

**Armagh Baptist Church**  
**Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2020 – 11:00am**  
**What will it take to see the ABC 2020 Vision fulfilled?**  
**Habakkuk 2:1-4**

**Introduction**

Ten years ago we launched the ABC 2020 Vision. This week I read over the annual reports contained in each of our handbooks for the last 10 years since then. Those 10 reports make for very interesting reading!

The question we were asking, 10 years ago, at the beginning of 2010 was:

***‘Where will we be in another 10 years,  
in the year 2020, as Armagh Baptist Church?’***

Let me quote from that first article:

*‘20:20 Vision is regarded as perfect eyesight. We use the phrase 20:20 Vision to talk about hindsight. If only we had 20:20 Vision looking forward into the future! Of course we don’t. We can’t see the future, and maybe that’s just as well, but nevertheless the Bible does encourage us to plan and prepare for the future, and to make the best use of the time that the Lord gives to us. So it is right to ask the question, where will we be as a Church in the year 2020 – in 10 years time? Someone has said, ‘if you aim at nothing, you’re sure to hit it!’ So instead we should aim at ‘something’ and trust God to help us reach those targets in the years to come. So what should we be aiming at between now and 2020?’*

*There were 3 Zeros in the title at the top of that page. I said we could think of them as three targets to aim at in the next 10 years if God spared us:*

*Those targets represented: Armagh City, South Armagh, and World Mission.’*

This morning I want to turn your attention to Habakkuk 2:1-4, and I want to answer this question from it:

**‘What will it take to see our ABC 2020 Vision fulfilled?’**

We have four verses here, and I want to make four points - one from each. So, come with me as we think about our **ABC 2020 Vision** this morning:

**1. A Vision Must Be Grasped (v.1)**

*‘I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower,  
**and look out to see what he will say to me,**  
and what I will answer concerning my complaint.’ (v.1)*

Habakkuk had a problem. He lived in the late 600s before the birth of Christ. So he lived between the time that Israel had been carried off by the Assyrians in 722BC, and the people of Judah were carried off into exile by the Babylonians in 597BC. He couldn’t understand how God could use these wicked nations to judge his own people Israel and Judah. That was *‘his complaint’* before God. He presented his complaints to God in chapter one. Now he waits for a reply. He uses terminology at the start of chapter two that takes us back to Ezekiel.

**(i) Habakkuk was a ‘Watchman for Judah’ just like Ezekiel was for Israel.**

There are two figures in Ezekiel ch.33 and ch.34 – the Watchman (ch.33) and the Shepherd (ch.34). One speaks of pastoring God’s flock; the other of warning lost people of the approach of danger and destruction. So, one is pastoral, and the other is evangelistic. That’s a tension that we often face in the life of a local church. Should we give all our time to pastoring the Flock – caring for God’s people who are already in the fold and family of God, or should we give the bulk of our time to reaching out to the Lost, who still need to be saved?

Some churches employ Pastors to do one, and Evangelists to do the other. Here in Armagh, we have a couple of pastors, a number of elders, and we’re trying to get all of **You** to see your role as being witnesses and evangelists to those who are still lost all around us.

In Ezekiel 33, God calls Ezekiel to be a watchman for the house of Israel. He says to him in vs.7-9...

*‘I have made you **a watchman** for the house of Israel.  
Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, “O wicked one, you shall surely die” and you do not speak out to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, **but his blood I will require at your hand.** But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, **but you will have delivered your soul.**’*

Do you see the watchman’s responsibility to hear God’s Word, to pass it on to those who are still lost, so that they might respond and be saved? If they do, good, then we will have discharged our responsibility. But if we don’t speak out, then God says *‘I will require their blood at your hand.’* We will be responsible!

**(ii) Habakkuk talks about ‘looking to see what God would say to him’.**

In other words: He’s **looking** for a vision from God.

He has to **see** it for himself. He wants to **hear** what God will say to him.  
A vision is something that must be **seen** and **heard** from God.  
It must be **grasped** - in this case by Habakkuk - in our case by the pastors and elders of our church. I believe God gave us this vision 10 years ago.

To keep us on track over the last 10 years.

To keep us focussed over the last 10 years.

Because many other things in church life could have distracted us!

In 2009, I had just come back to local church ministry after 4 years with SIM. I had seen the importance of working to a **vision** within that organisation. I had seen the importance of **mission**, and the importance of **discipleship**. I was determined, coming back into local church life, not to lose that **vision**. But over the last 10 years it would have been very easy to get side-tracked!

**Andrew Roycroft** (the previous pastor of this church) & **his wife Carolyn**, came back, broken, from the mission field, within my first year as pastor of ABC. That could have side-tracked us from the importance of mission.

**Another young man**, who had prepared to go to work down south with a mission organisation, lasted less than a month, before ill-health brought him home. That could have side-tracked us from the importance of mission.

**There were a number of painful membership issues** we had to deal with in those first few years, as a fellowship... That could have side-tracked us from the importance of mission.

Nobody ever said church-life would be easy, and many today want to give up on 'the church' and concentrate on 'Jesus alone' - but that's not an option either! All of these things could side-track us, unless we have a clear vision!

We need to **Shepherd** the flock of God, but we also need to be **Watchmen!** Habakkuk knew the importance of seeing and hearing from God himself. He looked to **see** what God would **say** to him, and once he had heard from God, he let nothing deflect him one way or the other, to right or to left.

We had to **see** and **hear** a vision from God himself for the work in Armagh. We had to remind ourselves regularly of that vision, in order to keep going. But here we are, 10 years later, and we're still going, sticking to that vision!

**1. A Vision must be Grasped.** And...

**2. A Vision must be Shared (v.2)**

*'And the LORD answered me, **'Write the Vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.'***

**(i) The Vision had to be written down.**

- And it was, every year since, in our members' handbooks.

**(ii) The Vision had to be made plain to others.**

- I hope that it was.

- Just those 3 target areas: Armagh City, South Armagh, The World!

- And we up-dated you every year on how things were going.

**(iii) Why? So that those who read it, could run with it!**

- So that it might 'put an inch to our step!'

- So that we could continue to run with it!

I hope the ABC 2020 Vision has enthused us and motivated us over the last 10 years to keep going through all the ups and downs of church life!?

I know it has kept me going many a time; it has kept me on track many a time. Maybe sometimes you would have wanted me to stop talking so much about **mission**, or get my eyes onto something else, but I haven't. This is the vision. This is what helped me **run** over the last 10 years, I hope it did it for you too!

That's why a vision shouldn't be kept to the leadership alone, it should be shared with the membership, so that we're all in it together!

There are aspects of the vision that maybe the leaders have known more about at times, but I hope we have shared it with you as much as we could.

e.g. Back at an Elders Away Day in early 2018 we got to talking about when ABC reached 150 members. Then we could send out 25 of them to start a new church in Keady. We were only at 118 coming out of our Centenary Year in 2017! But having looked at a pattern in our membership graph over the years, we believed that we were at the start of a significant period of growth, and that God could add to our numbers in the next few years and get us to that 150 members point, and so we prayed to that end.

Today we're at 140 members, we only need another 10, and we'd be at 150, and then we could send out those 25 people to plant a new church in Keady!

**1. A Vision must be grasped, and 2. A Vision must be shared.**

But it's important to remember that...

### **3. A Vision takes Time to be Fulfilled (v.3)**

*'For still the vision **awaits its appointed time**; it hastens to the end - it will not lie.  
If it seems slow, **wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.**'*

I'm sure you've heard the old saying:

*'Patience is a virtue, possess it if you can,  
Seldom in a woman; never in a man.'*

We're not big on patience in the Christian Church, are we?

We like everything done, yesterday!

We want to see the church growing.

We want to see people getting saved.

We want to see people growing in their faith.

We want to see Revival!

Well, Habakkuk did too! Look at ch.3:2...

*'O LORD, I have heard the report of you,  
and your work, O LORD, do I fear.  
**In the midst of the years revive it;**  
In the midst of the years make it known;  
In wrath remember mercy.'* (Hab.3:2)

He's pleading to God, for revival! Maybe you've been praying for revival, but you're tempted to give up, because it hasn't happened in your timescale!?

We're like that, aren't we? We'll pray for people to get saved, for a while.

We'll pray for revival, for a while. We'll pray for God to bless, for a while. But if he doesn't do it quickly enough, we give up, stop praying, and forget all about it!

We need to remember that **'A Vision takes Time to be Fulfilled.'** (v.3)

I praise God for the number of people who *have* got saved over the last 10 years

here in Armagh. There was a spate of about 6 or 8 in my first year.

There have been a number of others over the years, and 2 or 3 in the past year.

So God is at work. He is growing this church in remarkable ways:

We've been bursting at the seams some Sunday mornings.

We were running out of car parking spaces, many a time.

Our Sunday School has outgrown its classroom spaces.

Our Creche has burst out of the prayer room and now takes up half the big hall!

Did you know all that? It might have taken 10 years, but it's being fulfilled!

We were focussing on 3 target areas over the last 10 years, and we've seen growth in all 3 areas.

**(i) In Armagh City**, we have done all sorts of things, including the **Momentum** teams, especially into Drumarg Housing Estate in the West of the City.

We got involved in **A Passion for Life** working with a dozen or so other churches across this City & District to put on a week of mission in Armagh City Hotel in 2014 when an average of 600 people were present each night!

And we ran at least one event every year since for a total of 5 years.

And the ministers are still praying together for this City.

Not to mention the **ABC Soccer Academy** held each June, and the **Follow the Star** event over 2 or 3 Christmases, when 600 or 700 came through our doors!

But it's not just special events, what about the tremendous work that Building Blocks does, and the Ladies' Walk for Life, and our Men's ministry, and Friendship Hour, and Lisanally, and the School's ministry, etc, etc?

Just faithfully week in, and week out, making contact with people, influencing them for Christ, and seeking to see people saved.

And the work that our Bright Hour, JAM and Thrive leaders and helpers put in every Friday night over the last 10 years has paid dividends in so many lives of our young people who are now in their teens and twenties, many of them now married and walking with the Lord, because of faithful sacrificial ministry week in and week out. Why? - **Because A Vision takes Time to be Fulfilled.**

**(ii) The same is true of work in South Armagh, now centred on Keady.**

What about the 26 helpers who ran the Keady for Christmas shop over 2 months in 2012 and 2013. Or the Choir members who put on the Christmas and Easter musicals in the TMAC Centre in 2015 and 2016, and since.

What about the people who have got behind the Sunday night outreach events there and the Wednesday night Bible Studies in the TMAC seeing up to 50 people present now on a regular basis? It started with 10 on a Wednesday night and 20 on a Sunday night once a month in September 2016.

**A Vision takes Time to be Fulfilled...**

...But we're getting there. With Paul & Deborah now living in Keady, and having met with 30 folks in Keady at a recent Review Meeting, we will be bringing

proposals to our Members' AGM here on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February to increase the work in Keady again later this year - another major step on the road to the work there becoming a church in its own right. Thanks to all those who faithfully month by month put their back into it, to see **a Vision fulfilled over time**. It doesn't happen overnight, but it's getting there.

And we need to keep at it if we're going to be faithful watchmen and women, warning the lost in Keady, and caring for those who are already God's people.

### **(iii) We've also seen progress in our third target area – World Mission!**

There was a point, just after we launched the vision, that we were down to just one couple out on Mission from ABC. Stephen & Esther Williamson with OMS.

But since then, we've had Ken & Freda with SIM in South Africa, Brenda Valley with SIM in India, Aaron Riddle with Baptist Youth on the Amazing Journey into schools, John Humphries with the Trailer Ministry, now called 2 Minds Ministry, Maggie Burrows with Foundation Ministries, and now Steve & Sharon Hoy with OM working in a Muslim community in London. Not to mention at least 20 people every year serving on short term teams and summer placements. Over time God has been increasing our involvement in mission.

And every year for the last 10 years we have given c.£20,000 to mission at home and abroad. That's £200,000 over 10 years, given to World Mission! Praise God!

**1. A Vision needs to be Grasped. 2. A Vision needs to be Shared.  
3. A Vision takes Time to be Fulfilled, and finally...**

### **4. A Vision takes Faith to be Fulfilled (v.4)**

*“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,  
**But the righteous shall live by his faith.**”*

This is one of the greatest Gospel texts in the O.T. It is repeated 3 times in the N.T. – in Rom.1:17, Galatians 3:11 & Heb.10:38. It's the text that started the Reformation: **'The Just shall live by Faith'** Here it is in its OT context.

It's the Vision for that Day when the Gospel would be revealed in NT Times. When men and women like you and me would be humbled to realise that we can't be puffed up within our own souls. We are not upright in and of ourselves. Instead we are sinners, in need of God's saving grace. If we want to be truly

righteous, right with God, then it can be ours **by faith!**

By faith alone, in Christ alone, because of God's grace alone.

Here we have its first mention in the OT. But in the context of what we're talking about this morning (**Vision**) we can say that **'A Vision takes Faith to be Fulfilled.'**

It doesn't matter whether you're talking about the spies going into Canaan, or if you're talking about us seeing a new church established in Keady, it's only **by faith** that we're going to see that Vision Fulfilled.

### **And you know what?**

Just as those 12 spies going into Canaan, came back with a mixed report, so we today, sitting here in the comforts of Armagh Baptist Church, and all we have going for us here, some of us might be tempted to look into Keady and think to ourselves, we'd be far better off staying where we are! - That's understandable!

**So why would we look at it any differently? – Only if we have faith!**

When those spies went into Canaan, all that 10 of them could see were the giants in the land, the high walled fortified cities – the fact that the towns were hard places to penetrate. The fact that their enemy was stronger than they were.

**So why did Caleb and Joshua see it differently? – Because they had faith!**

*'Twelve men went to spy in Canaan – 10 were bad, 2 were good.  
What did they see to spy in Canaan – 10 were bad, 2 were good.  
Some saw giants tough and tall; Some saw grapes in clusters fall;  
**Some saw God was in it all - 10 were bad, 2 were good.'***

When I looked round that room in Keady at the end of November, at that Review Meeting, I saw 30 people sitting there, and was encouraged by the interest that so many families were showing in the work there.

But then I looked around and realised there was at least **a third** of the people sitting there that we didn't know at all, before the work in Keady started!

And then I looked more closely and saw **4 people** who weren't saved, 4 years ago, when the work in Keady started, and that's what clinched it for me!

**'Some saw God was in it all – 10 were bad, 2 were good.'**

**By Faith, we can see that God is in it!** That's all that matters. It's His Work.

Jesus said:

**'I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it!'**

## Conclusion

1. A Vision must be **Grasped**.
2. A Vision must be **Shared**.
3. It takes **Time** for a Vision to be Fulfilled.
4. It takes **Faith** for a Vision to be Fulfilled.

Let's move forward in **Faith** into 2020.

Next week I'll be starting a new series with you in Nehemiah.

All about **Vision**.

All about what it takes to see a God-given Project completed – **By Faith**.

May God bless us as a Church,  
and keep the Devil at bay,  
as we now go into '**2020 and Beyond!**'