

Wonder Marvellously by Lou Ann Mokwa

The prophet Habakkuk received a message from God that included the words “*wonder marvellously.*” Sounds like good news! A prophet would certainly relish the moments of sharing something positive, particularly with the “*stiff necked*” Israelites. But sadly, this was not good news, it was a warning:

*“Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously:
For I will work a work in your days,
Which ye will not believe, though it be told you.”* (Habakkuk 1:5, KJV)

Habakkuk was a man and a prophet with many questions. He was not shy, speaking boldly before God, even questioning God’s judgement. His pleas were like David before him in Psalm 13:

*“How long, O LORD?
Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?”* (v 1-2)

Habakkuk asks why God doesn’t hear his cries or *save* him from *violence*. (Hab 1:2) He wonders why God allows the world to exist with such sin and misery in its midst (v 3). Further, he asks why the world was filled with people who do nothing but argue and fight. Lawlessness ruled the land and true justice was so *perverted* it never *prevailed* (v 4). As modern-day Christians, is he not mimicking what at times is in our hearts and minds?

The answer God gives Habakkuk in verse 5 is part of the warning he delivers to the Israelites. The Chaldeans will come and completely annihilate Israel. He plainly tells them the impending doom to expect, but what do they do? Even though they hear the message, they do not believe it. Once the destruction occurs, they “*wonder marvellously*” at the resulting devastation. The NIV translation is “*be utterly amazed*” and EHV “*be completely dumbfounded.*”

Paul uses these very same words on his first missionary journey. Luke tells us in Acts chapter 13 that Paul (and Barnabas) arrived in Pisidian Antioch. “*On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down.*” (Acts 13:13) Paul waits patiently, “*after the readings of the Law and Prophets*” (v 15), Paul is given his opportunity to speak. He delivers an amazing sermon (verses 16-41), in which he lays out the entirety of the Gospel history, beginning with the 450-year captivity in Egypt! Paul chronicles how despite all God did for the “*children of Abraham,*” when the Savior arrived on earth, “*the people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.*” (Acts 13: 27) Paul’s preaching is filled with indisputable evidence, culminating with the pinnacle of Christian faith in verse 34: “*the fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay.*”

Paul closes his sermon with the exact warning God (through Habakkuk) delivered to the Israelites some 600 years prior. These words, familiar to the Jews in the synagogue, reiterate the point that we as humans are so entirely senseless, that despite numerous warnings, we remain ignorant. We can only “*wonder marvellously,*” and remain “*completely dumbfounded*” when the consequences of our sin result in suffering.

Victorian poet Robert Browning put it this way, "ignorance is not innocence but sin."

Paul's preaching was so powerful that the following Sabbath the entire city of Pisidian Antioch (many of them Gentiles) came to the synagogue to hear this Good news. As he once again began to speak boldly, some of the Jews "*were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.*" (Acts 13:45) What did Paul do? He directed his message to the Gentiles, quoting Isaiah "*I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*" (Is 49:6) This angered the Jews even more, exposing their bigotry. Jesus in his parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, addressed this very hypocrisy: "*...for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*" (Luke 18:14)

They accused Paul of blasphemy and "*incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from the city.*" (Acts 13:50) In the very next verse, Paul and Barnabas respond by "*(shaking) the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.*"

Let us learn from this scriptural lesson dear sisters and praise God for his marvellously wonderful Grace. Despite our completely helpless state, in his omniscience, he sent us Jesus our Savior who "*was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet **to all** who did receive him, to **those who believed** in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*" John 1:10-13