



"If you were a hundred times worse than you are, your sins would be no match for his mercy."

—Tim Keller

20-Dec-19

## **The Widow and the Fatherless (Part Three)**

In Part Two of this series, we concentrated on the prophet Jeremiah's sermon to the people of Judah in Jeremiah 7. Among his criticisms—in fact, nearly the first of them—is a command from [God](#) to stop exploiting widows, orphans, and foreigners ([Jeremiah 7:6](#)). He places the treatment of those who are weakest among us at the top of the list of factors that will make or break our relationship with God. It is that important.

God uses another prophet to tell us something similar. In [Isaiah 1:1](#), we learn that God speaks to the prophet Isaiah in a vision. He is upset that His "children" have forsaken Him, saying that they have "rebelled" against Him (verse 2). We can understand that He means that they have defied Him in both physical and spiritual ways. We can also understand that He directs His criticisms at both the [nations of Israel](#) and the church of God. Due to their mounting sins in defiance of Him, He warns Isaiah that judgment is coming. Though He speaks specifically about Judah here, we should not miss the application to us today.

God continues in [Isaiah 1:4-10](#):

Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Unless the LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah.

In the next few verses, we see that the people—as we in the church—are going to services, keeping holy days and Sabbaths, and offering sacrifices, yet, "When you spread out your hands [to pray], I will hide My eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood" ([Isaiah 1:15](#)). God does not give them credit, if you will, for their religiosity or hear their prayers because they are full of [sin](#). Their hands are dripping with the blood they have shed! Abortion comes to mind here.

In these first fifteen verses, God inspires Isaiah to rail against Judah (verse 1), Israel (verse 3), and by extension, the church. He has seen the rebellion, the murders and other heinous sins, and the trampling of His laws, Sabbaths, and holy days, and He declares He is just plain tired of it. God will "hide" His eyes from us. He will turn away from us.

In verse 16, God instructs us in what we need to do to make this right: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil." That is part one. These commands are much the same as James telling us to "keep [ourselves] unspotted from

[the world](#)" ([James 1:27](#)) or Jeremiah insisting, "Pay attention, people of Judah! Change your ways and start living right" ([Jeremiah 7:2](#), *Contemporary English Version*). God demands obedience to His Word. He wants us to be, not just hearers, but doers of the Word (James 1:22).

How do we do this? We find the answer in part two of His instruction: "Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" ([Isaiah 1:17](#)). A better, more positive translation of "rebuke the oppressor" would be "help the oppressed," that is, those in need.

It is noteworthy that God fills the first fifteen verses of Isaiah 1 with a laundry list of sins, but He provides only two direct, uncomplicated verses on how to correct the problems: Put away the evil and stop sinning and start doing what is right. "Learn to do good" encapsulates the intent of all of God's laws, but as the verse continues, God distills it down to helping the oppressed, fatherless, and widows. This simple division in verses 16-17 dovetails well with how the Ten Commandments are divided into two parts. The first four cover our dealings with God, and the last six, our interactions with other people.

Verse 18 gives some encouragement. Even though our "sins are like scarlet" and "red like crimson," they can be "as white as snow" or "as wool." In other words, because God is gracious, we can be forgiven even of the worst of sins if we [repent](#). Our lives can be put on the right track.

Verses 19-20 provide the bottom line: "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword"; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." *The Good News Translation* renders verse 20 as, "But if you defy me, you are doomed to die. I, the LORD, have spoken." God does not pull any punches. We must conform to His way or die.

So, how do we do what God wants us to do? How do we balance obedience and service? We will provide answers in Part Four.

- Mike Ford (1955-2021)

## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Christian Service](#)**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, reflecting that although service is not a highly- valued trait in a land that values rugged individualism and self-reliance, insists that selfless service is at the core of God's very character (springing out of His love) - a trait that we must emulate to go to a higher level of Christian living. God's love is not a commodity that can be bottled up or put into storage. It must be manifested or demonstrated in good works- service to God and service to others. Our Christian liberty obligates us to perform works, not for our salvation, but as an outward demonstration of our love for God. This service must be rendered after a sober reflection or honest assessment of the gifts God has given us to render service. Following our Elder Brother's example, we must live our entire lives in a perpetual state of sacrificial servitude - teaching, listening to, encouraging, and physically helping people to live God's way of life. Sacrifice is the essence of Christian service.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Serving Through Prayer](#)**

by Mark Schindler

Prayer is a constant and necessary part of being a Christian. But just how well do we pray? Are our prayers effective? Mark Schindler teaches us how we can learn to pray more effectively!

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