



**T**he prophet Habakkuk could see the coming onslaught. God's people were about to be overthrown by the Babylonians. Habakkuk cried out to the Lord for justice, but accepted his fate as judgment and correction. His cries are our cries today. We pray from a position of longing and hope, wanting above all that God would send his Kingdom. We watch and wait for heaven to come down. We long for the Kingdom Come.

## Kingdom Come - Synthetic Hope • Habakkuk 2:18-20 • Tim McConnell • Nov. 19, 2017

"Attention shoppers." What's the last time you heard that? I remember being in K-Mart as a kid when the announcement came on. "Attention shoppers—the blue light special will begin..." This week brings us to a very important day in the national calendar. A critical day for our nation, a day that keeps us all focused on what is truly important. I'm speaking of course of Black Friday. Or maybe this is a Cyber Monday crowd. I'd like to say I don't participate, but I think I'm the worst kind of participant. Not that I get up at 4:00 a.m. and stand in line or anything. I rarely buy anything on Black Friday. But I do hear about the great deals, then I think about what was bought for so cheap, and by the time I'm out shopping I go looking for that same stuff—only now it's not on sale! I'm the worst type of Black Friday shopper—the Black Friday Bargain Regret shopper. Which I'm beginning to think is the whole plan in the first place. But there's a phrase for bargain and online shoppers you need to know, a Latin phrase. We had a Latin phrase last week too; I love Latin phrases—they make us all feel so smart. Caveat Emptor—buyer beware. What you're buying may not be what you think it is. What you're buying may look like leather but actually be fake. What you're buying might not perform as advertised. Watch out for the synthetic imitation. We need the real thing.

There's a lot of synthetic hope out there. We've been studying Habakkuk, and how the Lord let him see the world the way it is and pray openly. How the Lord gave Habakkuk a vision of a Kingdom Come. How Habakkuk taught the people to hold out hope even when things looked bad. Today we learn Habakkuk saw a competitor on the field, something was in competition with knowledge and trust in the one true God. People were settling for synthetic hope. He called it idolatry. Attention shoppers, look over here. Buy this, reach out for this, want this, get this and you will be happy. One of our confessions, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, asks: "What is idolatry? It is to imagine or possess something in which to put one's trust in place of or beside the one true God who has revealed himself in his Word." (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 95) The problem with idols is that they promise freedom then put us in chains. Watch out for the idols in your life. Don't be satisfied with synthetic hope. Don't devote yourself to man-made gods. Break the idols before the idols break you.

Habakkuk 2:18-19, "Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman? Or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says

to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it." (Habakkuk 2:18-19) And we all think, Oh yeah, people used to worship statues! How weird. Glad we don't have any idols today! How foolish these ancient superstitious craftsmen. It was something to walk through the Egyptian History Museum in Cairo this year and see all the ways the ancient Egyptians found to take some animal, or some event, or some part of creation and fashion it into an idol—an actual false god with a cow's face and a woman's body, or the head of a crocodile or something like that. How strange those ancient people were, huh? With Habakkuk, we think, how sad when people genuinely expect these gods—these stone and wood statues—to do something for them and they call out to them and sacrifice to them in their desperation to get only cold silence in return. When I was young I visited Kathmandu with my dad. There were shrines everywhere, Hindu and Buddhist, with bowls of rice and meat and spices...candles, yak milk. Children were starving while this food spoiled in front of statues of elephant gods. I couldn't understand it. Good thing we don't have any idols, right? I think you see where I'm going.

We don't create statues and manufacture images to worship but we fashion our idols. What do you treasure most? What makes life worth living—to lose this would cause you to want to stop living? What do you think about first in the morning and last when you lay your head on your pillow? You say you trust Jesus, but where do you run when you are in need, when you are afraid, uncertain or insecure? The first two of the Ten Commandments are about idolatry—worshipping something else in the place of the one true God. Two out of ten! I don't think that expires. You and I are every bit as vulnerable to worship the creation instead of the Creator, and when we do everything starts to turn upside down.

In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller asks, "What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give." Is a list forming in your head yet? Another sharp thinker says there are four categories of idols. Idols are things that entice us, things we fear, things we trust and things we need. We could go deeper into any one of those categories. What entices you? What do you fear? I wonder if you are starting to wonder if there may be something in your life, in your heart competing for space with God. "No, I don't



worship money.” Of course not. Are you ready to be without it? “I don’t worship my status, I don’t bow down to my title.” Of course not. Are you ready to be made nothing for Jesus? Idols creep in unnoticed. We have to root them out. Billy Graham once said, “Give me five minutes with your checkbook and I’ll tell you where your heart is.”

Habakkuk saw it in the evil and arrogant. Back in chapter one, the foe was this arrogant one who knew how to use his net to attack those around him, and gather them up like fish. He consumed the righteous, profited from the weak, ate up the unsuspecting with his net. So what does he do? Look at 1:16, “Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.” It’s not hard for us to start to worship the thing that brings us success, the mechanisms and means that propel us into luxury, or make us feel comfortable, or help us feel secure. But watch what happens. The idol that promises freedom wraps him in chains: “See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness—indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.” (Habakkuk 2:4-5) The net is super effective. But do you see what else happens? “He is as greedy as the grave.” Like death itself, he’s never satisfied. Wine makes him want more wine. Success makes him want more success. Conquering makes him want to conquer. Greedy as the grave. Never satisfied.

We are quick to praise anything but God for our successes. Quick to turn to anything but God in our distress. We worship our nets. It’s down to my own smarts. I lean on my strength and charm. I can always depend on my charisma. My family line, my networking skills, my leadership acumen. We don’t need to build shrines or stand up sanctuaries to worship these things. We worship them every time we rely on them without God. Let me tell you, they can become idols. Idols promise much and deliver little. Idols work on the law of diminishing returns. They demand more and more and they deliver less and less. Gain these gods, they will never satisfy you. Betray these gods and they will never forgive you.

We learned at the beginning of this series that Habakkuk’s ministry came at a tough time. The people of God were acting like every other people on the face of the planet. Worshipping the stars. Sacrificing to the fields that brought them produce. Performing

rituals to fertility gods and even putting their own children to death to please a false god. How do you get there? Can you imagine? How do you get to the place where the next right thing to do in your mind is to cast your own child into the flames? It doesn’t happen in one step. The devil doesn’t buy souls in one deal; he purchases on the installment plan. A little here, a little there until he has a controlling interest. No one decides to sacrifice their children for success. Bit by bit the work gets more important. Decision by decision other priorities, other enticing offers, other meaningful pursuits. No one decides to make a divorce. I’ve never once had a couple stand in front of me and say their vows who hoped to create a divorce. Little by little, bit by bit the other woman seems a little more exciting. The other man seems more interesting. When you cast your heart toward synthetic hope, the fake stuff never satisfies. It looks good at first, but then it asks a little more of you for the same result. And a little more. And a little more. And...like the grave it is never satisfied. Idols are not neutral things. They clap chains around your soul—chains you hardly notice until you try to walk away. We need more than synthetic hope. You deserve more than captivity to manmade gods. Break the idols before the idols break you.

Let me give you a hammer. “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.” (Habakkuk 2:20) Who is worthy of worship? Who deserves our praise? Not chasing after false gods. Not shopping for synthetic hope. Where can we direct our love, our adoration, our praise? Where does it actually belong? There is only one who to worship Him is right; there is only one who to serve Him is freedom; there is only one who does not drape your shoulders with chains but sets you free when you give Him your life. Only one. The Lord is in His holy temple. Synthetic hope from man-made gods, false gods, trap you in the addict’s cycle of ever-increasing demands with ever-decreasing returns; ever-increasing desire with ever-decreasing satisfaction. Trapped. Chained down in front of a god who promises and never delivers. Enough! The Lord is in His holy temple. The temple was the meeting place with God—now that meeting place is Jesus Christ. By the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we know the Lord in His holy temple. We know Him right now. In this very place. In this very moment. We know Him. We see Him. We feel Him. We worship Him in Jesus Christ. Why chase synthetic hope from manmade gods that promise and never deliver; gods that hold you captive and steal your life bit by bit? Worship the living God who sent His Son. Who do you choose today? The false god makes empty promises and demands constant sacrifice; the one true God

sent His Son Jesus Christ who paid the ultimate sacrifice for you to make all His good promises true.

Some chase synthetic hope on Black Friday. Some don't—they just get good deals! Have fun. Get a bargain. Don't chase false gods. Come to the temple and worship. Give thanks and praise where thanks and praise is due. Gather on Thursday to exercise gratitude. Give thanks. I read an article this week listing twenty-eight benefits of gratitude. Twenty-eight! You can imagine what they are. Happiness; psychological health; positivity; self-esteem; less suicidal tendencies; greater popularity; enhanced romantic relationships; better friendships; increased social support; deeper spirituality; greater generosity...should I go on? Reduced materialism; optimism; patience; better decision-making; less stress; reduced blood pressure; better sleep; energized exercise; faster recovery. All from saying, "Thanks!" Maybe we ought to say, Thanks. Maybe we ought to exercise gratitude before God.

We break idols before they break us. We don't belong in their captivity. We belong to the freedom in Christ, the freedom and joy of the Kingdom Come. So we don't chase synthetic hope on Black Friday. We come to the temple, to the Day of the Lord and worship in truth, waiting in actual hope for the promises of God. When the real comes along the synthetic loses its shine. The Lord is present and all creation sits in silence before Him. Silence of reverence. Silence of expectancy. Silence of submission. Silence of awe and adoration. Silence of availability, waiting for God to move, to speak. The Lord is in His holy temple; let all creation keep silence. Don't go chasing synthetic hope. You belong to the Kingdom Come—worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth.

## **STUDY GUIDE**

### **KINGDOM COME • Synthetic Hope**

#### **Habakkuk 2:18-20**

#### **UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in God's Word**

- Read our passage Habakkuk 2:18-20. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one or two more times.
- What do you notice about our passage? What stands out to you? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- In times of trouble, who/what do you tend to run to? Why are we tempted to pursue false gods and false hope? What lies are we believing when we run after these false gods?
- Read verse 20 again. We don't really like silence. But take some time to sit in the silence (try a few minutes of silence), ask the Lord to remind you who He is. In the quiet, listen for what God wants to say to you about real hope in the midst of trouble.
- What is a word, phrase, or thought from today's passage or from our time together that God seems to be lifting up as being significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

#### **IN: Connect with the Family of God**

- Who in your life reminds you of the real and living hope we have in the Lord? How do they provide that encouragement? Who can you encourage this week? How do they provide that encouragement?
- Who can you encourage this week?

#### **OUT: Connect with the World around us by Joining God in God's Mission**

- All around us people are chasing after false gods. We get caught up in the pursuit of synthetic hope too and it causes us to devalue those around us. Think about the people you interact with on a weekly basis (cashier at the grocery store, co-worker). How can you intentionally value those folks? What gets in the way of valuing those around you?
- What gets in the way of valuing those around you?