

September 29, 2002
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

Hab 2:4b
The righteous will live by his faith-

Hab 3:16-19
16 I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound;
decay crept into my bones,
and my legs trembled.
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
to come on the nation invading us.
17 Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to go on the heights.

Hab. 2:4 states that the righteous will live by his faith. Or, the righteous by his faith shall live. The Hebrew word (tsadaq): "to be righteous." It is a legal term, which involves the whole process of justice. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers). Man is to be judged and found right or just or justified in his actions. God is perfectly righteous in all His relationships and perfectly just in all His actions. And we are commanded by Jesus to be "perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). But as Job said (Job 4:17) 'Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker? Compared to God (according to Isa. 64:6) our righteous acts are as filthy rags. A filthy rag no longer does any good. To attempt to wipe something clean with a dirty rag is useless. Doing something "right" with a hidden selfish agenda /motive, still makes the action selfish. No matter how good it looked to others it is not good to God. (The Scriptural meaning is a description much more graphic – "filthy rags" describes the clothing a women wore during her period when she was considered unclean). If we are going to be right in relation to God it will have to be by faith. For, (Heb 11:6) ... without faith it is impossible to please God. Paul writes (Rom 1:17) For in the gospel (the Good News of Jesus Christ) a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." We are made

righteous or justified before God by grace (God's favor shown to us) through faith in Jesus. Then those made righteous by faith will live by their faith (as is says in Hab. 2:4 and here quoted by Paul) because faith, if it is real, must be put into action. So we are made righteous by our faith in Jesus and those made righteous will live by their faith - the righteous will live by his faith – as per Hab. 2:4. Hab. 3: 16- 19 is a description of the righteous living by his faith.

Perplexed *Yet* Faith

Habakkuk the prophet was perplexed that the people of his land were living wickedly and God seemed to do nothing about it. He complains to God: Hab 1:2-4

2 How long, O LORD, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not save?
3 Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrong?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.
4 Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.

God answers this complaint and informs the prophet that He will punish the people of Judah through a Babylonian invasion. That results in a second complaint from Habakkuk. How can God use a wicked nation like Babylon to punish a better people like the people of Judah? God answers again and let's Habakkuk know that Babylon will also eventually be punished, and faith will be rewarded. We can have faith in the midst of the things that confuse us, knowing that God is good and just. Ultimately God will work all things out for good. Don't loose faith in times of confusion but cling to your faith. During perplexing times the righteous live by their faith. There will be hard times and we will not understand why God allows certain things. But one day our faith will become sight. God will reward faith. In confusion the righteous will *yet* cling to faith. They will continue to believe / trust and obey God because they know God will reward their faith one day.

Fear *Yet* Faith

After asking God to manifest His wrath and mercy, Habakkuk closes with a confession of his faith /trust and joy in God.

When Habakkuk hears of the invasion that is to come upon his nation from the Babylonians. He speaks of his fear.

Hab. 3: 16

I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound;
decay crept into my bones,
and my legs trembled.
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
to come on the nation invading us.

In the midst of his fear still he had hope because the righteous live by faith. We can trust God to keep His promises. The key to growing in patience is to develop an eternal perspective. God has a plan and His ultimate plan is our promised eternal salvation (eternal life as discussed last week). We will face times that will frighten us. I can relate to Habakkuk. I can remember times when hearing bad news made my heart pound, my lips quiver, my legs tremble (so much so that I actually could not stand on them) and it felt like decay was creeping into my bones. I can't relate to my Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who are in fear of their life because of their faith. And our enemy is not just flesh and blood but evil spiritual powers – satan and his devils. Yet God has promised that one day all our enemies will be defeated and we will be at peace in heaven. The righteous live by their faith; God does not lie. God is good. This confident assurance in God who keeps His good promises makes the righteous patient in affliction. To live by faith is to have hope and even peace even in times of fear.

Disappointment *Yet* Faith

Hab. 3: 17-18

17 Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
18 *yet* I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

As the prophet thinks of the coming invasion he realizes that he may very well have to do without some things. The attack will be so violent and devastating that his nation will not have enough to eat. There will no longer be an abundance of fruit, vegetables and meat. Yet, though he will lack the fulfillment of certain needs and that will bring disappointment and sadness ...yet he will rejoice and be joyful that he has the Lord and the Lord God is his Savior; because the righteous live by faith. Remember when Jesus was being tempted to not trust in God the Father but to take things into His own hands because He was hungry (Matt 4:4) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" He was quoting from Deut 8:3 (NLT) Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people need more than bread for their life; real life comes by feeding on every word of the LORD. Like Habakkuk plan ahead of time that even if something you love is

taken from you yet you will not turn from faith in God. Deep joy and contentment is found in Jesus – God our Savior. Nothing else is lasting but the Word of God.

Are you concerned that you will be weak in times of confusion, fear or disappointment? Don't be:

Weak Yet Faith

Hab. 3: 19

19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to go on the heights.

Note that it doesn't say merely that the Lord will give strength but The *Sovereign* LORD *is* my strength. To rejoice in the LORD and be joyful in God our Savior is to have a communion with God that brings God to us for His strength. He does not stand separate from us encouraging us to be strong. He lives in us and is our strength. This is the most wonderful and highest of all NT truths (recorded by Paul in Phil 4:13 NKJV) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. It was also Paul who heard the voice of the Lord declare to him (2 Cor 12:9) "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Don't deprive yourself of this central blessing that comes from accepting the good news of Jesus but open your eyes to see and heart to receive for the righteous live by his faith. Rejoice in an actual divine strength to dwell in and manifest itself triumphantly through your weakness.

The second part of this verse says God makes our feet like the feet of a deer. Habakkuk is talking about an animal who with gracefulness is able to be sure footed as it swiftly climbs a rugged mountain clearing every obstacle. What a contrast to how most of us get through the day. The strength and grace that is ours by being one with God's Spirit, the guidance of His Spirit and His Word makes us sure footed as we face "rugged" situations. We will get through every obstacle with the love of God in our hearts motivating each step. But we must live in communion with God.

And last the prophet in this verse says that faith and communion with God "enables me to go on the heights." The deer can get to a place high on the mountain where it is at home, breathing in the pure air, far from danger and attacks. God is calling you to a higher place in your Christian life. We get to new heights by keep ourselves in touch with Jesus. We are safer with Him on our high places. It is only when we venture a little down hill that we are in more danger. God keeps calling those who communion with Him to come up higher. He wants to show us so much more. Then one day He will call us home to heaven. Like the deer that can travel higher and higher until it is above the clouds and out of the sight of those below. God will bring us above the clouds where there is living water and we will be home.