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There is still a vision for the appointed time; it testifies to the end; it does not deceive.'  
Habakkuk 2:3

(Trade in your life clip. Men and women down through the ages who encourage us, like them to step out of their comfort zone, and make a difference)

**It always helps in life to know where you are going.** Usually when you head out of the door in the morning, you know where you are going. Weekdays, weekends, special occasions, we have a pretty good idea of what is in store for us. Most of us like it that way. We don't like surprises. Even surprise birthday parties which we officially don't know about, but guess are going to happen anyway, events.

**Wars, emergencies, illnesses, crises of various kinds, relationship breakdowns, marriage breakdowns, death.** They change all that. We lose our center. We lose our sense of balance. And when we have come through them, we have to establish a new normal. A life without a loved one. A new chapter looking for a new career, a fresh start.

**And today I want us to consider two such times of challenge.** The world of Habakkuk, and the world of Zacchaeus... well three such times of challenge, because I want us to finish by applying what we have learned from these two worlds, to our own world.

Remember, it is important to read Scripture, to read the word of God, and what He has to see. It is doubly important to read and understand the word of God. To think and to know the context of the Scripture, and where it fits in in God's overall message to mankind, and finally it is triplely important to read the word of God, to understand the word of God, and then to apply the word of God to our own lives.

**So first of all, Habakkuk.** An Old Testament prophet used by God to pass on His message to mankind.

First of all, how many people have heard of Habakkuk? He is one of 12 lesser known prophets of the Old Testament... what we call one of the minor prophets, in comparison to the four major prophets, the really well known ones... Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

**The book of Habakkuk is very short.** Three chapters in total, but the message is just as relevant today as it was to the people who heard Habakkuk, 600 years before the birth of Christ... so about 2500 years ago. You wouldn't think after 2500 years, there would be anything similar to our society. After all, technologically, after one year, most electronics are considered out of date!

In the field of the heart, though, the age old questions back then, still resonate with us today. And Habakkuk was very concerned as to how everything was going to turn out for the human race. **Look around**. We are all concerned, especially in the next couple of weeks, how everything is going to turn out for the human race, and for the American people in particular.

**Habakkuk saw his world around him crumbling**. The Babylonians would be victorious, the people of Israel would be exiled, enslaved, and subjugated. God's answer to Habakkuk's question, why God? Why?

All this will happen, but the Babylonians themselves would be overthrown, and although the near future was going to be tough to endure, in the end, hope would prevail.

**It would be like an hourglass**. Troubles were mounting, and options were getting fewer and fewer... at some point the people of Israel would pass through a time of constriction, with no option but to submit, but in the distant future, the hourglass would open out to a wider world, full of hope and possibilities. God's justice would prevail.

Now let us move forward to our second reading this morning. From the book of Luke. Telling the story of Zacchaeus. A vertically challenged tax collector. What can we learn from this story?

First of all, Zacchaeus, like Habakkuk, was in search of help. But instead of asking God, he wanted to see Jesus. He understood from all he had heard about him, that this man was special. That he could change lives.

So he climbs the sycamore tree, and waits. Jesus passes by, and wonder of wonders, calls up to Zacchaeus. Calls him by name, though he and Zacchaeus have never met before. He knows why Zacchaeus is there. Zacchaeus has questions, and Jesus has answers. Just as Habakkuk had questions, and God had answers.

**In fact, Zacchaeus goes one step further than Habakkuk**. He provides his own solution to his problem. When the people around Zacchaeus begin to express their anger against him, he says to Jesus 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.' Zacchaeus knows what has to happen if he too is to move forward from being the most unpopular man in town, to one who was respected. He had to turn his live around, and make amends. Just as the people of Israel had to make amends for their sin. Their separation from God.

And Jesus said to Zacchaeus in closing 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

**That is the result of faith. A future**. Just as the hourglass was drawing closer and closer to the middle, and Zacchaeus was feeling the strain of being despised and alone,

his decision to change his life, opened up new horizons, opened up a new life. A new life in Christ.

I often think about the people in the Bible, and the stories they were in. Like Zacchaeus. Did he do what he said he was going to do? Did he end up a popular vertically challenged person, who took great delight in sitting on all his grandchildren on his knee and telling them of the day in his life that changed everything?

Now you might quite rightly say, well I'm not a tax collector. I like to think that I'm an ok kind of guy. I'm nothing like Zacchaeus. I'm tall!

And you'd probably be right. Zacchaeus had done a lot of wrong things. But you know, we all do wrong things. Maybe not on the same scale as Zacchaeus, but no one is perfect.

Romans 3:23 says, *'Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God's glory.'*

**We are all works in progress.** We all need to learn that as Christians we have to face up to our mistakes, own up to them, acknowledge them, in order to stay focused. That's the problem with not doing the things we should do, and doing the things we should not to. They add up, and they wear us down, little by little, bit by bit. And small problems have a habit of becoming big problems, and situations that call for forbearance and patience, become major relationship stresses that trap us in the middle of that darned hourglass. Constricted. Not wanting to go back, but unable to move forward.

The wonderful news about the good news, is that we have a future. **Faith is an hourglass.** There is the before, there is the moment of truth, and then there is the after... an opening out into new possibilities, new chapters, unfettered by the past. But to get to that future, we have to go through the middle of the hourglass. There is no other way.

**And that is what Habakkuk learned. That he had to trust in God, and God's word.**

That at some point in the future, maybe not in his own personal future, but in the future of the people of Israel, there would be new hope, new life.

**And that is what Zachaeus learned.** That in order to leave the past behind, he had to go through a transformation of his own. He had to set aside his old way of life, and embrace a new life, and in doing so, everything would be changed. Not just his life in the village, but his eternal future, his salvation, God's grace, could all come into play.

C.S. Lewis. One of my favorite writers wrote this....

*The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it.*

*Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really*

*yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.”*

You see, when Habakkuk and Zacchaeus were just thinking of themselves, and what the future held for them, they were caught on the wrong side of the hourglass.

**But when Habakkuk said,** you know, no matter what happens, I will trust in God.

**And as soon as Zachaeus said,** you know, I need to change. I will change. I will trust this man Jesus Christ.

**And us, when we say, you know, I know I am going through a really challenging time right now, but I trust in God.**

He will help me to open up my life. I trust in God. I am going to turn myself around, and with the grace of God, I am going to open up my life. That is when we come to the other side of the hourglass, and experience peace, and contentment, and we feel hope stirring in our heart, and we feel excitement to know that we are on the right path.

One of the real problems with depression and anxiety is that we cannot see ahead. All we see is the present circumstances. We are in the middle of the forest, and we don't know which way to turn. All we feel is that our options are getting fewer and fewer, but that there is no way forward.

**That is a good time to remember God's promise to all of us.**

Each and every person that puts his trust in Him. God promised in the Old Testament through Habakkuk 'There is still a vision for the appointed time; it testifies to the end; it does not deceive.'

The living Word, God's son, Jesus Christ promised to Zachaeus and to all his followers *'I came to seek and to save the lost. I came to seek and to save you.'*

And that promise is unchanging, and freely available. Just as is His grace, that we sang about at the beginning of the service.

*Amazing Grace. How sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see.*

When we say together at the end of the service today, the closing prayer, engrave those words on your heart, and know that you are loved by an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God. And be amazed by his grace, as I am daily.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word that comes to us through the Bible. We thank you for your living Word, your son Jesus Christ, and we thank you for your Holy Spirit which we feel present with us today.

Help to remember your promise to mankind, and to live in the light of that promise.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.