation, but you don't see the big picture. You only see part of it. You are like the little boy trying to watch a football game through a knothole in a fence. It doesn't make sense to you because you don't see the breadth of the picture. You are only watching what is happening in your little corner of the world. If someone were to ask you about the state of the church in Switzerland, and you described what you knew of Westlake – one view of one church in one place – it wouldn't be an accurate description. God's reply to Habakkuk was that he had tunnel vision. Here's the second thing God said.

2. Your vision isn't long enough Habakkuk.

You are taking a short term view. What I am about to do isn't going to happen today, or this week, or this month or even this year. It is going to happen in your lifetime. You will live to see it. When I tell you what I'm going to do, you will be dumbfounded. I'm going to do something in your nation, in your lifetime, and you are going to live to see it. In fact, while you are complaining that I am doing nothing, I have already started doing what I had planned.

3. Your vision isn't deep enough Habakkuk.

You are limited by your small mind in the way you think I can work. I haven't revealed this to you before, because you wouldn't believe I would do it. I'm going to raise up the Babylonians and use them to straighten out your nation of Judah. Habakkuk was amazed at that. That was the last thing he expected God to do. He knew the Babylonians. They were ruthless and cruel. They were like ferocious animals that devour their prey. They were a law unto themselves. Throughout the Bible, from the tower of Babel to the Book of Revelation, the Babylonians represent a lawless people, who make up their own rules. They worshipped their own strength. They were a cruel and vicious people. Habakkuk wanted to see some light at the end of the tunnel. What he didn't expect was that the light would be an oncoming train. Never in a million years did he expect that God would use people like the Babylonians. His response was one of horror. "But you can't do that God! This can't be. You are a pure God who can't look upon wrong. You are too holy to look on evil. You are too pure to just stand back and watch. It's not in your nature. You couldn't stand back and watch evil people destroy this land." How wrong he was. In fact God did stand by and watch. Habakkuk couldn't understand how a pure, moral, holy God could use immoral people to accomplish his ends. It was inconceivable to him.

In the Old Testament there is a verse of scripture that we need to hold on to. It comes from the prophet Isaiah. ***"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" (Isaiah 55:6 - 9 NIV)**

We can never completely understand the ways and the purposes of God, but sometimes, if we are willing to take the broad view, the long view, and the deep view, we begin to see the purposes of God. God is at work, but not always in the ways we expect. God doesn't work to our timetable. God's ways are bigger, longer, broader and higher than what we can see from our perspective. I want to finish with two examples.

In 1869 there were 400 foreign missionaries in China. By 1900 that figure had increased to 2800. By 1926 there were 8235 foreign missionaries seeking to spread the gospel in China. But when the Communist government was established in 1949 what seemed to us like a disaster, happened. Almost every foreign missionary was kicked out of the country. About one million Chinese Christians were left to fend for themselves under a Communist government that was hostile to Christianity. During the ten years of the cultural revolution, from 1966 – 1976, multitudes of Christian leaders were killed, imprisoned or sent to harsh labour camps. Bibles and Christian books were burned. Churches were turned into factories. If Habakkuk had been living in China in those days he would have asked the question “Why doesn’t God do something?”

Of course we know now that God was doing something. Something quite amazing. We didn’t see it then, but tossing the missionaries out of China allowed Chinese Christians to rise up and grow up in their faith. They began to preach and teach, often at the cost of their freedom. The church began to grow, even under intense persecution. It’s hard to get exact figures today, but some estimates number believers in China at between 70 and 80 million. In ways that we never could have imagined, God was at work. We need to take the broad view, the long view, and the deep view, if we are to begin to see the purposes of God.

And a brief personal story of my own. When I was 15 years old I was told my mother was dying with leukaemia. You can imagine the impact that had on a 15 year old. I was angry at God. I was confused. I can remember lying on my bed staring at the ceiling, long after the light was out, asking God why he wasn’t doing something. For seven years I watched my mother waste away. But over those seven years, I began to see something I hadn’t seen as a 15 year old. I saw a woman trust God through incredible suffering. Even though her body was wasting away, her spirit was being renewed by the Spirit of God. God was at work, and I saw that work close up. I began to take the broad view, the long view, and the deep view, and I began to see the purposes of God. It was that experience, more than any other, that shaped my life and was the preparation of God in calling me to be a Pastor.

I don’t know what your questions are, or what life situation you are facing, but if you are prepared to take the broad view, the long view, and the deep view, I believe you will see God intervene in ways that will take you by surprise. In His own way and his own time, he will reveal His purposes to you. The key to making sense of this world is to acknowledge that his ways are not ours, and trust him. Will you?

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