

Major Truths From A Minor Prophet

This week I read a few startling statistics that stopped me in my tracks. Just today I read about shootings in Chicago. **17-Year-Old Boy Killed, 13 Others Wounded — Including 5 in Single Attack — in Citywide Shootings Friday** (Chicago 5 news Oct 23, 2021). **A record amount of Americans are quitting their jobs due to pandemic burnout** (CBS Evening News – Oct 21,2021). “A [record](#) 4.3 million Americans quit their jobs in August alone. The biggest reason: burnout. But rather than complain, thousands have started their own companies” (ibid CBS evening news). “In another survey, 95% of workers said they were thinking about quitting (ibid. CBS News). This next statistic got to me the most. **“The Next Epidemic Is Worse Than The First”** (Christian Post.Com, Sat Oct 23, 2021, Matthew Sleeth). *“This year, 10 million Americans will wrestle with whether or not to end their lives.” “One and a half million will be seen in emergency departments for suicide attempts and ideation.” “Every 11 seconds someone attempts suicide.” America’s suicide rate now ties the all-time high experienced in the Great Depression of the 1930s: 14.5 per 100,000 per year. But if we look more closely, we quickly see that our current situation is far worse. In the 1930s, they did not have the medical technology to reverse overdoses, dialyze off poisons, and mechanically ventilate those who temporarily lost their respiratory drive. They did not have in-school depression screening, a national suicide prevention hotline, or a 911 emergency system. No effective medical treatment for depression existed. Today, one out of every eight adults take an antidepressant. In short, without the invention and intervention of modern medicine and trauma systems, our suicide rate would be 200 to 300 times higher than has ever been experienced at any time in recorded history”* (Ibid. Christian Post).

Friends this is one of those sermons that I want you to listen to carefully and please do not take lightly anything that is said. Please stay tuned in. Last year in confirmation we asked the students to purchase a book entitled **Why Am I Feeling Like This? - by David Murray – A**

teens guide to freedom from anxiety and depression. Dr Murray wrote a book for parents, ***Why Is My Teenager Feeling Like This?: A Guide for Helping Teens through Anxiety and Depression.*** I was hoping for the parents and students to read this on their own since this is the biggest need of their age group. We did not go through the book in confirmation. I still recommend these two books for reasons that are more than obvious. I'm saddened these did not catch fire like I expected. Parents, your children are the ones most impacted by the pandemic and their coping skills have yet to arrive to meet the need at their young age. You are an important part of their coping skills.

I asked the third-year students last Saturday what we can do to improve confirmation. Each agreed that they want to be put into small groups of two or three and discuss pertinent questions that we as leaders set up. That way they are free to express their own opinions including their own emotions more freely than they can in front of 17 people. Deeper friendships can be developed this way also.

On top of all of this, in these last 2 weeks I have found much encouragement reading the minor prophets. The difference between major and minor prophets is one of size. The major prophets wrote more. Here are some verses that shouted out to me.

Habakkuk 1:2-4 (NLT2) ²*How long, O LORD, must I call for help? But you do not listen! "Violence is everywhere!" I cry, but you do not come to save.* ³*Must I forever see these evil deeds? Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight.* ⁴*The law has become paralyzed, and there is no justice in the courts. The wicked far outnumber the righteous, so that justice has become perverted.*

Habakkuk lived 600 years before Jesus was born. What he wrote could have been written yesterday with all that is happening locally and worldwide. I encourage you to read the entire book. It is only 3 short chapters. **1. Today, things are not worse than ever.** There are

no new sins under the sun. Sinful human behavior does not improve over the ages. It is a constant current that will not be stopped until the Lord Jesus comes again. God answers Habakkuk's question directly. **2. In the answer we discover that God sees all that is happening and will actively bring correction to the sins of the day.** **3. God sets things up to occur, so people are humbled and repent.**

Habakkuk 2:4 (NLT2) *"Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by faith."* There are nuggets of gold through the Bible. We go treasure hunting every time we open the Bible, and this is one of them. **4. "The righteous will live by faith."** This one short phrase changed the life of Luther and sparked the reformation in Germany. Yes, there is evil all around us. **5. God's salvation is greater than all the darkness we see.** God saves us, rescues us from this mess by giving "faith" to us, the ability to believe in Jesus Christ. And in that faith is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that makes us right with God and heaven bound. **6. The gift of faith and the righteousness of Christ are given to us by God's grace.** The phrase in Habakkuk is further explained by Paul in Romans and elsewhere. Luther felt like he entered the gates of paradise when he finally understood "the righteous will live by faith."

Friends, our answer to today's catastrophes is to live by faith, a continual belief and trust in Christ that outshines the darkness and sin of our day. **Habakkuk 2:14 (NIV)** *¹⁴For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.* The glory of the Lord has shined and will continue to shine and one day the entire earth will be covered by it. **7. Evil loses and good wins.** Sin is stopped in its tracks and righteousness reigns supreme. Please see the full picture and don't get discouraged by only seeing this present darkness.

Habakkuk 2:20 (NIV) *²⁰But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.*" Friends, if we were to lay eyes on Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ruling the universe

from the Throne Room of God, our complaints would be silenced. We would be completely overwhelmed by God's holiness. Nothing is escaping God. His works are perfect. We may not see what God is doing, but that is what living by faith is all about. **8. Faith is that inner assurance and certainty and confidence that God is who he says he is.** *"Faith cometh by hearing and the hearing of the word of Christ."* We can be silent before God and read his word. God is speaking clearly. Are we listening?

Habakkuk 3:18-19 (NIV) *"¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will be joyful in God my Savior. ¹⁹The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to go on the heights."* After listening to God, Habakkuk ends on a high note some may call ecstatic. I say he was encouraged to the max. Habakkuk has become my favorite minor prophet. To see the problems and still to be able to rejoice in the Lord and enjoy new heights of faith in God is true godly maturity.

This past week I was at a conference on evangelism. There were people from 35 states, and I enjoyed every second that I was there. Let me tell you what I sensed at the conference. I sensed new vitality, revived souls, persons more on fire than ever for Christ. The pandemic has not defeated them. God has used the pandemic to increase their faith. Instead of growing weary serving God by having a bunch of grumblers and complainers in the church, these church leaders have been humbled before God by the stresses of the day and God has raised and is raising them up to do the greatest ministry of their lifetimes. You could feel it in the air and see it in their eyes. I did not want to leave. I was in the company of the holy. It is called living by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – that same spark that lit Luther on fire over 500 years ago. Living by faith in Jesus Christ means the best days are always in front of us and never behind us. The best is yet to be. Resurrection power is the same today as it was on the day Jesus was raised from the dead after dying for our sins on the cross so we can live by faith in God. The righteous shall live by faith. There is no other way.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for giving to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Thank you for creating faith in Jesus inside of our souls by your grace. May we cling to Jesus, rely on Jesus, and trust in Jesus far more than ever. In these dark days, helps us to rejoice in the Lord and experience new heights that are ours through Jesus. This we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.