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News of His

Vol. 47: No. 21 November 5, 2008

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Guided by His Word,  
Serving in His Love

## The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

"The righteous shall live by faith." This was an important theme to the Apostle Paul. In *Romans 1:17*, it served as the premise in his discussion of how Jews and Gentiles alike were sinners in need of God's mercy. Works of the Law can never secure any person's salvation. With these same words, Paul aggressively combated certain false teachers who were trying to impose Jewish Law-keeping on Gentiles before they could come to Christ (see *Galatians 3:11*).

The author of *Hebrews* used the same declaration (*chapter 10:38*). In the wake of coming persecution, many Hebrew Christians were running back to the empty rituals of Jewish ceremony - just in case faith in Christ wasn't quite adequate to save them after all.

"The righteous shall live by faith" spearheaded the Reformation Movement. Martin Luther was appalled by the Roman church's practice of selling indulgences, which allegedly shorten a person's stay in purgatory, an imagined abode where dead believers were refined through suffering in order to be fit for heaven. To Luther, this practice was tantamount to purchasing God's mercy, at least, part of it.

"The righteous shall live by faith." As celebrated as these words became through the ages, their origin is more obscure. Six centuries before Paul and two millennia before Luther, God Himself spoke these words to calm one of His troubled children, an unsung prophet by the name of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk was a prophet to the kingdom of Judah in the years leading up to the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar, who would capture the citizens of Jerusalem and take them back to Babylon. At some point while this terrible storm of Babylonian aggression was gathering, Habakkuk began to prophesy. Habakkuk was a man in a dilemma, a man of God in a godless world, but he was most deeply troubled over the merciless values of his own fellow-Jews:

<sup>2</sup>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?

<sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails.

The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

— Habakkuk 1:2-4

Judah was a mess, and God's will was that Babylon would be God's tool to execute God's judgment on His Own people. To Habakkuk, this remedy seemed worse than the illness. Judgment would be painful, but it would also be necessary to the restoration of Judah's righteousness. Everything seemed hopeless, but God assured the prophet: ". . . the righteous will live by his faith" (*Habakkuk 2:4*).

We must *accept* the will of God whether we understand it or not. The key to our peace is how we learn to *embrace* His will rather than to *resent* it. Often, we are afraid to ask questions of God as though doing so undermines the authenticity of our faith. But, our questions cannot intimidate God. He reminds us that He is our Father. He helps us to welcome His perfect hand. Clearly, through the vehicle of Habakkuk's faith, God transformed the prophet's distress to perfect peace:

<sup>16</sup>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.

<sup>17</sup>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,

<sup>18</sup>yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

<sup>19</sup>The Sovereign LORD is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to go on the heights. — Habakkuk 3:16-19

And, by faith, he can transform your distress as well.



## Karl's Korner