

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Christ the King Sunday
November 23, 2025
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
How long, Lord?

—Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4

"I can't wait!" How many times in your life have you said that simple little phrase? For children it's, "I can't wait until it's Christmas. I can't wait until Grandpa and Grandma come. I can't wait until school's out." For a young adult it's, "I can't wait till graduation! I can't wait till I land a great job! I can't wait till I can get my own place. I can't wait till I meet that special someone and can get married and settle down." For an expectant mother it's, "I can't wait! I want to meet this baby!" When we're in the working world it's, "I can't wait till I wrap up this project and am finished with this deadline. I can't wait until I get promoted and can move out of this position. I can't wait to use my PTO for vacation. I can't wait till I retire (and it's 3 months, 4 days, 6 hours, and counting!)." Then when we're retired it's, "I can't wait till the children come home to see me and bring the grandchildren to visit. I can't wait to get my other knee done. I can't wait till the doctor clears me to drive again."

Other things—well, let's just say our attitude is, "That can wait!" Some things we want to push as far off into the future as possible. We call that "procrastinating." Most kids don't say, "I can't wait till I get to clean my room!" Usually it's, "That can wait." Most students don't usually say, "I'm so eager for test day! I can't wait to spend hours studying to take the final exam." Most of my classmates and I despised test-taking. Most Americans probably don't say, "I can't wait to do my taxes!" For most of us, April 15 can stay away as long as possible. Most pastors don't say, "I can't wait to have a loving conversation with a church member who has fallen into persistent sin." Most of the time we'd rather do just about anything else. And most Christians don't go through life saying, "I can't wait until I die!"

Or do we? Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die. And yet, death is the doorway to heaven, so unless the world ends and Jesus returns as judge, to get to heaven we *have to* die. So, what's our attitude toward the end of the world and the end of our lives? Do we say with the Apostle Paul, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23), or do we want to hold on as tightly as possible to this life before finally going kicking and screaming out the door of death? Do we say, "Take your time, Lord! That can wait!"? Or do we say, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus! I can't wait!"?

The Prophet Habakkuk was frustrated. He looked around Jerusalem and saw a city that had completely turned its back on God. This was the holy city of God's chosen people. It was home of the temple where the Jews worshiped, the place where God dwelt among his people. But the temple had been defiled by the corrupt practices of the priests and by the pathetic offerings from the people that wouldn't cut it as a gift to a neighbor, let alone to the holy God of the universe. The city of Jerusalem itself was full of violence and corruption. The Sabbath day of rest was desecrated. The poor were exploited. There was no justice, only greed and the relentless pursuit of profit and selfish gain. Habakkuk the prophet was called to preach to these people, to call them to repent of their sins and return to the LORD their God, but he finds that he's only throwing pearls to pigs. The Word of the LORD is ignored and despised. So Habakkuk cries out, "How long, LORD?" How long are you going to ignore this and turn a blind eye to this? When are you going to do something?

We can relate to Habakkuk, can't we? Why do we care about something that happened 2,600 years ago on the other side of the world? Because human beings have not changed. Sin and wickedness have not changed. And most importantly, God's justice has not changed. Scripture tells us that these things were written, so we could learn from them (1 Corinthians 10:1-13). Doesn't it make you upset to watch the news and see another day of violence in our city? Drugs, trafficking, exploitation. How long, Lord? How long are you going to tolerate this evil? It makes me mad to watch people promote lifestyles and behaviors that are destructive to our culture and slap God in the face. How long, Lord? How long are you going to put up with wicked people insulting you? But it's not just in the world; it's also in the church today. All around I hear priests and preachers and evangelists and church groups saying things about Jesus that are simply not true. But people believe them, and the people are led astray by false prophets and false shepherds. How long, Lord? How long will you endure the false messages from these lying prophets who claim to speak in your name?

And lest we compound our own pride, let's remember that we have our own personal struggles. Not the things that we fight against on the outside, but the battles that we fight within ourselves, the struggles against our own sinful desires. It's the fight against our own laziness, procrastination, bitterness and resentment, the temptation to squander our precious time doing mindless things on our phone, to become frustrated with others, to covet and lack contentment, to lust and desire things our eyes should not see and that we cannot have. We say with St. Paul the Apostle, "The good that I want to do, I don't do, and the evil that I don't want to do—this I keep on doing." How long, Lord? Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7).

"Hang on," we might say. "Things aren't so bad. I have my whole life ahead of me. I have big plans for the future." God has given us the things in our lives for our use and enjoyment, but let's be careful that we don't get too caught up with them, so we take our eyes off the prize of heaven. Jesus cautions us, "Watch yourselves or else your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the worries of this life, and that day may come on you suddenly. For it will come like a trap on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:34,35).

God had an answer for Habakkuk. *Then the LORD answered me. He said: Record the vision and write it plainly on tablets so that a herald may run with it. Indeed, the vision is waiting for the appointed time. It longs for fulfillment and will not prove false. If it seems slow in coming, wait for it, because it will certainly come and will not be delayed.* Justice was just over the horizon. Punishment from God was coming in the form of the Babylonian army. Just a few years later the Babylonians would descend on Jerusalem, and they would lay waste to the city with the sword and put an end to the greed and corruption. It culminated with the destruction of the beautiful temple that the Jews had desecrated with their idolatries and abominations. Habakkuk cried out for justice, and the LORD delivered frightful justice.

The Lord has an answer for his people today who are waiting for his deliverance: God is not mocked. Judgment Day is coming. The Son of God, Christ the King, will return on the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead. For the enemies of God, for the indifferent and the apathetic, for the sexually immoral, for gossips and slanderers, for the bitter and resentful, for the proud and the self-righteous, that day will bring the ultimate retribution: Eternal fire, originally prepared for the devil and his angels, but now the final and forever torment for all who are not ready to meet Jesus the Judge when he comes. If we think about it, we realize that hell is just what an unbeliever asked for. In this life they wanted to live without God, and in eternity they find out exactly what it means to be forever separated from God.

But for God's people, who are watching and waiting for the Lord's coming, who grieve over our own sins in repentance, who grieve over the dreadful condition of the world, who see ourselves as strangers and pilgrims here and are just passing through, who are waiting for deliverance from this world of sin—for God's people who look to Jesus for forgiveness and the promise of eternal life, the Day of Judgment will be for us the day of deliverance.

Look at the contrast Habakkuk lays out between the one who is content and comfortable in the world and the one who is waiting for God's deliverance: *Look, his soul is puffed up and is not righteous within him—but the righteous one will live by his faith.* As righteous children of God, we live by faith. Not just "faith" in the generic sense but faith that is trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior. With faith we trust in Jesus, who is God in the flesh, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, eternally begotten from the Father, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. Faith trusts that the baby born in Bethlehem is the Savior of the world. We live by faith that gazes upon the Son of God crucified and tormented, weighed down by the guilt of my sin, and in faith we trust that God has traded my sin for Jesus' perfection. That's why you can be called a "righteous one," because your faith holds onto Jesus' righteousness and claims his perfection as your own. We're not righteous because of what we've done but because of what Jesus has done for us. In Christ, through faith in Christ, you have the forgiveness of sins, you wear garments of righteousness in which you stand dressed in holiness. In Jesus, looking to Jesus, gazing upon Jesus, resting in Jesus, your attitude about Judgment Day changes from "That can wait!" to "I can't wait!"

In faith, we lift our eyes heavenward and set our hearts on things above (Colossians 3), and we see that Jesus reigns. Christ, our King, is in control. Amidst the chaos of the world, amidst the injustice and violence all around us, we trust that God is working out all things for the good of those who love him and is directing all things for his ultimate glory. In faith we wait for God's plan to be revealed. We hold onto God's Word, meditate on it, find comfort in it, trust in it. In sickness, trouble, stress, anxiety, frustration, when we're confronting fear, grief, and death, in faith, we peer through the gloom and the shadows and the night of this dark world, and we wait for the glory of heaven to be revealed.

Shifting gears a bit, it has been said that in the life of a boat owner the two greatest days are the day you buy it and the day you sell it. Before you have it, you say, "I can't wait to get a boat!" Then after you've had a boat that has to be stored, that costs money for fuel and insurance and license and maintenance and doesn't get used very often, the boat owner starts to think, "I can't wait till I sell the boat!" The same thing is true for owning an airplane. And perhaps the same is true for taking a vacation. Before we leave, we say, "I can't wait to go on vacation," but after we've been gone for several days or a couple weeks, our sentiments change to, "I can't wait to get home!" Then when you do get home it is such a good feeling to be surrounded by familiar things, to sleep in your own bed, and to be back to your regular routine. There have been times when I've returned from traveling internationally when I've literally felt like kissing the ground because I was so happy to be back home in the United States.

How do you think you'll feel when Judgment Day comes? When you see Jesus, your loving Savior, face to face? When faith turns to sight, and prayer to eternal praise? When darkness is no more, when the dawn of heaven breaks, and the light of God's glory never fades? I can't wait! How long, Lord? Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Amen.