

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

HABAKKUK 1:1-2:4

In the Summer of 1939 American preacher Donald Grey Barnhouse took his family to the coast of France on vacation. The family photos Barnhouse took on the beaches of Normandy were later used by the Allies to plan the D-Day invasion. *A war was brewing in Europe.*

No one knew how far Hitler would go in pursuit of his militaristic ambitions. The atmosphere was tense.

People everywhere were preparing for the worst.

In September of '39, Barnhouse left his family in France for a series of meetings in Belfast, Ireland.

Already, commercial flights to England were canceled, so he took a boat across the English Channel. All over France he heard bells toll calling men to mobilized for war. French troops were everywhere.

On his way to Belfast, Barnhouse learned by radio that Germany had just invaded Poland. British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, had given Hitler an ultimatum. He had until 11:00 AM on Sunday, or England would declare war on Germany.

Barnhouse arrived in Belfast late that Saturday night, in time for Sunday services the next day. The last words the host pastor said before leaving him that night, were, "I do hope you will have a good sermon. It may be the last some of the men will ever hear." Talk about preaching under pressure - *this was definitely it!*

The next day, the sanctuary was packed. Everyone was eager to hear from God in a time of such crisis.

The congregation was singing hymns when an elder walked to the platform, and slipped Barnhouse a note which read, "No reply from Hitler. The Prime Minister has declared war." Seconds later the guest speaker was introduced, and Barnhouse walked to the pulpit...

His text was Matthew 24:6, "Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled."

He began his sermon listing the horrors of war. After each gloomy description he said, "*Don't be troubled!*"

It sounded something like this, "Millions of homes will be broken up. *Don't be troubled!* Children will be torn from their mothers, husbands and brothers will perish in battle. *Don't be troubled!* Innocent blood will flow like a river. Children will be left orphans. *Don't be troubled!*"

As the tension mounted the preacher turned his eyes toward God and shouted, "*Don't be troubled?*"

Then he told the church, "These words are either the words of a madman or God. How can they be spoken to men who have hearts that can weep and bowels that can be gripped with compassion? Unless Jesus is God He has no right to tell us, *don't be troubled!*"

Of course, Barnhouse went on to explain that Jesus is God - *He's the God of history.* He is in charge of every circumstance. All that happens flows through a channel dug by God. Though man's sin causes him to act like a savage beast - attacking and devouring his fellow man - even in the

midst of man's insanity God still controls history. He's not asleep even in times of war. God is awake on the bridge. He sees the future and is in control of events - *no matter how terrible*.

And this is the message of Habakkuk's prophecy.

Even in the midst of calamity, and tragedy, and uncertainty, and confusion our God is in control.

God's people are not to let *the momentary pandemonium* rob them of *God's eternal peace*.

***"The just* (that is, *the child of God*) ***shall live by faith!*"** The torch that guides us through the darkness of the *unknown and unseen* is the light of our faith. When life gets confusing we're to walk by faith not by sight!**

The Prophet Habakkuk begins his prophesy, verse 1, ***"The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw."***

Habakkuk lived at the end of the seventh century BC. He was a contemporary of King Josiah and the Prophet Jeremiah. He may've known Daniel or Ezekiel.

There is a legend that relates to Habakkuk. It's found in the Jewish Apocrypha - a group of extra-biblical writings. It's not inspired Scripture, but it is interesting.

The story goes, Habakkuk was taking dinner to the workers in the fields. Suddenly an angel appeared, and told him that Daniel was in the lion's den in Babylon.

This angel grabbed Habakkuk by the hair and flew him to Babylon where he fed the food to Daniel in the midst of the

lions. Daniel thanked God for the meal, and Habakkuk boarded the return flight back to Judea.

If it's true, it was *a hair-raising experience*, indeed.

The facts are, we know nothing of Habakkuk other than the little we glean from his prophecy. Apparently, he was a priest, as well as a prophet. He was also a musician, a songwriter who loved to worship God.

Habakkuk was certainly a devout man, concerned about the nation of Judah's declining morals. He was knowledgeable of God's justice and righteousness. And Habakkuk was a thinker - aware of world events.

Most importantly, Habakkuk was a deeply spiritual man. He desired to know God's plans and purposes.

And Habakkuk certainly knew how to pray and wait on God. Here was a man who lived in crisis times, and God taught him some extremely valuable lessons....

Here's an outline for his brief book...

In Chapter 1 we find Habakkuk *wondering and wrestling*. In Chapter 2 he's *watching and waiting*. And in Chapter 3 Habakkuk is *worshipping and witnessing*.

In Chapter 1 he *begins in the valley*. In Chapter 2 he *climbs into the tower*. And in chapter 3 he *ascends into the mountain*... In Chapter 1 he *sighs*. In Chapter 2 he *seeks*. And in Chapter 3 he *sings!* Habakkuk's prophecy begins with *a sob* and ends with *a song*.

The prophecy of Habakkuk is for all who've struggle with the presence of evil, and have asked God, "*Why?*"

Verse 2, “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, “Violence!” And You will not save.” This Hebrew word translated “cry” means to “roar or scream.” Habakkuk is disturbed over the evil he sees. He's made the startling discovery that life isn't always fair. Injustice and inequity have slapped him between the eyes. He feels helpless to change things.

And what adds to his misery is He wonders why God doesn't do anything to restore order! *When is God going to punish the wicked and deliver the righteous?*

Verse 3, “Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises.”

Habakkuk is asking God, “Why do you reveal this wickedness to me? If *I can't* change it and *You won't* change it - *why are you trying to torment me?*”

“Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.” Habakkuk is describing a justice system that no longer protects the innocent. The courts in Jerusalem placed a greater emphasis on a *criminal's rights* than the *victim's rights*.

Lawbreakers were caught, but there were so *many loopholes - so much corruption - even weak-kneed judges* - the criminals didn't stay off the street for long.

The judicial system in Habakkuk's day was broken. And many would say ours today in America, is too.

Notice, the ironical phrases in verse 4, *“justice never goes forth... but judgments proceed.”* In other words, the courts were full. The judges and lawyers and clerks were busy, *but why was it justice never got served?*

In the world today, *America has about 5% of the world's population, but 95% of the world's lawyers.*

Frivolous and unscrupulous lawsuits overload our legal dockets. The wicked and greedy often use our courts to pad their pockets and further their agendas.

In essence, Habakkuk is saying, *“The righteous are outnumbered and surrounded!”* The real question behind his legal observations was a theological one...

“Evil and evil people abound and why isn't God doing anything? Where is God in these wicked days?”

That's obviously, a question we could asked today.

God responds to Habakkuk in verse 5, *“Look among the nations and watch - be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you.”* Habakkuk has accused God of not doing anything about the evil in the land...

But God says, *“Not so! I'm working even as you speak. In fact, My plan is going to blow your mind, Habakkuk - knock your socks off - you'll be utterly astounded when you see what I intend to do.”*

Habakkuk had assumed that God was inactive, but to the contrary, God was at work in ways Habakkuk had never dreamed. *And this is often the case with us!*

We get tunnel vision. We zero in on one way to do things. *We draw broad conclusions from our narrow experiences.* Whereas, God thinks outside the box.

You've heard the expression, "Its a jungle out there!"

And indeed it is. At times life is like a journey through thick jungle brush. You're whacking with your machete, moving forward one step at a time. You can't see more than a couple of feet in front of you. You're wondering if the guide you're following knows where he's going.

Well, for the Christian, *God is the guide*, and He knows exactly *where He's going and what He's doing.*

From His vantage point there's no panic, no problem. If you're following Him you're precisely on course.

You might be ploughing through a jungle, but God is at work up ahead. He's making provisions you don't even know you're going to need. All you can see is the leaf in your face - but just around the corner God has hung *a bridge to cross a raging river*, or *built a shelter from wild animals*, or *prepared a table of delicious fruit.*

God is already answering prayers you've yet to pray! His hand is at work even though to us its invisible.

God tells Habakkuk in the next few verses exactly what He plans to do to judge the evil about which the prophet is so frustrated. When Habakkuk voiced his complaint, God's plan was already in motion...

Verse 6, "For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the

earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves.

Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; their cavalry comes from afar; they fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. “They all come for violence; their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings, and princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, for they heap up earthen mounds and seize it.” At the time the Assyrians were the dominated world empire - *and had been for some 250 years.*

When Habakkuk writes (*the middle 7th century BC*), Assyria was at its zenith. The Assyrian empire was as strong as she'd ever been. There was no reason for Habakkuk to suspect a change in global politics.

Yet the Lord tells this prophet in Jerusalem to hold onto his hat! The mighty Assyrians are going down and the Chaldeans, or Babylonians, will rise to power...

Babylon did conquer Assyria in 612 BC. Then defeated Egypt at the battle of Charchemish in 605 BC.

Here's God plan: He'll bring this band of Babylonians and their King, Nebuchadnezzar, to power to judge the evil in Judah and address Habakkuk's complaint.

Verse 11 continues God's prediction of this future Babylonian kingdom, “**Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offense, ascribing this power to his**

god.” After spending the last several weeks in Daniel we know the story of Nebuchadnezzar.

He was a mighty king - chosen and used by God - he was a tool of God - *but he let it all go to his head.*

In the king’s vision that Daniel interpreted, Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold, but he wasn’t content with that. When he raised up an image in the plain of Dura it was solid gold. He wanted to be greater than God intended. Not just the head, but the entire image. He thought his kingdom would rule forever.

Recall in Daniel 4:30 we’re told Nebuchadnezzar took a walk one night out on the balcony of his palace.

He looked out over his city, and said to himself, “*Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?*” And God must’ve eavesdropped in on him.

He was offended by his pride and drove the king mad. He humbled Nebuchadnezzar - brought him to his knees. The God of Daniel made Nebuchadnezzar successful, but the king took the credit! God raised him up in victory, but he elevated himself in pride.

But here’s what happens to Habakkuk, *God’s explanation raises more questions than it answers...*

Habakkuk asks God, Verse 12, “*Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction.*” Habakkuk understands

God is going to judge Judah's sin. He has marked them for correction.

But “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?”

This is what Habakkuk doesn't get... *why would God judge the Jews at the hands of a people, like Babylonians, who were more wicked than those they judged?* Yes, the Jews had declined morally, yet compared to the idolatrous and brutal Babylonians they were choir boys. Habakkuk is thinking, “*Maybe God is at work, but what He's doing just doesn't make sense!*”

In the beginning Habakkuk **wondered**. He *wondered* why God seemed *inactive*, and discovered He wasn't.

Now he **wrestles**. Habakkuk *wrestles* with why God seems so *inconsistent* and would use a wicked, heathen nation like Babel to judge His chosen people.

Verse 14, “**Why do You make men like fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler over them?**”

In Habakkuk's mind it's as if history has gone berserk! He's wrestling with what he sees as inconsistencies. “*I know there's a holy and righteous God behind the scenes, calling the shots, but this is not the way I imagined Him to work. It looks to me from the way history is unfolding that circumstances are occurring randomly. Nothing is making much sense.*”

Henry Ford once said the same in three words, "History is bunk." That's what Habakkuk is suggesting.

He's wrestling with history. *Is it bunk, or is God in control?* I'm sure you've heard the play on words, "History is His Story." *Well, is that really true, or is history just an unguided chain of random accidents?*

Verse 15, "They take up all of them with a hook, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their dragnet; because by them their share is sumptuous and their food plentiful. Shall they therefore empty their net, and continue to slay nations without pity?"

Again, Habakkuk is moaning the Babylonians. Is it right to prey on nations like a fisherman catches fish?

They get hungry so they catch a few fish - then thank their false gods, and have a sumptuous meal. Then when they get hungry again, they go back for more.

Habakkuk is thinking, *"It's just not like God for Him to allow a wicked, proud nation, like the Babylonians, to devour another more righteous nation, like Judah."*

At the end of Chapter 1 we've got a prophet who is perplexed. He's trying to square *what he sees God do with who he knows God to be*. And that can be tough. At times, God works in ways that are mysterious to us.

Chapter 2, “I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected.”

What do you do when God doesn't make sense?

When life goes haywire, when all your *conclusions* end in *confusions* - when you can't reconcile horrible circumstances with the hands of a loving God?

Do you abandon what you know of God and jump to the wrong conclusions, *or do you seek the Lord?*

Habakkuk decides to ascend into the tower and wait on God. **Rather than jump to the wrong conclusions, Habakkuk climbs to get the right perspective.**

I love this, the prophet ascends to the top of the wall. He climbs into the tower. He gets alone to hear from God. Rather than draw false assumptions Habakkuk gives God an opportunity to explain Himself. *He's even open to correction.* He wants God to set him straight!

He's no doubt confused, but rather than get *haughty*, Habakkuk gets *humble*. He acknowledges he doesn't know all there is to know about God. He can be wrong.

Habakkuk *climbs on his knees* - which is the highest anyone can climb. He seeks God's perspective.

Whenever life throws you a curve you have a choice to make - you can jump or you can climb?

You can jump to conclusions - and draw the wrong conclusions about God and your circumstances - or you can climb spiritually into a conversation with God.

This is also the issue in the book of Job. Remember, for 39 chapters Job and his pals jump to conclusions.

It's only in the last 5 chapters that Job settles his heart, reacquires some humility, and listens to God.

In moments of perplexity, you can fold up your faith, and give up on God - or you can fortify your faith and grow in God. Here Habakkuk chooses the latter.

He literally chooses the LADDER, and climbs to the top of Jerusalem's walls to the tower, to hear from God!

Before we leave this verse, I want us to notice four attitudes that Habakkuk employs in seeking God in crisis times... Its possible to pray, seek God - yet God not answer because we've had the wrong attitude.

Notice in this verse Habakkuk's four-fold attitude: **determination, isolation, humiliation, and expectation.**

First, pay attention to the prophet's **determination.**

Habakkuk says, *"I will stand my watch."* Here's a note of determination and resolve. Implied is that Habakkuk is not coming down until he hears from God.

So often, we give up too easily. Moses fasted for 40 days and nights before God spoke to him. If we don't get an answer from heaven in 15 minutes we're ready to throw in the towel and conclude no one's home.

In Jeremiah 29:13 God baits the hook, **"You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."** He rewards determination not half-heartedness.

Second, notice the prophet's **isolation**.

Habakkuk climbs to the top of the ramparts. He goes up on top of the walls of Jerusalem - into the tower.

Whenever I'm in Jerusalem I also like to walk the ramparts. When our tour arrives in Jerusalem, I like to make this our first stop - a walk on top of the walls.

It's amazing how peaceful and quiet it is on top of the walls, especially in contrast to the chaos in the streets below. At street-level it's hard to focus on God when you're worried about somebody snatching your camera, but on top of the walls you're undistracted.

God speaks to us in a still small voice. That means its necessary to find **a quiet time, a quiet place**, and cultivate **a quiet heart** to hear clearly from the Father.

It reminds me of an indian from the reservation who was visiting a friend in New York City. They were walking down the street when the indian stopped, and said to his friend, *"I hear a cricket."* His friend replied, *"That's silly, you can't possibly hear a cricket in this noisy place."* The indian insisted, *"Yes I hear a cricket."*

He walked up to a concrete planter. Dug his hands into the shrub, and actually pulled out a tiny cricket.

His friend was amazed, but the indian said to him, *"Its really not such a big deal. We all train our ears to hear what we want to hear. Let me demonstrate..."*

He reached into his pockets and pulled out a handful of coins. He tossed them onto the street. Suddenly everyone

within a block turned and looked in his direction. Everyone recognized **the sound of money**.

The indian had made his point. We hear what we want to hear. *What have **we** trained our hears to hear?*

Habakkuk isolated himself to hear the voice of God.

And thirdly, notice the prophet's **humiliation**.

Habakkuk expects a rebuke. I love how he puts it, *"to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected."* He wants to be corrected.

Correction isn't always easy to handle. It's a rare person humble enough to see the value in correction.

Here, Habakkuk wants to be corrected, because he's sure he's the one in error. He knows the problem isn't with God, but with him. And this is a safe assumption for us. Isaiah 55:9 reminds us, *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts."*

When God doesn't make sense its safe to assume it's due to our lack of understanding, not a weakness on the part of God. We're need correcting, not God.

And notice fourthly, Habakkuk's **expectation**.

The prophet says, *"I will... watch to see what He will say to me."* Not what *He might* say or what *I hope* He says, but what *He will say!* That means when you pray do you pray with pen and paper in hand? Do you really expect God to speak? Are you ready to receive...

Hebrews 11:6 tells us, “Without faith it is impossible to please (God), for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” God speaks to **expectant hearts**. You could say, **God expects our expectation**.

And this is what happened to Habakkuk. After he ascended to the ramparts, verse 2 tells us, “**Then the Lord answered me and said: “Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.”**”

God's answer to Habakkuk was not only for him, but for everyone. He's to emblazon it on a billboard.

He's to write it plainly on the tablets so others can understand God's truth - then apply it, or run with it!

“For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”

God is warning Habakkuk that he'll have to wait to see the completion of what he's about to be shown.

But be patient. God's Word will be fulfilled! As we're told in Hebrews 6:12, “**through faith and patience (we) inherit the promises.**” *Oh, how we need patience.*

The farmer never reaps in the same season that he sows. He sows the seed; then he has to endure the long hot summer with nothing to show for his efforts.

But if he's patient. If he doesn't sell the farm in frustration - in due season he will reap a harvest.

He just needs patience, and so do we if we want to grow spiritually. For the same is true for us, **we never reap in the same season that we sow.** We need endurance. We need to follow God, and continue to serve Him, and with patience we'll reap the rewards.

And then verse 4, **“Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.”**

Did you hear about the guy who thought he was so great he had himself cloned. After a while the clone learned some dirty language and became quite vulgar.

The man hated to be around himself, so one day he pushed the clone off the edge of a cliff. The man was immediately arrested and charged with a felony... *And what was his crime? Making an obscene clone fall.*

But it was pride that got the man in trouble. And pride was the sin of the Babylonians. It's why Babylon fell. *The proud will fall, but “the just shall live by faith.”*

God will punish the wicked and reward the righteous, but **“the just shall live by faith.”** That means along the way, situations won't always be clear - life won't always seem fair. The life of the righteous will require faith.

What a message to Habakkuk!

At the moment, he was **living by sight** (*he couldn't see God at work*). He was **living by smarts** (*what God said He would do didn't make sense*). He was **living by sentiment** (*emotionally he was so frustrated he could scream*). The situation didn't *look right, seem right, feel right.* But we're not

to decipher situations by how they *look, or seem, or feel*. We're to **live by faith**.

We need to trust God in every circumstance.

*Do you believe **God is at work** even when He can't be seen? Do you believe **He's wise**, even when He doesn't make sense to you? Do you believe **He's wonderful**, even when He doesn't tickle your senses?*

Even when you can't observe Him, or understand Him, or experience Him, you can still trust Him!

This is real faith. ***"The just shall live by his faith."***

Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the most famous verses in all the Bible. It capsulizes God's requirements for man...

In the third century AD, a Jewish rabbi named Simlai, noted that Moses had given the Hebrews 613 laws. He divided the Law of Moses into 365 negative commandments (*as it turns out, one prohibition for every day of the year*) and 248 positive commands.

Read Psalm 15 and you'll discover that David summarized the Law in just eleven commandments.

In Isaiah 33:15 the Law gets reduced again. This time down to six commandments: *walk righteously, speak righteously, despise oppression, be honest, don't listen to evil, and don't look on evil.*

In Micah 6:8, Micah reduces the Laws to three, *"to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God."*

But here Habakkuk reduces the Law of God to a single commandment, ***"the just shall live by his faith."***

This was the verse that captured the heart of the Apostle Paul. It was from this verse he hammered out the doctrine of **justification by faith**. Three times in the NT Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 - in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and in Hebrews 10:38. Habakkuk 2:4 is the seed from which the entire New Testament sprouts.

The book of Romans is about God's work of justification, so in Romans the emphasis is on the word **just**. The emphasis, **"The just shall live by his faith."**

Galatians teaches us that we're saved not by the works of the Law, but by faith, so the emphasis is on the word **faith**. **"The just shall live by his faith."**

And in the book of Hebrews Jewish believers are encouraged not to turn back to Judaism, rather they're to *live* by faith. In Hebrews the emphasis is on the word **live**. So it reads, **"The just shall live by his faith."**

In a sense, the books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews form a trilogy of commentary, all intended to interpret this one verse in Habakkuk. Indeed, Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the Bible's greatest verses!

And this was the verse that caught the imagination of a young German monk named Martin Luther.

As a young man Luther enrolled in an Augustinian monastery where he earned a Doctorate in Theology.

But Martin Luther's learning was empty scholarship.

The more he understood God's holiness the more his heart was troubled. He lacked peace with God.

The awareness of his sin tortured him. And in order to appease his conscience and squelch the guilt he felt about his evil desires, he sought to deprive and starve his flesh. He would fast two weeks at a time.

When temperatures dropped below freezing he'd sleep outside without a blanket. At times he would beat his body until it was black and blue and bleeding.

He hoped that by punishing his body he could rid it of its evil lusts. He went to confession so often the abbot finally told him, "[Martin, either go out and commit a sin worth confessing, or stop coming in here so often.](#)"

In Rome there is a cathedral called the Church of Saint John. *I've been there.* In the church is a staircase that supposedly was actually brought from Jerusalem.

The legend says that it was the staircase where Jesus stood during His trial before Pilate. The stairs are adorned with little pieces of glass mosaic that were supposedly to mark the spots where the drops of blood fell from Jesus' body. For centuries, Penitents made pilgrimage just to climb the stairs on their knees, and beat themselves with whips, and kiss the mosaics.

And it was in search of peace for his troubled heart that caused Luther to make this journey to Rome.

He crossed the Alps on foot. It was a dangerous journey. On the way he grew ill and almost died.

He was taken to a monastery and there the brothers nursed Luther back to health. And while recovering from his sickness, one of the monks suggested he read the book of Habakkuk.

Luther read the book we're reading tonight, and was particularly drawn to 2:4...

But at that point, he had no idea what it meant...

When Martin Luther finally arrived in Rome he went to the Church of Saint John and climbed the staircase.

As he climbed he beat himself, and kissed the mosaics, trying somehow to rid himself of his guilt and earn God's favor. But halfway up the stairs suddenly the Holy Spirit reminded him of Habakkuk 2:4, *"the just shall live by his faith."* And this time he understood.

All his doing, and sacrificing, and suffering for God was unnecessary. All that needed to be done for him to be just and right in God's eyes had been done by Jesus on the cross. All God asks of us is to have faith.

Later, Martin Luther wrote of this experience, "Before those words broke upon my mind I hated God and was angry with Him... But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words - 'the just shall live by faith!' - I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God."

Luther laid down his whip that moment, and returned to his monastery in Wittenburg, Germany where he began what would become the Protestant Reformation.

And what was the rallying cry for Luther and the other Reformers who followed him? It continued to be Habakkuk 2:4, *"the just shall live by his faith!"*

And we'd do well to make this verse our rallying cry!

The believer is not only *saved by faith*, but *lives by faith*. Not only does forgiveness of sin and a home in heaven come to us through faith, but likewise all God's blessings are granted by grace through faith.

Joy, peace, assurance, fulfillment, gifts and callings, usefulness and maturity - everything in the Christian life comes to us by grace through faith. Nothing we receive from God is earned. It's all His free gift.

The problem with legalism - with trying to earn God's favor - is that it's never enough and never quite clear.

When you're bartering for blessing - when you're trying to be good enough for God - how good is good enough? God is holy, His standards call for perfection.

If it's up to me to be good enough for God I'm doomed to the same frustrations Luther experienced.

Besides legalistic living is never quite clear. If its up to me to perform, to live up to the standard, then which of the rules am I suppose to obey? The rules change from culture to culture - even from person to person...

In India Christian women wear dresses that cover their bodies from the neck to the ankle, but they leave their midriff bare. They consider this to be modest.

On the other hand in Trinidad a Christian woman with her stomach showing would be frowned on. But she could wear a dress with a slit down the back and bare-shouldered, and no one would think anything of it.

In Japan, a Christian sister would never expose either her stomach or her shoulders - but she would think nothing about a short skirt that revealed her legs.

This is the problem with legalism - it's a moving target. It changes from locale to locale - from tribe to tribe - and from age to age. Legalism is a difficult lifestyle. You're never sure where you stand because the ground under you is shifting. *You're never enough.*

But God has made it much simpler than legalism!

Rather than give us a list of rules and regs making our *progress* dependent on our *performance*, God has given us only one rule, *“the just shall live by his faith.”*

Trust Jesus and He'll work in your life. He'll cleanse you, and comfort you, and change you, and call you, and consecrate you, and crown you with His glory.

Live by faith and you won't go wrong!

Always remember, it's not **by sight** (what we see) or **by smarts** (what we can figure out) or **by sentiment** (how we feel) - but *“the just shall live by faith!”*