

Key idea:

FCF:

Application:

1. How to wait...

Who here would have predicted, 3, 5, 6 months ago, that the key issue we would all be facing now would be, 'How to wait?'.

In essence, that is what we are facing as a wider society, as a smaller community, as families, individuals and workers. We are all waiting – and we really don't know what we are waiting for, where we will emerge.

And, wherever you look, on websites, newspaper articles, television shows, and all forms of media, there is advice on how to wait, on what waiting should look like. One line of advice is to get busy, so that there is not too much down-time and not too much opportunity to consider what is going on and what might have been lost. The form of busy-ness can be anything, just get busy. Another line of advice is to take advantage of the enforced and imposed quiet-time – take the moment to wait in reflection, to spend time resting, to consider what is necessary and what is not. A further line of advice is to use this waiting time for bettering yourself – to learn a new skill, to try something different, to develop a hobby or an interest, to achieve those things that you had always planned but never had the time to indulge.

Behind all this advice is one key question – 'How do we wait well?'

It is a key question because we don't wait well, generally, as people in this time and place. We exist with no concept of waiting, with a sense of the immediate (takeaway food and credit-cards), with no notion of delayed gratification. Our whole culture is not built around waiting but is built around now and me.

Habakkuk is waiting. When we first met him, he was waiting – for an answer from God. Then, as he asked questions, he waited. Now, having heard the LORD's responses to his questions, he seems to have finally grasped how to wait well. Let's listen to what he has to say...

PRAY...

2. Why to waiting...

Habakkuk has been on a remarkable journey. He began with 'why?' – he could not understand how God could fulfil his promise to deal with the sin of the world when the very people that he had chosen to represent him – Abraham's family – were so rebellious. They had been rendered ineffective in their work by the evil and stubborn and wayward hearts that ran their lives. As a nation (Judah, the southern part of God's people), they had driven Habakkuk to despair and lamentation – he could not stop crying out to the LORD, asking him 'why', and 'what'.

God had responded by revealing his plans – and they were astounding! God would deal with the sin of his people by bringing judgement. The judgement was to be brought by the most

ruthless and violent superpower of the time – the Babylonians. God was raising them up for this very purpose. This enabled us to place Habakkuk in history – he seems to have been operating around 610-605BC.

God had form in this area – he had already dealt with the northern kingdom of his people (Israel) through the violence of Assyria. God's people had seen both the patience and judgement of the LORD. But Judah persisted.

Habakkuk persisted, too. The LORD's answer troubled him even more. Now he was grappling with the nature of God and the method of God. Put simply, if God is the unique, eternal, pure lord of the universe, how could he use the Babylonians? Moreover, what did this mean for his promise to deal with the sin of the world through Abraham's family? What was going to happen?

Habakkuk knew that the LORD would answer. Habakkuk also knew that the answer of the LORD would create the need for change in his own life.

The LORD did answer. His answer was for his people, across the generations. His answer needed to be written down. His answer needed to be waited for. His words would come true, but in his time and in his power.

The LORD did answer. His answer revealed the reality of all humanity: the sinful, destined for judgement, destined to 'taste their own medicine', destined to face God's anger – the Babylonians and the wicked amongst God's own mob; and the

righteous, those living in line with God's design, those who hear God – take him at his word and live like it, those who wait for God to do exactly as he promises. In essence, the righteous live life with the LORD in his rightful place: at the centre, as the most significant being in all the world.

Habakkuk has asked 'why'. Habakkuk has been commanded to 'wait'. Habakkuk is now waiting – how does he wait well?

3. How to wait... well

(i) Dependent community (vs.1, 19)

The last chapter of Habakkuk is different to the rest of his prophecy. The difference is made quite clear in the first and last verses – **look at verses 1 and 19... READ.**

This is the response of the changed life – remember Habakkuk 2:1? Here is the reply of Habakkuk to the LORD's answer. And it is a striking response.

It is a prayer. That in itself is an expression of dependence, of taking God at his word, and living like it, of having God in the right place in his life. It is the life of the man of faith because prayer is a fundamental declaration of dependence – not independence, not co-operation, but dependence, taking God at his word. How different it is to the arrogant sinful human, who is the lone ranger and superior to God!

It is a community prayer – did you catch that in the last verse? It is to be part of the gathering of God's community, to be sung and to be played. Again, that is the action of a man of faith – to trust God

to do as he says and to live like it is to be in community with God – and, in the end, his mob. Again, it is so different to the arrogant and sinful man – his actions are always self-serving and independent and at the expense of community, because he alone is 'God'.

How does Habakkuk wait well? He waits well by waiting in dependent community.

(ii) Remembering (vs.2)

The first part of waiting is remembering – **look at verse 2... READ.**

Habakkuk can wait because he knows his history. He has 'heard the report' about the LORD. He knows what God has done, and is capable of doing. He knows what God has done to display his commitment to his promises.

This is so important for Habakkuk's waiting. It explains his approaches to God – he knows his promises, he knows his actions, and so he feels confident in asking him questions. Moreover, as the LORD responds, Habakkuk has the history of his dealings with the world firmly entrenched in his mind. In fact, this history fills Habakkuk with 'awe' – he has heard of the LORD's utter consistency in doing as he said, that he can only stand dumbstruck at how faithful God is. The LORD's reply to his last lament has transported him back into this awesome history of God's consistency, and he is reassured and calmed.

(iii) Requesting (vs.2)

This history emboldens Habakkuk not just to stand in awe of God but also to present a request before him – **look at verse 2 again... READ.**

Habakkuk is a student of the work of the LORD. But he has not experienced the wonderful goodness of the LORD's salvation before his very eyes. As he waits through the judgement of God on sin – through the Babylonians, and of the Babylonians and the wicked amongst God's people – he presents a simple request: 'LORD, revive your work'.

It is not just a general statement – he describes his desire for revival in the very next phrase – there at the end of verse 2: 'in your wrath, remember mercy'.

Habakkuk has heard of the LORD walking with Adam and Eve after their sin. Habakkuk has heard of the LORD preserving Noah in the boat. Habakkuk has heard of the LORD giving Abraham a son and showing him the land. Habakkuk has heard of the LORD passing over Egypt and bringing his people out. Habakkuk has heard of the LORD giving his people the land he promised.

In each, the judgement of the LORD has highlighted the mercy of the LORD – the undeserved generosity of God; in fact, in each, the LORD's wrath goes hand-in-hand with the LORD's mercy. And, as he stands and waits in the middle of this judgement, Habakkuk asks the LORD to remember his mercy. He is requesting the LORD to do as he promised – to deal with human sin in the way that is both just and merciful.

(iii) Recalling (vs.3-15)

As Habakkuk waits, he recalls the one he is reliant upon. He recites, if you like, a snapshot of God in his greatest hits across history. It paints an awesome picture of the LORD that he has heard about. But, it is more than just a recognition of what God has done – it is a recognition of what his trustworthy word states he will do – it looks at the present and the future of Habakkuk, and God's people, based upon what the LORD has already done.

The snapshots come in three verses. Each verse has a title which is emphasized with a 'selah', and then the title is unpacked in a number of lines.

The overall impression is to strike in us a sense of the awe of the coming of the LORD to do as he promises. It is a picture of the LORD entering this physical world in a way that is astounding, awesome and striking. It is an entrance that has an effect on the very fibre of creation itself, as the LORD does as he promises – deal with sin through the family of Abraham.

The first verse begins in **verse 3 – READ...**

The title seems fairly tame – 'God comes'. However, when you see how that coming is described, you cannot avoid the awe. It is like the phrase 'there was a dust-storm'. It sounds so tame until you actually see the pictures and experience the magnitude of it. The description of the LORD coming is awesome and awe-inspiring. It dwarfs the universe, it displays across the skies his significance, it shakes the very roots of the mountains, it overturns

the gatherings of humans. When the LORD comes, it is unlike anything that has ever been seen or experienced.

The second verse begins in **verse 9 – READ....**

There is a more personal note here – there is the change to addressing God himself – he is not distant but he has arrived. Again, the image is awe-inspiring. But we have to notice how Habakkuk draws our attention to the effect of the LORD's coming on the physical creation. Each phrase mentions the physical impact of the LORD coming on his creation – the very things we see as set and established and immovable, the very things that we see as beyond our control and too massive to move – these very things are dwarfed and diminished by the coming of the LORD. The coming of the LORD affects the very fibres of this created world.

The third verse begins in **verse 13... READ...**

This is where Habakkuk's recognition of the LORD lands. The snapshots of the LORD's coming finds its ultimate purpose here: the LORD comes to save his people, to save Habakkuk and the people the LORD had committed to. This is what Habakkuk is waiting to see – the way in which the LORD saves his people at the very moment he judges his enemies. On a far bigger scale, the LORD saves those he is committed to by dealing with sin – just as Habakkuk has known that he always promised to do! When the LORD comes, all the promises of the LORD are fulfilled!

(v) Revering (vs.16)

This snapshot, and this revision of all history into the present, produces a remarkable response in Habakkuk – **look at verse 16... READ.**

This snapshot has caused him, I think, to finally grasp who he is waiting upon – and the magnitude of what this means. It is hard to understand why he feels so rotten within himself – perhaps this exposure to the awesome nature of the LORD has reminded him, rebuked him, even revealed to him, his own sin. However, it would be safe to say that Habakkuk has been brought to a state of fearful reverence before the LORD: if this is the LORD, what else can we do but quiver and feel rotten in our own bones? What else can we do but wait for the inevitable faithfulness of the LORD to bring deliverance? What else can we do but know that the LORD will do exactly as he says?

(vi) Rejoicing (vs.17-18)

Such a recognition brings Habakkuk to true fear: the LORD is fearful and fearsome and for us – **look at verses 17-18... READ.**

The view that Habakkuk has as he looks at the world is fearful and fearsome – the earth is scorched and unproductive, the crops are withered and empty, the stables and stockyards are eerily quiet and dust-ridden. The world he knows has been decimated by the judgement of the LORD, by the astounding way God dealt with the sin of his people, by the ruthless tactics of the Babylonians (who will meet their judgement, too). It is a profoundly fearful and fearsome and depressing view.

But, in the midst of this Habakkuk knows this truth: the LORD will do as he says. The LORD is for those who take him at his word, and live like it. As he waits, he knows – from remembering and requesting and recognizing and revering, in community, in prayer – that the LORD will save him. Nothing could be more certain!

It is a stance, an attitude, an approach that is so starkly out of step with the world around Habakkuk. All around him, the arrogant are taking what is not their's, destroying the people of God in judgement. All around him, the landscape is scorched and dry and desolate and empty and smoking and there are wails and shouts and shrieks and cries and mourning laments – and Habakkuk is rejoicing!

It is a deep-seated satisfaction that the LORD will do as he says. Amidst all that is desolate, this is alive: God's word will take place. How? Habakkuk does not know. When? Habakkuk cannot time or place it? But this he knows: the LORD will do as he says, and Habakkuk takes him at his word, and lives like it. The LORD has said that he will deal with sin through Abraham's family – Habakkuk lives like this will certainly happen, because it will!

And so he rejoices!

(vii) Relying (vs.19)

As Habakkuk stands amidst the wreckage of his nation, he is transformed from the man of lament to the man of rejoicing – and he relies upon the one he previously questioned – **look at verse 19... READ.**

I struggle to grasp the significance and wonder of these words. I think that you have to picture, as vividly as you can, the movement that Habakkuk has experienced as well as the physical environment he stands in. Around him is destruction, desolation, exile and suffering – the LORD has judged his people, and will judge their invaders. The LORD has done as he said, in mind-blowingly astounding ways. The landscape is bare. The paddocks are charred. The buildings are demolished. The nation is judged. The invaders rejoice and plunder. Everything is sapped and drained and sucked dry.

And Habakkuk prays with God's mob – the mob who hear the LORD and take him at his word. And they state clearly that they have strength because the LORD is committed to his word, and so committed to them. They state clearly that as everything else sags and wilts and dies, they are enabled to walk with sure-feet on any terrain and landscape, because the LORD will do as he says. Put simply, they can get on with life because the LORD will do as he said: he will deal with sin through Abraham's family.

I want you to notice that the reliance of Habakkuk and God's mob is not on their worthy volunteering, or their own selfless care for those around them, or their community-minded attitude, or their ability to just be rugged individuals. Their reliance is not based in their own ability to pull together, to see the best in things, to make lemonade when the world hands you lemons. Their reliance is in none of these things. Their reliance is in one thing, one person: in the LORD who is committed to doing what he says, and so is committed to his people. That will never fade, never fail, never

tire, never wilt, never rescind, never retire – he will always deliver on what he has said.

4. Jesus is...

It is an amazing change in Habakkuk, isn't it?

Here is the man of 'why' who is now waiting, and as he waits, he gives the LORD – the one he questioned – what he deserves: worship. In this community prayer, this mob-expressed dependence upon the LORD, Habakkuk shows us how to wait: in dependent community, remembering, requesting, recalling, revering, rejoicing and relying.

We are never told whether Habakkuk saw in a physical sense 'the day of distress to come against the people invading us'. But he knew it would come. And it did – Babylon was destroyed by Persia in 539BC. The wicked of God's people had been judged by the wicked Babylon, who would be destroyed by the wicked Persia. And so on... And the remains of God's people, the descendants of Abraham, returned to the land that they had left – in 538BC.

If you know your Bible history, you will know that this was as good as it got, for a long time. It was a pale imitation of what God's people had enjoyed, and hoped for. And yet, the LORD's word remained clear: God would deal with sin in this world, through Abraham's family. Habakkuk's recognition remained: 'you come to save your people, to save your annointed'.

The faithful waited, waited, waited, and waited.

And then Matthew starts his biography of Jesus in this way –
Matthew 1:1... READ...

As someone who is waiting, as someone who might have even given up on the LORD's words, this is meant to jolt you awake: the family of Abraham remains, and, as you find out as you read, it has narrowed down to this one man.

He is anointed at his baptism (Matt.3:17). He is confirmed in his testing (Matt.4). He is revealed as the one that the LORD had promised, as he proclaims that the kingdom of God is coming (Matt.4:17). His actions are amazing, changing the very physical nature of the world. He is anointed, again, at his revealing on the high mountain (Matt.17). He enters the capital of the LORD's people as a king (Matt.21). He lives in a landscape where the fig tree is barren (Matt.21:18). And he is continually waiting for the moment when the LORD will do as he says – for the right time.

As that moment draws closer, he kneels and prays in dependent community, in the Garden of Gethsemane. As he surveys the world around him, that world is struck by sin, damaged and broken and desolate, and his immediate landscape is the cup of the wrath of the LORD for human sin. He states his complete dependence upon the LORD, upon the God who has said he will deal with sin through Abraham's family. He is deserted, alone, and bereft, but he states clearly that the will of God is his desire. At this moment, he states clearly that he depends upon the LORD alone. At this moment, Jesus is the man of faith, who will live, although we are astounded at how this can be.

He dies an astounding death – creation is damaged and affected, the mighty are astounded as the might of Rome faces the Son of God. Sin is judged. Sin is dealt with through Abraham's family, in an astounding way.

He rises – raised by the LORD to show that the word of the LORD has been achieved. Creation is changed as he walks around with a new body, a glimpse of what will one day be. The LORD had done what he promised!

And when you look back on his life, this man Jesus was the living embodiment of the very prayer that Habakkuk prayed as he waited – he remembered and recognized the great works and words of the LORD (Matt.4). He requested that the LORD deliver mercy in judgement, that the LORD's will be done (Matt.26). He revered the LORD, always obeying him. He rejoiced in what the LORD provided, in relying upon the will and plan of the LORD alone.

Habakkuk's 'why' led to waiting and then worship, as he looked for the certain time when the LORD would do exactly as he promised. He lived as the man of faith. Jesus, THE descendant of Abraham, is the place and person where God does exactly as he says. As Jesus takes God at his word – that God will deal with sin through this one descendant of Abraham – he dies and lives.

5. We wait...

Let me remind you of what Paul said, what we heard this morning – **Romans 1:16-17... READ.**

If we take Jesus at his word, and live like it – if we are people who trust that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has done exactly as he promised (dealt with human sin, with our sin, with my sin) – then we will live: we will be people who are in line with God's design, because the LORD did as he said!

This life, then, is the life of the person of faith, who waits, knowing that the LORD has done what he promised (dealt with our sin) and will do as he promises (bring his people to live with him, with all sin wiped out). How do we then wait well?

Well, there is nothing original about this – just look back at Habakkuk's prayer, and the way in which Jesus IS Habakkuk's prayer, and you will gain a glimpse of such a waiting life, a life in which the LORD is where he belongs, and we live as if we take him at his word.

Let me draw out some three obvious ideas that we can apply now, as we wait... so we wait well:

(i) Never forget that the LORD's people wait well in dependent community. We might not be gathered physically, we might not be seeing each other physically, but our community exists, and nothing we experience has changed the design the LORD has laid out. Please continue to wait in community, dependent upon the LORD in prayer. Please continue to nurse and nurture the habit of meeting together, of being a community, in the ways we can. Please look for ways to be that community that might be different to how you normally enjoy that community – use the

address book to ring people to pray with them, write letters or emails or Bible verses to each other as a way of maintaining community. But please continue to fight for the community that the LORD has placed us in.

(ii) In community – as a larger community, in the community of your household, even as individuals in community with the LORD – use the template of Habakkuk's song to wait well: remembering, requesting, recalling, revering, rejoicing and relying. Perhaps you can use one of those 'r'-words to structure your Bible-reading each day, or perhaps you can spend a week using that 'r'-word to structure your prayers.

(iii) Finally, to wait well is to read well. It seems to me that one of the key parts of Habakkuk's waiting well, of Jesus' waiting well, was that they knew the LORD through his word. Here is the key to waiting well: know the LORD through his word. Now is as good time as any to get into the habit of reading the LORD's word to know him.