

Silent Before God's Sovereignty

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[0:00] So, Emily, thank you for serving us. Emily is going to read Habakkuk chapter 2, starting at verse 5 and down through the end of the chapter.

Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol, like death he has never enough. He gathers from himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples.

Shall not all these take up their taunt against him with scoffing and riddles for him and say, Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own for how long and loads himself with pledges.

Will not your debtors suddenly arise and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoiled for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnants of the people shall plunder you for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm. You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples who have forfeited your life.

[1:07] For the stone will cry out from the wall and the beam from the woodwork respond. Woe to him who built a town with blood and pounds a city on iniquity. Behold, it is not from the Lord of hosts that people's labor merely for fire and nations weary themselves for nothing.

For the Lord will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink. You pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness.

You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink yourself and show your uncircumcision. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you and utter shame will come upon your glory.

The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them. For the blood of the man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it?

A metal image, a teacher of lies. For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols. Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, awake. To a silent stone, arise.

[2:11] Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him.

Thanks, Emily. Father, again, we pause to ask that you would guide us as we continue in our time of worship. Holy Spirit, please open your word to us.

Make it clear. Help us to see our Savior Jesus. Help us to believe and to obey the truths that we find here.

Stir our faith. Awaken and refresh our hope. We ask that you would be with us as we continue in this time.

In Jesus' name, amen. When I was younger, I was fascinated by boomerangs.

[3 :11] The idea that you could take a curved stick and throw it and have that stick come back to you. It just felt like magic to me.

But boomerangs were not originally toys for boys to play with. Originally, they were for different purposes.

And if you're not careful with a boomerang, you may throw it and find that it has returned and knocked you in the back of the head. That's the way boomerangs work.

This image shows up in our text in Habakkuk 2. God announces that Babylon's violence done to the nations is going to come back on them.

Habakkuk's first question to God is simple. Why don't you do something about all of this? And God's first response, I suspect, had to surprise him.

[4 :22] I am doing something about all this. I'm already doing something. Babylon is coming. And Habakkuk objects.

Babylon? Babylon? They are more wicked than your people. Why would you tolerate their violence? I am not leaving until I get an answer to this question.

And God in his mercy responds a second time. We notice in verse number 4. God is not confused about Babylon. He knows exactly what they are like.

Verse 4. Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him.

Babylon looks strong. And yet God knows that it is unstable. God knows what's happening there in Babylon. And he knows that wine, alcohol, that promises them control also loosens their judgment.

[5 :39] This is a foreshadow, I think, coming up here in verse 5, of what we see later on in the book of Daniel. When Belshazzar has that amazing party for a thousand lords and they are drinking alcohol out of the goblets that were reserved for the service of God in the temple.

And there is that hand that appears writing on the wall. Alcohol loosens judgment and it exposes arrogance.

But Babylon's appetite for conquest is never satisfied. Look how verse 5 continues. Moreover, wine is a traitor.

An arrogant man who is never at rest. Speaking about Babylon. His greed is as wide as Sheol. Like death, he has never enough.

He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples. Babylon's appetite for conquest is never satisfied.

[6 :49] Like death itself, there is always room for more. Always another nation that it can open up its mouth and swallow down.

To make it clear that Babylon's success will be limited and temporary.

God declares five woes against it. You may have heard that word as Emily was reading. We're going to notice five woes.

This is not woe like a surprise. And this is also not woe like what you say to a horse when you are, you know, pulling back on the reins.

A woe is a merciful warning. And it is also a sovereign verdict.

[7 :49] Think about that. A merciful warning and a sovereign verdict. The first woe begins with a question in verse number six.

Shall not all those take up their taunt against him with scoffing and riddles for him and say, Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own.

For how long? And loads himself with pledges. He heaps up what is not his, what is not his own. This is just a little freebie.

It's the Hebrew word Lolo. I kind of like that because it's my nickname for Lois. But there it is. Not his own. It's not his. It's Lolo.

He heaps up what is not his. And he takes pledges. Pledges are collateral for loans. Will not your debtors, verse number seven, suddenly arise?

[8 : 55] And those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. Because you have plundered many nations. All the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you.

Why? For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. Notice verse number six. It is the conquered people who speak up.

The nations do not mourn when Babylon falls. They mock it with taunting and scoffing and riddles.

The empire that terrified the world has become a punchline for a joke. God names Babylon's crime.

He heaps up what is not his own. This is the woe to the plunderer. The nation that heaps up what is not its own.

[9 : 58] Babylon is ruthless. Like a loan shark. It plunders nations. It takes what does not belong to itself. And then it turns that stolen wealth into leverage.

Binding debtors with bad interest rates. He loads himself with pledges. And verse eight exposes the full scope of Babylon's guilt.

This is brutality on a global scale. They have done violence. Not just to people. And not just to cities.

But to the land itself. God will not tolerate blood staining the earth without consequence.

And he announces a massive role reversal. Babylon. Babylon. You will fear the people that you once exploited. Your debtors will rise up.

[10 : 58] Those that you crushed will become your creditors. You plundered many nations. And now all who remain will plunder you. The joke makes sense now.

Babylon won't just fall. It will fall. It will fall by its own methods. Boomerang. And if Babylon thinks it can protect itself from this consequence.

The second woe makes it clear. It cannot. Here's the second woe. The woe to those who seek security at the expense of others. Look at verse number nine.

Woe to him. Who gets evil gain for his house. Who takes plunder in order to build his house.

To set his nest on high. To be safe from the reach of harm. You have devised shame for your house.

[12 : 04] By cutting off many peoples. You have forfeited your life. For the stone will cry out from the wall. And the beam from the woodwork respond.

The problem is not just that Babylon has taken plunder from all of the nations. The problem that God has is what they are using the plunder for.

Babylon takes what it steals in order to build a house. A nest on high. Out of reach. Untouchable. Secure. Their goal is clear.

They want to have a secure city to live in. They want to be honored for having the safest place for their people to live.

But notice God's verdict. They are expecting that they will receive honor from this house.

[13:03] And yet God says you have stored up shame. And you thought by building this place to protect yourself. That you would be secure and preserve your life.

But instead you have forfeited it. And in fact what Babylon thought would protect them. The stones and the wood.

Take the witness stand and testify against them. It looks. It looks like Babylon is securing its future.

Like this is a city that will never be conquered. But boomerang. The plunder turns against them.

The metaphor expands in the third row. Third woe. Third row. The metaphor expands in the third woe. From a house. Now to a city.

[14:04] This is the woe to the one who builds with bloodshed. Look just at one verse. Verse number 12 to begin. Woe to him. Who builds a town with blood.

And founds a city. On iniquity. This woe is about building. It's about progress. It's about achievement.

It's about making a legacy. Babylon didn't just conquer. It constructed cities. Walls. Monuments. Systems. But God sees right through all of that.

The city is built with blood. It is founded on injustice. And so God asks a question in verse number 13.

Behold. Is it not from the Lord of hosts. That people's labor merely for fire.

[15:05] And nations weary themselves for nothing. In other words. Who do you think determined the outcome of all of this? Is it not from the Lord of hosts.

For the earth. Verse 14. Will be filled. With the knowledge. Of the glory. Of the Lord.

As the waters. Cover. The sea. Babylon's success. Isn't history. Spinning out of control.

Babylon didn't push. Too far. By accident. God. Let's them build. He lets them exhaust themselves.

He lets the empire. Begin to strain. Under its own ambition. Ambition. Because all of their effort. All of their success.

[16:07] All of their blood soaked progress. Is nothing more than fuel for the fire. They are literally working themselves to death.

Matching the second woe. The fourth is set in a house. This is the woe to the predator. Who betrays. And exploits. His neighbors.

Verse 15. Woe to him. Who makes his neighbors drink. You pour out your wrath.

And make them drunk. In order to gaze at their nakedness. You will have your fill of shame. Instead of glory. Drink yourself.

And show your uncircumcision. The cup in the Lord's right hand. Will come around. To you. It will return to you.

[17:08] And utter shame. Will come upon. Your glory. A house is a space designed for safety.

Hospitality. But instead of providing shelter. Babylon as a homeowner. Is a predator. Babylon makes its neighbors drunk.

Not to celebrate. Not to celebrate. But to exploit them. When they are most vulnerable. This is not carelessness. Like a party that gets out of control.

This is calculated betrayal. Power abusing trust. Intimacy weaponized against the weak. In the second woe.

The construction materials. The stones. And the wood beams. Testify against the carpenter. Here. The premeditated plan.

[18:22] Again. Turns against the perpetrator. Verse 16. You will be filled. You will be filled. With shame.

Instead of glory. God will not tolerate forever. The depravity of predators.

Those who exploit people. Who are expecting kindness and safety. Will themselves drink from the cup. Of God's wrath. Like a boomerang.

Coming back. A day is coming. When secret violence. Will be exposed. When stolen dignity. Is acknowledged.

When shame. No longer rests. On the shoulders of the victim. But on the one. Who caused the harm. And if I may make just an aside.

[19:26] If you were abused by someone who should have protected you. Or if you were violated in a place that should have been safe.

Or if you've been taken advantage of by someone you trusted. I am so sorry for what you suffered. This passage is not meant to reopen your wounds.

But to give you this truth. God takes what happens to victims seriously. He will not excuse it. And he will not forget it.

Justice may be delayed. But it will not be denied. How do we know? Look at verse 17. The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you.

As will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them. Why? For the blood of man. And violence to the earth.

[20:36] To cities. And to all who dwell in them. You see Babylon's violence was not just against people and cities. It was against creation itself.

They stripped the cedar forests of Lebanon. They slaughtered animals without restraint. The earth suffered. Under their ambition.

Under their ambition. And God says their violence and destruction will return to them again. For what they have done.

The fifth woe. Like the first. Begins with a question. God doesn't ask this question because he needs information.

He asks this question because he is exposing absurdity. This is the woe to the one who worships a lifeless idol. Look at verse 18.

[21:37] What prophet is an idol? When its maker has shaped it. A metal image. A teacher of lies.

For its maker trusts in his own creation. When he makes speechless idols. Woe to him. Who says to a wooden thing.

Awake. To a silent stone. Arise. Can this teach? Behold. It is overlaid with gold and silver.

And there is no breath in it. At all. Did you notice the repetition in verse 18?

Look back up there at verse 18. Notice the repetition of the word maker. And the word makes. This is deliberate. This is deliberate. Ironic humor.

[22:36] God emphasizes. The human effort. That has to go into idolatry. You make it. You shape it. You overlay it.

And then you trust in it. How absurd. The carved wood and stone is encased.

Sealed inside of gold and silver. That was plundered from the nations. That we read about in the first woe. This idol can't speak. Why can't it speak?

Well it can't even breathe inside of there. It's all sealed up under all that gold and silver. How absurd. In the first woe.

God warns Babylon. That their debtors will arise. And awake. And then they will taunt them. With jokes and riddles and so on. And here.

[23 : 35] Babylon cries out to its idols. With the same words. Notice. Arise. Awake. Habakkuk. And then God ends this section of Habakkuk with one final word.

But the Lord. is in. His holy temple. Let all the earth.

Keep silence. Before him. I learned this week that this. Hebrew word underneath. Be silent.

Or keep silent. Sounds like how we say. Shh. Enough noise.

Enough shouting. Enough questions. Back in chapter.

[24 : 44] In verse 13. Habakkuk asks God. Why do you remain silent when the wicked swallow up the righteous? God's answer to his prophet.

Is his response to predators and plunderers and people like us. His answer is not an explanation. But a declaration. I am not silent.

I am reigning. Governing history. Toward my glory. And because that's true.

Then. You. Be silent.

Five woes. God's plan is clear. Babylon will not define history. Babylon will serve history.

[25 : 55] Because the end of history is neither Babylon's dominance. Nor its predicted fall. The end of history is God's glory.

God's glory. repent of your sin and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, you will drink the cup of God's wrath.

Not because God is cruel, but because sin must be judged. But hear the good news of the gospel. If you will turn from your sin, if you will turn from yourself and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you will have eternal life.

Come to Jesus. Trust in Jesus today. My brothers and sisters, it is easier to hear these woes spoken about Babylon than to hear them spoken about us.

But the Holy Spirit preserved these warnings, these woes, these sovereign verdicts, not so that we could congratulate ourselves for not being like the Babylonians, but so that we would examine our hearts.

[27 : 59] So ask yourself, am I chasing the next thing that I don't have? Whatever that is.

Am I chasing the next thing that I don't have? A possession? A relationship? A career? Success? Ask yourself, have I tolerated harm towards others because protecting my own sense of security mattered more to me in that moment?

Ask yourself, have I valued my reputation, my ministry, my career? Have I valued those things more than the voices that I have silenced along the way?

Has success, has my success come at the expense of those closest to me? I suspect that most of us have never bowed down to a carved idol, but let me ask a deeper question.

Where do you turn when you are sad, when you are lonely, when you are anxious, when you are afraid? What is it that you look to that you hope will give you security and significance?

[29 : 33] Peace. Peace. What habit or routine or escape are you hoping is going to get you through one more day?

These woes are both verdicts and warnings. And so rather than hide, we can repent. We can repent freely and boldly because of grace.

The boomerang of sin, the boomerang of God's wrath towards our sin that should have spun around and come back on us did not hit us, brothers and sisters.

It hit our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He took the cup of God's wrath. He took the cup of God's wrath and he drank all of it.

There is not one drop left for you to drink. And so we repent. And we receive fresh mercy.

[30 : 44] And we receive real forgiveness. because of our Savior Jesus. Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 14 is at the very center of this text.

So it's worth reading one more time. Babylon is God's means.

But God's glory is the end. And notice this. The promise that God offers here doesn't just describe a future.

It invites participation right now. The knowledge of God's glory implies what? Knowers.

If the earth is going to be filled with the knowledge of God's glory, then it must be filled with those who know God's glory.

[32 : 00] This is an invitation for us to participate in what God is doing. By God's grace, we are among these knowers.

But the knowers also includes those around us who do not yet believe. So let's go.

Let's go with the gospel. Let's take the gospel into the places where we live, into the places where we work, into the places where we visit.

Let's go with the gospel and hasten the day when the knowledge of God's glory fills the earth. Finally, let's be silent before his sovereignty.

Because God governs history toward his glory, we can rest. How does that sound? If God is governing history toward his glory, then we can rest.

[33 : 19] Silence does not mean giving up. It doesn't mean pretending we don't have questions. It doesn't mean stuffing down our legitimate emotions. Habakkuk has already shown us.

Faithful people ask honest questions. But the last verse of this text reminds us that after God has spoken, faith relaxes its grip on control.

And it rests. Verse 20 again. The Lord is in his holy temple.

Let all the earth keep silent before him. Silence is not resignation. It is not despair.

Silence is quiet confidence that God's purposes are at work. Even when his answers seem incomplete.

[34 : 26] And the outcome of all things is unresolved. And the justice that we crave seems delayed. To be silent before his sovereignty is to let God's character and God's promises quiet our restless souls.

Shh. Shh. Shh. Shh. Shh. Shh. We can be silent because our God, our God who reigns from his holy temple, is doing right now far more than we can ask or imagine, even when we can't see it yet.

Let's pray. Let's pray.