

**“The Righteous Will Live by His Faith”  
(Hab. 2:4)**

**Intro:** Sometimes when life seems unfair we begin to question how God runs the world. Why does the good person have to suffer? Why does a person who is wicked seem to prosper while those who are righteous endure hardship? We are not the first to ask those questions.

A little over a week ago we read in our Daily Bible reading the prophecy of Habakkuk. It is an intriguing book. One of its unique features is the fact the whole book is a conversation between Habakkuk and God and it deals with the problem of the seeming unfairness of God’s actions.

In chapter one Habakkuk cries out to God because of the sins of his own people, Israel. Even he, a righteous man, suffers at their hands (Hab. 1:2-4)

*How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out to Thee, “Violence!” Yet Thou dost not save. (Habakkuk 1:2)*

**God answers with the astounding statement that He will raise up the Chaldeans to punish the disobedient Israelites (Hab. 1:5-11).**

*“For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs. (Habakkuk 1:6)*

**Habakkuk is troubled by this revelation; it puts him in dilemma. Why would God look with favor on a wicked nation and allow a people more wicked to destroy a people less wicked? (Hab. 1:12-2:1).**

*Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor. Why dost Thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? (Habakkuk 1:13)*

**God responds to Habakkuk’s concerns.**

God says, “You can write this down! The Chaldeans will get their just repayment for their sin. In contrast God makes an assuring promise to the faithful.

*Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith. (Habakkuk 2:4)*

**This statement from God reveals one of the most important principles of God’s dealing with mankind. What does it mean, “The righteous will live by faith”?**

**An Important OT Message—“The righteous will live by his faith”**

**“The righteous” does not refer to those who never sin; but instead refers to those who humble themselves before the Lord. “The righteous” stand in contrast to “the proud”. This humility is shown by:**

*Acknowledging sin*

*Submitting to God’s will in obedience*

*Respecting God’s purpose in history*

**“Will live” refers to the blessing that comes to the righteous.**

*In the context, God was promising that His people who remained true to him would be saved in the day of wrath that was about to come upon Israel.*

*Their very lives would depend upon honoring God’s word.*

**“By faith”**

*This is the means by which the righteous man will live. By trusting in God’s power to deliver, he will be delivered.*

*In this case, the faithful were given a particularly challenging command. Their trust in God would be shown by surrendering to the Babylonians rather than fighting them.*

**This principle expresses clearly the basis upon which God saves. Three times in the NT this statement from Habakkuk is quoted to clarify God’s way of salvation for His NT people.**

### **Three NT Applications**

#### **Paul’s application of the principle in Romans 1**

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17)*

Paul affirms that the gospel is God’s power for salvation to the believer, whether Jew or Greek.

The “good news” is that there is a way of salvation through Jesus’ death on the cross. This message is God’s power to deliver the sinner from the wrath of God.

This deliverance was available to all who believe, whether Jew or Greek.

In the gospel, “the righteousness of God is revealed”.

Though rooted in God’s character, “the righteousness of God” is a righteousness that God reckons to us.

Consider Paul’s description: “not having a righteousness of my own derived from law but that which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil. 3:9).

This righteousness is “by faith”, that is, it results from trust in the sacrifice God has provided rather than in our works.

“Faith” in Romans refers to trust in God’s sacrifice that may be accepted and appropriated upon conditions God has set forth.

It is placed in contrast to “works” by which a person earns righteousness by perfect obedience to law.

“Unto faith” suggests the intention of the gospel message.

It is given in order that men may believe, resulting in righteousness and salvation from sin and eternal wrath.

“As it is written...” suggests that Paul’s statement is in harmony with what God has previously said through Habakkuk.

Just as God through Habakkuk had promised deliverance for the humble who trusted in God, so God, through the gospel, promises deliverance for the humble who trust in God.

### **Paul's application to the Galatians in Galatians 3**

In Galatians, Paul's concern is that some of the Gentile Christians who have been saved by faith in Christ have been persuaded by Judaizing teachers to start keeping the Law of Moses in order to be saved. It becomes necessary for Paul to explain the difference between salvation by faith and salvation by works.

*For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith." However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them." (Galatians 3:10-12)*

Let's consider the three points in a slightly different order:

First, righteousness by the Law required that the person under the Law practice all the things that the Law had said without sin and in this way would "live by them". As such it was not a system of faith in God's forgiveness, but instead a system of works based on human effort, on perfect law keeping. Second, failure to obey all requirements of the Law put one under a curse.

Third, the OT made it clear that no one had successfully earned righteousness by works.

*Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith." (Galatians 3:11)*

Habakkuk's statement indicates that no one had deserved to be saved from wrath because of perfect obedience to the Law. Instead it affirmed that only those who trusted in God would be delivered.

Therefore Jesus took the curse of the Law upon the disobedient upon Himself on the cross in order that the disobedient could be righteous by faith!

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:13-14)*

### **The Hebrew writer's application of the principle in Heb. 10**

Later the Hebrew writer would write a word of exhortation to believing Jews who were turning back from faith in Jesus to Judaism, leaving the new covenant of faith for the old covenant of works. He reminded them of all that they had endured in the past for their faith in Jesus and how that if they would remain faithful they would be rewarded.

*Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. (Hebrews 10:35-36)*

Then the Hebrew writer gives the basis for his exhortation to keep the faith.

*For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. (Hebrews 10:37-39)*

The Hebrew writer understood that trusting God meant courageously obeying Him when the circumstances were frightening. When confronted with such threats, we can either face them courageously or shrink back in fear. If they did the former then they would be saved; if they did the latter, they would be destroyed. Thus he ends the chapter with this great affirmation of faith based on Habakkuk's statement.

*But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*

**Conclusion: The message of Habbakuk 2:4 has lasting importance and application in our lives.**

First let us thank God that He has made available to us a way of righteousness that does not depend upon our perfection, but upon His grace in Jesus Christ. Secondly, let us live humbly, acknowledging our sins, obeying God the best we can, and submitting to His purposes in history.

Thirdly, let us courageously face whatever difficulties we may face knowing that shrinking back can only bring destruction, but faithfully persevering will bring salvation.

Indeed—"the righteous will live by faith"!