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“The Lord Says Wait”

Grace and mercy to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't know about you, but I have found myself saying more and more lately, What a crazy world we live in. It seems as though evil is just always on the rise. And we just live in a crazy world. We look around the world. We see the wars that have been waged for several years now. The terrorist attacks upon the innocent. And genocides. Unnumbered dead.

But then our eyes draw inward to our own country. We see rising numbers of unhoused people and asylum seekers. We hear divisions and threats of civil war. We face economic instability. We see political assassinations, Melissa Hortman and Charlie Kirk, unfettered access to abortion, mass shootings at churches and schools, even here in Minneapolis. It creeps closer and closer, and then it even enters our home. We're faced with sudden sicknesses and deaths. Family and friends hollowed out by addictions of all kinds. We see suicide, sexual assault, and domestic violence. All we see is death, destruction, and despair. And we cry out, God, why? How could you do this? Why, God? Why?

The power of death, destruction, and despair is nothing new. In our Old Testament reading, we hear from the prophet Habakkuk, who faces the same things and turns to God, crying out, How could you allow Judah to fall so far into sin? All I see is the law being ignored, set aside, violence and injustice running rampant through Jerusalem's streets. The king is corrupt. He cares nothing for his people. Why do you allow this? And God answers, Look, I will send Babylon to humble Judah.

Except Habakkuk is even less pleased with that. Babylon is even worse than Judah. Their unrighteousness is unparalleled. And God wants to use the wicked to judge the righteous? All Babylon will bring is more death, more destruction, more despair. Habakkuk knows that his home is under threat. His family and his friends, his loved ones, may soon be killed or sent away.

I will stand in my watch post and station myself on the city wall. I will look at what he will say to me and what answer he will give to my complaint. Even amidst this despair, knowing what will come, Habakkuk looks to the Lord to listen. For Habakkuk will listen to the Lord's answer. And the Lord answers, wait. Wait for my appointed time. If it seems slow, wait. If it seems false, wait. Wait as a watchman on the wall hears the enemy army approaching, but does not yet see them.

Because God will use one nation after another to bring them down. Arrogant, restless, and greedy nations set up like dominoes to be knocked down at God's will. Babylon will be used to destroy Assyria. But then will be defeated themselves by Persia. Each kingdom brought to an end, judged for their wickedness by their conqueror. These nations are God's instrument of righteous judgment. He does not endorse their wickedness, but uses their strength to bring mighty nations low. Until the appointed time, when God himself will rule alone over all his people. Wait, the righteous will live by faith.

But that brings us back to today. That's great that Habakkuk saw his answer, but what about our death? Our destruction? Our despair? Why does God send them into our life? The answer is not easy. We must wait. But we do not wait aimlessly. We wait in three ways. We wait for answers. We wait in faith. And we wait for Christ's return at the end of time.

When we ask God why, we wait for his answers. Perhaps God will show us why something evil in our life occurred. Perhaps some good occurred out of that evil. Perhaps God used that evil to shape and to strengthen us. And perhaps in wisdom we can look back and see it differently after years of waiting. But sometimes that will not come until we are in heaven. And for now, the only answer we might get is I don't know. Wait. Wait as a warrior under siege, attacked by wave after wave of evil.

But we wait in faith. We see unexpected and unparalleled evil in our life, yet we forge forward in faith, faith that believes God can work for good even through evil, faith that rests in your Savior's loving arms. Give me your pain. Give me your doubt. Give me even your anger. Give it all to me. I bear your burden. There is never anything too large for me not to hold. And ultimately, our faith looks to God's supreme use of evil for good. The cross. The death of not just any innocent man, but a man who lived a perfect and blameless life, to die the death of a criminal. The death we deserved, the death of Jesus, to bring us peace. God used evil for our redemption. A bloody, horrible, gruesome death for you to be reconciled, made right before God. If God can use evil for good like that, how can he use evil for good in our lives?

So we wait with purpose in faith as the king goes forth, leading by example. And we wait for the end of time. More than just dying and using death. God used death to destroy death. By raising Jesus from the grave, God conquered death, destruction, and despair. The grave had no power. They are defeated. This is our hope.

And so we wait for the perfect consummation of Christ's victory. We wait for the new heaven and the new earth, the new creation, where death, destruction, and despair have no power. They are set aside, not a forward to Jesus' return. We wait to hear the blessed words, Well done, my good and faithful servant.

We righteous ones live by faith. We wait now for answers in faith. For Christ's return, we wait even amidst the powers of death, destruction, and despair in all lives. But Habakkuk's own words are our words. And so today I want to leave you with Habakkuk's final words in chapter 3, where he shares his hope and his faith.

The fig tree may have no buds. The vines may have no grapes. The olive tree may fail to produce. The field may yield no food. The sheep may be cut off from their flock and there may be no cattle in the barn. But I will delight in the Lord and rejoice in God who saves me. The Lord God is my strength. He will give me feet like a deer and make me leap along the high hills.

Amen. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

