

REACH OUT IN MERCY

15 The oracle concerning Moab. In just one night Ar of Moab is devastated and destroyed! In just one night Kir is devastated and destroyed! ²Dibon goes up to its temple, to its high places to weep; Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba. Every head is shaved and every beard cut off. ³In their streets they wear sackcloth; on their rooftops and in the public squares they all wail and weep profusely. ⁴Heshbon and Elealeh cry out, their voices are heard as far away as Jahaz. Therefore the armed men of Moab cry out, his soul trembles within him. ⁵My heart cries out over Moab; his fugitives flee as far as Zoar, as far as Eglath Shelishiyah. They go up the ascent of Luhith, weeping as they go; on the road to Horonaim they lament their destruction.

⁶[They mourn] because the waters of Nimrim are dried up and the grass is withered; the vegetation is gone and there is no green thing left. ⁷Therefore the wealth they have acquired and stored up they carry away over the Ravine of the Poplars. ⁸Their cry [of distress] echoes along the border of Moab; their wailing reaches as far as Eglaim, their lamentation as far as Beer Elim—⁹because the waters of Dibon are full of blood. But I will bring still more devastation upon Dibon, namely, a lion against those who flee from Moab and against those who remain in the land.

16 Send lambs [as tribute] to the Ruler of the land—from Sela, across the desert, to the mount of the Daughter of Zion. ²Like fluttering birds pushed out of the nest, so are the women of Moab at the fords of the Arnon River. ³Give them counsel, execute justice [on their behalf]; make your shadow over them like night in the middle of the day! Hide the fugitives; do not betray the refugees! ⁴Let my fugitives stay with you, be a hiding place for Moab from the face of the destroyer; because the oppressor has come to an end, destruction has ceased, the aggressors have vanished from the land. ⁵Furthermore, a throne will be established by mercy—surely one shall sit upon it in the tent of David, rendering judgments, seeking justice, and being swift to do what is right.

⁶We have heard of Moab's pride, that he is very proud. [We have heard] of his arrogance and his pride and his wrath. But all his boastings have come to an end! ⁷Therefore the Moabites wail over their plight, all [of Moab] wails; they mourn over the raisin cakes of Kir Hareseth, because they are utterly devastated. ⁸[They mourn] because the fields of Heshbon wither, and also the vines of Sibmah. The rulers of the nations have trampled down the choice vines that once reached as far as Jazer and spread out towards the wilderness—their shoots spread out and went as far as the [Mediterranean] Sea! ⁹Therefore I will weep, as Jazer weeps, for the vines of Sibmah. O Heshbon and Elealeh, I will drench you with my tears, because the shout of joy over your ripening fruits and over your harvest has been stilled. ¹⁰Gladness and joy have been taken away from the orchards; no one sings or shouts for joy in the vineyards; no one treads out wine in the presses. I have caused the joyful shout to cease. ¹¹Therefore my heart laments like a mournful harp for Moab—my inmost being laments for Kir Hareseth. ¹²When Moab presents himself [to his gods], when he wears himself out [with supplications] at his sacred high places, and when he comes to his shrine to pray, it will be to no avail.

¹³This is the word Jehovah has already spoken concerning Moab in the past. ¹⁴But now Jehovah declares, Within three years, as they are reckoned when making a

contract with a hired laborer, Moab's splendor will be degraded, together with his great population, and his survivors will be very few and insignificant. (Isa. 15:1-16:14)

Introduction

Christians in southern Louisiana say the devastation of Hurricane Andrew, which struck that area in late August of 1992, gave them a new opportunity to meet the physical and spiritual needs of their neighbors. A Christian radio station in Crowley, LA, conducted a fund-raising drive to provide relief for those affected by the storm—they reported that this fund-raising venture actually began as a time of intercessory prayer.

One pastor from the south Louisiana town of Patterson reported that city officials designated his church as an official distribution site because they knew the church could be trusted to get the supplies to the people. The pastor went on to say, “Our church was doing many of these things before the hurricane, and that’s why people have turned to us after the hurricane.”

Another Christian leader from the area states, “We see this crisis as a way of reaching the lost, meeting their physical needs, and opening doors to meet their spiritual needs. A vast missionary field has been opened to us because of this hurricane.”

The pastor from Patterson summed it up by saying, “A lot of the activity is just Christians out on the streets being Christians.” (*WORLD*, 9/5/92, pp.8-9)

In the passage of Isaiah presently before us, we find that Judah’s neighbor, the people of Moab, were devastated by the invading armies of Assyria, and the LORD now instructs His people to reach out in mercy to their needy neighbors. As Christians, we are being exhorted to reach out in mercy to those in need, because the LORD has compassion for a broken, needy people.

I. Reach Out in Mercy,

...To a Neighbor Whose Pride has been Broken (Isa. 15:1,3-9)

Moab had a reputation for pride, arrogance, and wrath: *“We have heard of Moab’s pride, that he is very proud. We have heard of his arrogance and his pride and his wrath”* (16:6.) Do you know any such people? They would never think of asking for help, they would even get angry if anyone offered them help.

Isaiah 16:6 is describing the way Moab used to be; now he has been totally devastated. God has brought into his life something he cannot handle; consequently, his pride has been broken: *“the Moabites wail over their plight, all of Moab wails; they mourn over the raisin cakes of Kir Hareseth, because they are utterly devastated”* (16:7.) The Hebrew word אֲשִׁישָׁה, from the root word אָשַׁשׁ

(meaning “to press together,”) has the meaning “foundations” or “raisin cakes,” (both involving a “pressing down,” as in pressing down a foundation or pressing together a raisin cake.) The term is here used as a play on words, since the raisin cakes of Moab were the foundation of its economic prosperity, note 16:8,

“[They mourn] because the fields of Heshbon wither, and also the vines of Sibmah. The rulers of the nations have trampled down the choice vines that once reached as far as Jazer and spread out towards the wilderness—their shoots spread out and went as far as the [Mediterranean] Sea!”

This verse is describing the vineyards of Moab as luxurious vines that once stretched out over the wilderness and even extended as far as the sea. The point is that the raisin cake produced by the fruit of the vineyard was a commodity that found great international markets; but, as this verse indicates, this has all been devastated by the invading armies of the Assyrians.

As 16:10 indicates, this devastation by the foreign invader was at the command of the LORD God: *“Gladness and joy have been taken away from the orchards; no one sings or shouts for joy in the vineyards; no one treads out wine in the presses. I [the LORD] have caused the joyful shout to cease.”* Isaiah 15:1 expresses the fact that this was a swift and devastating blow: *“In just one night Ar of Moab is devastated and destroyed! In just one night Kir is devastated and destroyed!”* Do you know such a neighbor? Formerly characterized by pride, but who has now suffered a devastating blow: his economic security shattered by the loss of a job; or his personal security shattered by a broken marriage?

Isaiah, reflecting the LORD’s own heart, expresses a deep pity for Moab and empathizes with him:

Therefore I will weep, as Jazer weeps, for the vines of Sibmah. O Heshbon and Elealeh, I will drench you with my tears; because the shout of joy over your ripening fruits and over your harvest has been stilled ... ¹¹Therefore my heart laments like a mournful harp for Moab—my inmost being laments for Kir Hareseth. (Isa. 16:9,11)

My heart cries out over Moab; his fugitives flee as far as Zoar, as far as Eglath Shelishiyah. They go up the ascent of Luhith, weeping as they go; on the road to Horonaim they lament their destruction. (Isa.15:5)

Isaiah beholds the nobles of Moab fleeing to the little village of Zoar, just as their forefather, Lot, had done to escape the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19:18-22.) Can you empathize with such a neighbor? Can you put yourself into “his shoes?” How would you feel if you were in his position? How would you react if you had placed your trust in economic security, (that had created a sense of confidence and pride,) and suddenly that foundation has been swept away?

The example of Isaiah, reflecting the heart of Christ, exhorts us to reach out in mercy to a neighbor whose pride has been broken. Such reaching out in mercy must originate from and be stimulated by a feeling of sympathy and empathy; it must originate from a Christ-like spirit within us. Note that the Good Samaritan was moved to action by compassion when he came upon the victim of robbers lying in the roadway,

*But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. When he saw him, he **was moved with compassion**,³⁴ and came to him. He bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine. He set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (Lk. 10:33-34)*

The Good Samaritan in our Lord's parable is actually a portrait of Himself in His divine compassion: *"But when [Jesus] saw the multitudes, **he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd**" (Matt. 9:36.)* The same must be true of us, as those who have been re-born from above and filled with His Holy Spirit.

II. Reach Out in Mercy, ...To a Neighbor Who Needs to See Christ's Love (Isa. 16:2-5)

Once proud and secure, Moab has now been reduced to a band of homeless refugees, carrying away with them a few personal belongings: *"Therefore the wealth they have acquired and stored up they carry away over the Ravine of the Poplars"* (15:7.) In 16:2 Moab is described as a flock of birds, scattered from their nest, in fear and desperation gathering at the fords of the Arnon River, (which formed the border with Judah.) What if a neighbor, or fellow worker, or fellow student, desperate and in need of help, came to us? Would we show him the love of Christ? What if he or she confided in you: My marriage is falling apart; my parents are getting a divorce; I have been diagnosed as having terminal cancer (or AIDS); would you show them the love of Christ? Do our lives reflect the love of Christ right now, so that such an individual would be drawn to us in their time of need?

In Isaiah 16:3-4a the LORD commands His people to show mercy to these desperate Moabite refugees. *"Give them counsel; execute justice [on their behalf]."* Judah is commanded to do what is right in the sight of God with regard to these people in need. Note the LORD's desire as expressed through the prophet Micah: *"He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does Jehovah require of you? He requires you to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God"* (Mic. 6:8.) Note, too, the definition of true godly religion as it is given by the Apostle James, *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world"* (Jam. 1:27.) Then, too, let us take to heart the Lord's admonition and rebuke of the Pharisees,

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and integrity. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (Matt. 23:23)

Furthermore, Judah is exhorted, *“make your shadow over them like night in the middle of the day! Hide the fugitives; do not betray the refugees!”* (16:3b.) The people of God are exhorted to provide relief and refreshment for such a neighbor in need, to come to their aid—receive him, befriend him, provide for him for Jesus’ sake. *“Let my fugitives stay with you, be a hiding place for Moab”* (16:4.) Note how the LORD here identifies Moab as *“my fugitives.”* We are to view such a neighbor in need as precious to the LORD, a person in whom the LORD has an interest and for whom He has concern; one who needs the LORD, one whom the LORD may choose to bring to Christ through our ministry. The reason Judah is to welcome Moab and show mercy to these fleeing fugitives is due to the fact that *“the oppressor has come to an end, destruction has ceased, the aggressors have vanished from the land”* (16:4b.)

The LORD indicates to His people that the remnant of Moab is not to be feared; all that once served to make Moab a feared enemy—an *“oppressor”* and *“aggressor”*—has been done away with, he is now a humble suppliant pleading for mercy and in need of compassion. In 16:5 the LORD indicates that a further reason Moab should find mercy in Judah is the fact that *“a throne [i.e.; a government] shall be established by mercy.”* That is to say, a government, here referring to that of Judah, shall be strong and secure if it displays mercy. Indeed, the LORD’s throne of mercy and justice shall be located there: *“surely one shall sit upon it in the tent of David, rendering judgments, seeking justice, and being swift to do what is right.”* Here is a reference to the Messiah’s own ministry, witnessed in the days of Christ’s earthly ministry and to be fully seen when He returns to reign in glory.

We must minister mercy and Christian love to a neighbor in need because the LORD Himself has so ministered to us: *“Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?”* (Matt. 18:33.) We must minister mercy and Christian love to a neighbor in need in order that we may reflect the goodness of the LORD and so encourage them to look to the LORD for His saving mercy.

Let us reach out in mercy to a neighbor who needs to see Christ’s love. Many times the pastor receives the call: “My neighbor is having problems, can you help him?” That call to the pastor should come **after** you yourself have first done what you can personally to show that neighbor the love of Christ.

III. Reach Out in Mercy, ...To a Neighbor Who Needs the Gospel (Isa. 15:2; 16:1-12, 16:1)

Isaiah 15:2 describes Moab turning to his religion in his hour of need: *“Dibon goes up to its temple, to its high places to weep; Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba. Every head is shaved and every beard cut off.”* But, as 16:12 indicates, Moab finds his religion to be useless: *“When Moab presents himself to his gods, when he wears himself out [with supplications] at his sacred high places, and when he comes to his shrine to pray, it will be to no avail.”*

Here in the case of Moab, there is an indistinct calling out to God, there is a sense of contrition, but there is the need for guidance, there is the need to be pointed away from false religion to the true and living God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In time of need your neighbor may seek after God, but he may need your help to find Him. Your neighbor may only have a faint childhood recollection of church or Sunday School, or he may have a completely pagan or godless background. Now in his time of need, his search for God may lead him into dangerous paths of spiritual darkness unless you are prepared to point him to Christ the only Savior.

In 16:1 Isaiah instructs Moab to seek the LORD; to pay homage to Him and so find salvation in Him: *“Send lambs [as tribute] to the Ruler of the land—from Sela, across the desert, to the mount of the Daughter of Zion.”*

Moab had at one time sent lambs as a tribute to the kings of Israel, note 2 Kings 3:4, *“Now Mesha king of Moab raised sheep, and he had to supply the king of Israel with a hundred thousand lambs and with the wool of a hundred thousand rams.”* Now Moab is instructed to send such a tribute to *“the Ruler of the land”* (or, *“the Ruler of the earth.”*) Note: The lamb was the Old Testament sacrificial offering for the forgiveness of sins; thus, Moab is being instructed to turn to the living God, the God of Israel, and seek salvation by offering unto Him the appointed sacrifice for the forgiveness of their sins. In his hour of need Moab’s initial reaction was to call upon his idols, but it was to no avail. It is the prophet of the LORD who points Moab to the only Source of salvation and refuge.

Let us reach out in mercy to a neighbor who needs the gospel. When we encounter a neighbor in need, let us not take the superficial view that all he needs is financial aid or marital counseling, let us not just look to the solving of his temporal problems. May we be sensitive as to how the LORD can use a personal crisis to speak to his heart and address his deepest spiritual need, and let us be ready to lead him to Christ the Savior—pray that the LORD would so work in the heart of a needy neighbor and that He would use you to minister not only to his temporal needs, but to minister the gospel to him.

Conclusion

One of the pastors in southern Louisiana summed up the response of the church to its needy neighbors with these words: “A lot of the activity is just Christians out on the streets being Christian.” How about you and me? Are we “out on the streets” of

everyday life “being Christian?” Are we ready and willing to help a neighbor in need for the sake of Christ? Just as Old Testament Judah was exhorted to come to the aid of their pagan neighbor, the people of Moab, so, too, we are exhorted to reach out in mercy to a neighbor in need, because the LORD has compassion for a broken and humbled people.