

October 4, 2026 - Habakkuk 2:15-17 "Lesson 4: Use Power to Serve, not Shame"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0:00] The scripture this morning is Habakkuk chapter 2 verses 15 to 17. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory.

The violence done in Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them. For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

This is God's word. Thanks be to God indeed. Well, it's great to be gathered once again here in this wonderful building, and gathered with great friends.

Taking communion is always a great reminder of our forgiveness in Christ, and our union with one another. There is really no other community on planet earth that compares to the local church.

Yeah. It is a taste of heaven, what we do here every week. We're in a series in Habakkuk. We're close to the end now, and we're going to be getting into chapter 3 in a couple weeks.

[1:57] And what we've been doing with Habakkuk has kind of slowed down with these woes. There's five woes against this evil nation that is known as the Chaldeans, but which the Chaldeans, through historical trajectory, establish themselves as Babylonians.

And you probably know Daniel, full of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and that's that wicked nation here. And the Lord is pronouncing these oracles or woes to this wicked nation, as Habakkuk is struggling to understand it all.

He's looking at what's happening around Judah. He's wondering if God is going to remain silent in chapter 1, and that leads him to get a response from God.

But it didn't really bring much clarification at all. He was then caught up, not in God's silence anymore because God spoke to him, but now he was caught up in reconciling how God can use a wicked nation like that for his sovereign purposes.

It just didn't make sense. And he waited for the answer from the Lord as he took his stand at his watch post at the beginning of chapter 2, which led to the Lord answering him with these woes.

[3:25] So what we should sense is that God is directly confronting the evil. He is saying that judgment will come, and it's just not yet.

And in this fourth woe, we see something develop regarding relationships, and specifically how Babylon is essentially using their power to, how might I say, just consume other people.

Their power to abuse other people. And so this woe is very relational. And I wanted you to understand that there's a pattern that shows up in human relationships over and over again.

And what is going on, theologically speaking, is actually something that occurs today. It can happen with politics. We're in a very heavy political season with midterms coming up, and it's almost like you can't watch TV without at least one or two political ads about one side or the other, and them just bashing each other with half-truths.

It's our world that we live in. And we stop talking about those people.

[4:56] Almost removing dignity from other people. We all of a sudden become labelers of Democrats or Republicans or conservative or liberals.

And, you know, there's an issue with that. Because once somebody becomes primarily a label, those people, it becomes very much so easier to mock them, to caricature them, to assume the worst about them, assign motives to them, and say things about them that, honestly, if we wanted to be honest with ourselves, we would probably not even approach and say the ghastly things that we say about those people if they were sitting across the dinner table from us.

We might say something, but not how we say it in private. And further, there is not merely something like, there's not merely something one political party does to the other.

Because researchers say that this is very, very balanced. They've documented the dehumanizing attitudes towards political opponents across partisan lines.

It's not just conservatives or liberals. It's both acting in this way. And I think that we sense that tension today when we turn on the TV. Maybe we might see this pattern arriving in the home.

[6:21] There's a woman who is named Ruth Doddsworth. She was married for 18 years to a man who gradually controlled her money, tracked her movements, monitored her through their children, and abused her physically, abused her.

Years later, she described the experience with just two words, what she was living through. And it was degrading, and it was dehumanizing.

Sometimes we see this very issue within human relationships, and forgetting the dignity that other people possess, we see one way of viewing another human being, and how that can end.

This week, the nation watched the conclusion of the Caleb Flynn trial here in Ohio. And a jury convicted Flynn of murdering his wife, Ashley, after prosecutors presented evidence of an affair that he was in, and that it was an obvious staged invasion in their home.

Not only was his wife, Ashley, dehumanized through murder, but his mistress became collateral damage of unhinged emotional bonds outside of the covenant union of Christian marriage, as Caleb Flynn was a pastor, a worship pastor of a church.

[7:58] So, now, church, I deliberately chose those three categories, politics, marriage, and then this murder.

I deliberately chose those things because they aren't morally equivalent. And that's, that's, you need to understand that.

Calling your political opponent an idiot is not the same as murder, right? So, they're morally, they're not equivalent morally. But what happens when another human being stops being someone whose dignity we must honor and become someone that we feel entitled to diminish or consume?

Like, what happens when I begin to think, well, because I have power over you, I can do whatever I want to you? That instinct is as old as the Bible.

It's happening here in, with Babylon's rise and how they're treating every nation around that's in their way.

[9:08] It's as old as the Bible. It's an ancient problem that's even meeting our televisions today with these politics. And in Habakkuk 2, 15 through 17, God shows us what it looks like when an entire empire is thinking this way.

And that's what we see. And what we will see today unfold is a lesson from God's judgment against Babylon in this fourth woe, specifically once we stop seeing someone as possessing that God-given dignity that they were born with and our power over them when it begins to feel like permission to diminish them.

The point that I want to get across today in our time is that power is not permission. Power is not permission, but power is stewardship.

And I don't want to just assume everyone knows what stewardship means. I think terms are very important. And stewardship means managing something that belongs to someone else according to the owner's purposes.

And so let's see that unfold today in this fourth lesson that we have looking at Babylon. And that lesson is use power to serve, not shame.

[10:42] Use power to serve and not shame. And I'd like to take a moment, a time of prayer, just to unite ourselves and humble ourselves that we may receive God's word without hindrance of our own flesh, that a spirit may work in our hearts and our minds as we receive the nourishment our souls need.

And I'd like to also lift up a timely prayer request for somebody's relative who's going to be going into surgery.

It's a two-and-a-half-year-old that got bit by a dog on the face and really bad. And this person, Genevieve, has surgery today at 12 o'clock, so just about 40 minutes, 45 minutes.

So let's pray for the word to do its work and also for the Lord to sovereignly guide the surgeon's hands and this family. Let's pray. Father, we come to you knowing that you sovereignly keep us on our toes with communion cuffs missing, with prayer requests that just fall on our laps to pray for.

And we're constantly reminded that this church service isn't some program. This is a living, breathing community that assembles according to your living and breathing Holy Spirit.

[12:08] And we lift up Genevieve right now as a sovereign opportunity for us to stop what we're doing and think about this two-and-a-half-year-old girl.

So we pray that as she is looking at an uncertainty going forward, we know that as she gets older in the teenage years, she's going to regret some of the things that have happened to her when she was two-and-a-half years old and maybe not even feel that she has this beautiful image-bearing look anymore because of scars and things like that.

We pray that as you are leading the surgeons through what they need to do, that you help to restore what unfortunately evil circumstances have broken.

We pray that you guide the surgeon's hand, that you give them wisdom, that you help hold her near in comfort and help her family surround her with just great confident truth that you can work miracles.

And we pray for a miracle for this little two-and-a-half-year-old Genevieve. Please, Lord, work and allow this to be something that doesn't have this lasting negative effect upon Genevieve and her identity.

[13:35] And we now turn to the sovereign working of your word in our midst. And as we look upon our own evil that's been unfolding in Habakkuk, that we are able to look at the enemy and learn something about them, help us to see ourselves rightly, and even our propensity to act more like the enemy than like Christ.

Help us, Lord, to be convicted and encouraged. However your word decides to cut today, let it cut. And Father, we know that you mend those wounds by the power of your Spirit.

And you are making us, you are refining us into Christ's image. And we pray that you do that image work today. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. We have three verses, and I'm going to just dive into each verse individually.

And this first verse, I have a thematic kind of phrase to capture it. And we see in verse 15 that power can strip dignity.

[14:56] We see in verse 15, as it was read, woe to him who makes his neighbors drink. Habakkuk gives us a disturbing picture of someone taking his neighbor a drink.

But not only that, but to get him drunk. And what they do, because they have evil intent, is to deliberately get them drunk, to expose them to stare at their nakedness.

And the Hebrew here in verse 15, I think, is helpful to see what's going on. We see the words in our ESV, you pour out your wrath.

And that carries a sense of basically mixing something into a drink. You pour out your wrath, but there's something being mixed into that drink.

This is even so far as carrying the imagery and idea of venom in different biblical pictures. But do you see what's happening here? Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink.

[16:12] You pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness. Do you see this? Babylon is someone intentionally intoxicating, intoxicating another person, another image bearer, with something malicious mixed into that cup, offering something that looks innocent, with ulterior motives attached to it.

This is imagery that's captured in Deuteronomy 32, verse 33. It compares corrupt wine to, quote, the poison of serpents. And Scripture repeatedly uses this forced drinking image as it's related to specifically judgment and wrath.

But here, Babylon is the one holding the cup. Babylon is holding the cup. Notice the ulterior motives. In order to gaze at their nakedness, this isn't accidental at all.

This isn't accidental exposure. This is the humiliation. They want to humiliate this other image bearer. And even the word gaze is important.

Earlier in Habakkuk, we might remember, God tells people to look, to gaze at what he is doing. In chapter 1, verse 5, and then in verse 13 of chapter 1, Habakkuk says to God, And you see here, Babylon looks upon the humiliation produced by its own wickedness.

[18:02] And where God cannot look approvingly upon evil, Babylon creates this evil and then gazes upon the results.

Babylon is an evil nation that believes that they can gaze upon something just in the same way as God does that has been unfolding in this series so far.

And who is the recipient of such disgrace? Who are these people? Well, it's labeled here, his neighbor. Someone who should have been regarded as a fellow human becomes an object of

intoxication to expose them and to shame them.

Church, this is what sinful power does. This is what sinful power does. It changes the question from, how should I treat this person to, what can I get away with doing to this person?

You see, that is the heart of degradation that we see through Babylon. And we have to clarify that it's not necessarily inherently evil to hold power, but power becomes sinful when the ability to expose, embarrass, manipulate, or diminish someone begins to feel like we have permission to do it because we have power over them.

[19:51] And church, that reaches some of us today. This might reach some of us today. What do we permit ourselves to do to people simply because in that moment, they can't stop us?

In a superficial moralistic sense, we could turn this totally into moralism and say, well, be careful how you use your power. Treat others with dignity and don't embarrass people.

Don't manipulate people. Don't shame people. And there we go. We can pray and you can go on off to whatever else you have planned this afternoon. But leaving moralism of the do's and don'ts, think of something deeper here.

There is something deeper that we have to realize is much deeper than the thread of superficial moralism of do's and don'ts. The deeper reality that unfolds here that is displayed in our culture today is that how we treat other people reveals what we believe about God.

How we treat other people reveals what we believe about God. That's deeper than moralism. This is a theological issue. Like if our treatment of people denies the dignity that God has given them, then repentance is not merely about being nicer.

[21:25] It's not just about treating them differently, but it's submitting again to God's word and asking him to remake our hearts until our love for other people, those people, becomes visible in a way we use our power.

That's the tension. That's the deeper issue going on here with Babylon. And so the tension is clear. Verse 15 really sets up, things get tense in verse 15.

Sinful power degrades what God has dignified. I know you're waiting. Let's see how God responds, right? The second section, if you can click that up on the screen, we see the cup comes around in verse 16.

The cup comes around. Verse 16, it says, you will have your fill of shame instead of glory. God says to the enemy, you will have your fill of shame instead of glory.

Drink yourself and show your uncircumcision. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you and utter shame will come upon your glory.

[22:49] This verse becomes the great reversal that occurs in this fourth woe. This is the good news, the reassurance that we need in our lives.

God says you will have your fill of shame. Instead of glory. That's devastating. Especially after last week's sermon, where the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

God is saying there is no competing glory that can finally stand beside His. There's no comparison. And as we resolved last week, we saw how our glory ends, didn't we?

In fire. That's where our glory ends. It ends with nothing compared to God's glory. So we should, you see, we should see here that Babylon's entire pursuit is completely turned upside down.

Their diminishing attempts to the enemy is completely foiled. The nation that exposed others will then become those who will become exposed.

[23:59] The nation that forced others to drink is now commanded, drink yourself. The cup comes around to them.

Lamentations 4.21 uses almost the same imagery here, but against Edom. Where Lamentations 4.21 says, To you also the cup shall pass.

You shall drink, you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare. The image is deliberate reciprocity here.

And then Habakkuk tells us whose cup this really is. The cup in the Lord's right hand. Will come to you.

The Lord is offering something to the enemy that almost is emblematic of what they are offering to other image bearers.

[25:07] This now turns the metaphor completely, unmistakably theological, right? I mean, even throughout the prophets, if you read any of the other minor prophets, or major prophets for that matter, this cup that you'll see this image of cup constantly being used, and it's the image of God's

judgments.

And do you see the stunning picture here? Babylon may have thought that it was the one pouring out the drink, but God says, There's another cup, and it's coming for you.

Go ahead and drink yourselves. Drink yourselves drunk. Have it endlessly. Take from my hands now.

This cup is precisely given to the enemy of God. It's not what Hindus would call karma. This is not karma. This isn't just coincidence of happenstance.

It is judgment. It is judgment. Direct, pointed, defined judgment. God will not ignore the dignity that Babylon stripped from others.

[26 : 18] God sees it all. Humiliation, the violence, the exposure, the shame, it all mattered to God. God's last words of verse 16 seem to intensify things.

Where he just, it's like insult to injury here. Utter shame will come upon your glory. This carries the sense of overwhelming, even sickening, even sickening disgrace.

Babylon wanted glory, and God says its glory is going to be covered in shame. Literally, people are going to gag at what Babylon is trying to hold up.

Gag-worthy shame. Boy, if we trace a line through Scripture and this cup imagery throughout the Bible, we eventually come to a garden where Jesus Christ prays, my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.

He knew what was in that cup. It was judgment. It was wrath. It was shame.

[27 : 36] Reserved for sinners. Jesus Christ took that cup and drank it on the cross.

Jesus willingly drank the cup of judgment and allowed himself to be exposed to shame on our behalf.

As Micah declared boldly the gospel before we took communion, Jesus was stripped, humiliated publicly, mocked, beaten, and crucified very publicly, lifted up on a cross.

And Hebrews says, the author of Hebrews says that he endured the cross, despising the shame. The cup that should have come around for every one of us did not disappear suddenly in the New Testament.

No, Jesus literally stepped in between the cup and us and said, I will take that cup from you. He stepped in, he intercepted it, and drank it in himself.

[28 : 52] What do you call that, church? The Bible calls that grace. The Bible calls that love.

Not reckless love. Sovereign, direct, effectual love for the sinner.

There's nothing reckless. This is all pointed and very precise. God doesn't overlook sin.

Never has, never will. He judges it. And maybe you're here today and you're like, well, I didn't ever think about it in that way.

Well, praise the Lord. Because there is a cup coming for those who aren't in Christ.

[29 : 56] Continuing down a road apart from faith in Christ and continued in rebellion rebellion of self-sufficiency, of self-rule, and rebellion against God.

You, it is guaranteed according to Scripture. I am just a messenger. Don't shoot the messenger. There's a cup coming.

And you will have to drink it unless today you place your faith in Jesus Christ. Unless you say today, Lord, I bow to you.

I know my way is all messed up. I've tried to solve my problems my own way, do things my way, even create this modipod of something called Christianity in my own thought, but it has nothing to do with the Bible alone.

It has everything to do with a little bit from Hindus, a little bit from Islam, and here we kind of just mash it together and it makes sense to me. No. Come today by faith in Jesus Christ according to the gospel of His word in Scripture alone.

[31 : 08] And by faith you can drink something today. You want to know what you drink today if you come by faith? You drink a cup of living water, not a cup of wrath.

That's grace. And the good news is for everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ because of our faith, not because of our works, the judgment that we deserve has fallen upon Jesus who has willingly stood in our place as a cup bearer on our behalf.

This woe concludes in damage that spreads and it's almost like if there is an unbeliever here in our midst or on the live stream, it's almost like the warning is set out.

Babylon, if you keep continuing in this way, sinner, if you keep continuing in this way, it's just going to get worse. And that's how this woe concludes, the damage that spreads from those who continue in their rebellion against God.

And it's almost as if the lens widens. And in section three, we see the damage spreads. The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them.

[32 : 36] For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. In verse 16 that we just saw, God has been talking about humiliation of people, human beings.

But now he names a location, Lebanon. He names animals. He names lands of cities and everyone living in them. And so as we see this lens widen here of the effects that is happening with Babylon, we see that Babylon's evil and their sin and their violence, everything that they've been doing has quite a blast radius.

Where, yeah, it affects an individual person, but boy, it spreads. Lebanon is not mentioned here just randomly or by choice or by chance.

By choice, by the Holy Spirit. Lebanon was a famous location that had cedar forests and the wood from Lebanon was used to build cities to empower people with weapons for war.

It was a surplus that was just so vast and rich of resources. and Habakkuk even mentions animals likely showing the collateral damage.

[34 : 01] When the forests are gone, the collateral damage of the inhabitants within the forest. And now Babylon did not merely devastate people. The point is that they didn't just devastate people, but it consumed whatever stood beneath its power.

If they wanted the entire South African rainforest, forest, well, they're going to have it and everything will be destroyed because they can.

Right? Psalm 104 says that the cedars of Lebanon were trees that God planted. God had a purpose for those on earth and not to showcase Babylon's glory.

In biblical worldview, we conclude that the earth belongs to him, the animals belong to him, the people belong to him, but in Babylon's worldview, if we have the power to have power over it, well, we can do whatever we want with it.

That's Babylon's worldview. Now, I think it might warrant a clarification here because maybe we need to be careful with not to make verse 17 or even this theology here say more than it actually says because you might be like, well, Brent, are you saying that how far are we going here?

[35 : 29] Am I sinful because I'm hunting? I like to have a bonfire in my backyard. Can I cut down my tree? Right? We can get like caught in the weeds a little bit.

And no, I don't think that Habakkuk is saying that hunting is sinful, that cutting down a tree is sinful, or that every war that happens on planet earth is inherently sinful, or that possessing national power is inherently wicked.

The issue is dominating without stewardship. Dominating without stewardship. You see that this is what Babylon was actually doing.

They were dominating without stewardship. Babylon's consumption was a usage of power simply just to destroy. That's all they cared about. To destroy others and to glorify themselves.

And so the principle is simply not using creation is evil, but the principle is this, what belongs to God may never be treated as though our power over it makes us accountable to no one.

[36 : 39] And so it's basically power in check, motives in check. And the passage gives no warrant to label whatever nation, a nation we dislike as Babylon.

Oh, that's Babylon over there in the Middle East and things like that. And while every nation must answer God for actual injustice, the text requires us to identify the injustice not merely attached as labels.

Identify the issue, not attach labels. And notice here in the passage, there's reciprocity again. The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you.

Simply to say, what Babylon unleashed against others is now coming back upon Babylon. Another way of basically saying that cup's coming back around to you, Babylon.

And this verse ends by repeating almost word for word the indictment from verse 8, earlier in verse 8. You see it? The indictment, the blood of man and the violence to the earth, to the cities, and all who dwell in them.

[37:52] Why is judgment coming? Because the prosecution is clear. The blood of man, the violence to the earth, to the cities, and all who dwell in them.

That's why judgment's coming. You see, God remembers the whole trail of destruction regardless of how wide that lens gets. Nothing fell out of his sight, and nor will anything ever fall out of his sight. In church, there is something deeply comforting here for anyone who has ever been on the receiving end of somebody else's shameful cup that has been passed and forced upon them. Maybe it's someone in your own life at one point or another who used their authority to humiliate you, or a spouse who maybe degraded you, a parent maybe who terrified the heck out of you, or a family member who inappropriately touched you.

The list can go on and on. And maybe that abuse left damage that spread far beyond those moments of some time in the past and here Habakkuk reminds us God sees the extent of that damage.

[39:17] He sees it. And what does he see today? He doesn't see a damaged person. He sees you as a dignified person who Satan tried to damage.

He sees what happened. He sees what it did to your life and to your own self-confidence afterward. He sees the fear. He sees the shame, the relationships that are affected, the years that it stole from your life.

And he does not ask you just to pretend like everything just never happens and just move on and sweep it under the rug.

What are relieving reality? In just the words, the cup is in the Lord's hand. God will not call evil insignificant, not once.

And the Bible encourages and reminds us that Jesus Christ submitted himself. He used his power and he submitted himself under those of us who are crushed by sin, who feel worthless and completely demolished and diminished by sin.

[40:47] And what does he do with us? He raises us again to new life, forgiven and free from the penalty of sin.

That's what holy power looks like. The greatest power in the universe is revealed in a king who gives himself away.

Not any religion that exists today has their savior die for them. Jesus does. Jesus is that savior. So bitterness does not have to become our way of keeping the wet record straight. The Lord knows your past. He knows who did it and what happened and he's going to take care of it in his time. Because God already has a record and in Jesus Christ the legal record for you is completely washed white as snow. Sin had left a crimson stain but Jesus has washed it white as snow.

[41:50] Man. Church Babylon teaches us something here. It teaches us what sinful power looks like. It looks like the saying because I can I will.

Well perhaps that is the most dangerous lie that power will tell any of us. Habakkuk says no. Every person under your authority belongs to God.

Every life that you can affect bears the dignity before God and every ounce of power that you possess remains accountable to God.

This might be why the Bible even instructs for those who feel called to authority kind of like check themselves like are you sure? Because the stakes get raised a lot higher.

Specifically elders, great warning for all of us, myself, how we use our authority is always going to be held accountable to God. You see the point, power is not permission.

[43:02] Power is stewardship. So this may be very practical. It may mean renewed patience that you have with your children.

Not to use this power to just diminish them and consume them, but to have patience with them. It may mean pursuing forgiveness with a family member or a friend that the Lord, through the power of His Holy Spirit, is bringing to your mind.

Or for someone who has been deeply, deeply, deeply wounded, it may mean releasing vengeance that you have and release it into the hands of God while still remaining wise with your boundaries and how you live your life to protect yourself and protect others.

Whatever form it takes, remember this, the way we steward power ought to tell the truth about the God that we believe in.

Power is not permission. Power is stewardship. Let's pray. Let's Thank you.