

A couple weeks ago, we started our discussion of Brian Fikkert’s book *When Helping Hurts*.
Fikkert challenges us to rethink our understanding of poverty.
We tend to think of poverty in terms of ‘lack of resources,’
but there is more to poverty than this.

Fikkert cites the *Voices of the Poor* to describe poverty:
“For a poor person everything is terrible – illness, humiliation, shame.
We are cripples; we are afraid of everything;
we depend on everyone.
No one needs us.
We are like garbage that everyone wants to get rid of.” (Fikkert 52)

Ezekiel says that this is what Jerusalem will be.
Jerusalem will be ashamed – humiliated – afraid –
like garbage.
Why does Ezekiel say this?
We normally think of salvation resulting in *honor* and *glory*.
But Ezekiel says that Jerusalem’s salvation will result in their *shame*.

To understand this we need to sing Psalm 83.
Psalm 83 asks God to defeat the enemies of Israel.
It recounts how God defeated their enemies in the days of the Judges –
and then asks God to put all their foes to *shame*.

In Ezekiel 16, Jerusalem – the fairy tale princess –
has been playing the whore,
chasing after the nations,
giving her beauty away to whoever passed by,
slaughtering her children, oppressing the poor,
and worshiping the gods of the nations.

In short, Jerusalem has become Sodom.
Or in the terms of Psalm 83,
Jerusalem has become the enemy that needs to be ashamed and destroyed –
made like Sisera and Midian, “who became dung for the ground” (v10).

But how can we (today) sing a psalm like Psalm 83?

There are two reasons:

First, we give thanks that God has already done this in Jesus Christ.
Our Lord Jesus Christ has triumphed over his and our enemies in the cross.
As Paul says in Col 2, “He disarmed the rulers and authorities [demonic powers]
and put them to an open shame, triumphing over them in the cross.”

And so we sing Psalm 83, rejoicing that God has done this!
But second, *because* the powers have been disarmed and put to shame,
therefore, we pray that God would continue to work this out in history.
We *should* pray that God would overthrow those
 who are seeking to destroy his people.
We want them to become as dung for the ground –
 preferably the way Paul did:
 remember what he said in Philippians 3?
 That he counted all that was to his profit as *dung*
 compared with the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus.
Also note that Psalm 83 concludes with a prayer that the enemies of God
 would “seek your name, O LORD.”
 That they would know that you “are the Most High over all the earth.” (v16-18)

The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims to everyone without favoritism:
Repent or perish.
And as we will see in our sermon today,
 that message, “repent or perish” is the same for *every single one of you!*
All that you take pride in must become as dung upon the ground –
 or else *you* will become as dung upon the ground.

If you feel uncomfortable singing Psalm 83 about others –
 that's fine.
Sing it about yourself!
 Ezekiel would!

Sing Psalm 83/Read Matthew 11

Striking, isn't it?
Jesus says that if he had done his mighty deeds in Sodom
 “it would have remained until this day.”
Jesus says to the *Jewish* population of his day
 “it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

But there is nothing especially new about what Jesus says here.
Jesus is simply reminding his hearers of what Ezekiel had taught them 600 years before:
 you are *worse* than Sodom.
You should *not* think of yourself as *better* than Sodom;
 if God can save you, then God can save anyone!

Last week we were brutalized by Ezekiel's stunning description of Jerusalem's sin.
As Christopher Wright puts it,
 “The searing imagery of stripping, stoning, hacking and burning in 16:39-41
 leaves little hope for anyone but the vultures.” (Wright, 150)
But that's Ezekiel's point.
Left to ourselves and our own devices – the vultures are going to have quite a meal!

1. **The Charge: Jerusalem’s Abominations (16:1-34)**
 - a. **The Fairy Tale City (16:1-14)**
 - b. **The Fairy Tale Run Amok (16:15-22)**
 - c. **The Fairy Tale Whore – Chasing the Nations without Pay (23-34)**
2. **The Judgment: A Fairy Tale Nightmare (16:35-43)**

We start today with the two ugly sisters – Samaria and Sodom – in verse 44

3. **The Two Ugly Sisters (16:44-58)**
 - a. **The Family Resemblance (16:44-52)**

44 “Behold, everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you: ‘Like mother, like daughter.’ 45 You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite.

Throughout this passage there are many references to “daughters.”
 The daughters of Jerusalem are the cities and villages of Judah.
 The daughters of Sodom are the cities and villages of Canaan.
 The daughters of Samaria are the cities and villages of Israel.

Which raises an interesting question:
 if “mothers” are the “mother-cities”
 and daughters are their dependent villages and cities –
 then who is this Hittite, who is said to be Jerusalem’s “mother”?

If you back up and look at Ezekiel in the context of redemptive history,
 there is a mother-city who loathed her husband and children.

In Genesis 11 we hear of the mother-of-all-cities:
 Babel –
 the mother-city – the original “city of man.”

And given that Ezekiel has already worked with the Noah material from Genesis 6-9,
 and is explicitly discussing the story of Sodom from Genesis 18-19,
 I wouldn’t be surprised if Babel were lurking in the background of Ezekiel 16.

Throughout history the city of man has consistently rejected God.
 Like mother, like daughter –
 from Babel to Sodom to Samaria and Jerusalem.
 (We could continue this list: to Babylon, Rome, Paris, London, New York, Tokyo)

46 And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters.

Who is Samaria?
 Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom.

The city of Samaria was founded by Omri – the father of Ahab.
The Omride dynasty made the kingdom of Israel famous.
Indeed, in the ancient world, the Omrides were more famous than David.
After all, the northern kingdom was the bigger kingdom –
they had ten tribes (the house of David had two);
they had the fertile river valley (the house of David had the barren highlands);
and with the greater wealth and size,
Samaria quickly became more powerful than Jerusalem.

You see this in the book of Kings.
Jehoshaphat comes from Jerusalem to assist Ahab in battle –
acknowledging Ahab’s superiority.
When Judah tries to resist Israel,
the kings of Israel laugh at the house of David.
Jerusalem is more important for God’s purposes in history –
but even a careful reading of the OT
shows that Samaria was more important in ancient history!

But how does Samaria get to be the “elder sister”
and Sodom the “younger sister”?
(especially since Sodom was destroyed 1,000 years before Samaria was founded!)

In Hebrew the words literally mean “bigger” and “smaller.”
Samaria is the “greater” sister (Samaria was a bigger city than Jerusalem –
and certainly more important in world politics),
and Sodom was the “little” sister (she was smaller and less important).

But perhaps a better question would be,
how did Sodom become a sister at all!
Sodom is not biologically related to Samaria and Jerusalem.
Genesis 10 connected Sodom with the Canaanites.
But I cannot refrain from pointing out that while Sodom was destroyed by fire,
there were *two* people of Sodom who survived –
Lot’s daughters.
Lot’s wife appears to have been from Sodom –
and Lot’s daughters committed incest with their father,
and produced heirs for Lot:
Moab and Ammon.

The Moabites and the Ammonites are rooted in Sodom.
And the prophets did not forget this!
Zephaniah 2:8-9 says,
“I have heard the taunts of Moab and the revilings of the Ammonites,
how they have taunted my people and made boasts against their territory.
Therefore, as I live, declares the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,
Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah,
a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste forever.”

Zephaniah had prophesied in the generation before Ezekiel,
during the days of Josiah.

So the only survivors of Sodom are Israel's cousins, Moab and Ammon –
which makes for a plausible biological relationship.

But the biological relationship is *not* Ezekiel's main point!
rather, Ezekiel is going for the shock value of the connection.
Sodom is Jerusalem's sister,
because Jerusalem is *acting* like Sodom.

47 Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. 48 As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done.

You think Sodom was bad?
You are worse!
Do you remember what Sodom did?

49 Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.

Notice that homosexuality is not mentioned.
If you look back at Genesis 18-19,
God's judgment against Sodom was pronounced in chapter 18,
before the threatened homosexual gang rape of chapter 19.

There are four sins of Sodom that Ezekiel names:
Pride
Excess of food
Prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy
Haughty and did an abomination

Now, after last week, you *know* that Ezekiel is no prude!
Ezekiel is not at all bashful about talking about sex!
So if homosexuality was "the problem" in Sodom, you'd hear about it from Ezekiel!

Think about this.
What is the problem in America today?
So many people will focus on sex (and sure, it's a huge problem!) –
but Ezekiel zeroes in on the root problem:

it's pride – arrogance – and with pride and arrogance invariably comes
a failure to aid the poor and needy.

Sodom had an abundance of food – prosperous ease –
but did not care for the poor.

The Psalms are loaded with references like this:

Speaking to the wicked, David says in Psalm 14:6 –

“You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge.”

And in Psalm 12:5,

“Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan,

I will now arise, says the LORD;

I will place him in the safety for which he longs.”

The good king is defined in Psalm 72:4

“May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,

give deliverance to the children of the needy,

and crush the oppressor!”

Notice that aiding the poor and needy is *not* defined by giving them handouts!

You aid the poor and needy by giving them *justice* –

by defending their cause –

by delivering them from their oppressors.

This is what Sodom did not do.

And you remember what I did to Sodom, right?

50 They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.

and

51 Samaria has not committed half your sins.

If you look like Sodom and act like Sodom, then you must be related to Sodom!

When we get to chapter 22, Ezekiel will give a detailed catalogue of the sins of Jerusalem.

“The charge sheet includes bloodshed, idolatry, contempt of parents,

oppression of aliens, orphans and widows...

desecration of the Sabbath, slander,

sexual perversions including adultery and incest,

bribery, corruption, taking interest, dispossession and confiscation of property,

neglect of religious traditions, vicious bureaucracy, murder for profit,

false prophecy justifying the status quo, extortion, and robbery.” (Wright 150)

For now he is content to say simply that Jerusalem is worse than Sodom and Samaria.

You have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed.

Ezekiel does not give examples of Samaria’s sin

(he assumes that his hearers still remember the northern kingdom of Israel).

We’ll hear more about Samaria in chapter 23...

But if you have committed double the sins of Sodom and Samaria, what should I do with you?

52 Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.

Three times Ezekiel says that Sodom and Samaria are “righteous” compared with you.
In other words, Jerusalem is so bad,
that God is reconsidering how he treated Sodom and Samaria!
Their extreme wickedness now “intervenes” on behalf of Sodom and Samaria.

Do you remember what God did to Sodom?
God sent fire from heaven to destroy the city and all its inhabitants!
In all the Bible there is no city worse than Sodom –
except here in Ezekiel 16, where God says,
“you know what, Jerusalem makes Sodom look righteous!”

Ezekiel has gone from the horrifically obscene in verses 15-43
to the utterly ridiculous in verses 44-53.

Ezekiel, you can't be serious!
God wiped Sodom off the face of the earth.
You are not going to tell us that we are worse than Sodom!

Jesus will do the same!
Jesus will say in Matthew 11 –
“Yeah, Ezekiel was right!
You are worse than Sodom!
At the final judgment, Sodom's going to get off easy compared to you!”

Have you ever had that happen as a parent?
One child does something bad, so you discipline him.
Then another does something far worse –
so you look at the first child differently –
and you think, hmm, that wasn't as bad as I thought it was!

When your actions have God thinking that maybe Sodom really wasn't so bad...
you *know* you're in trouble!!

The same thing is true today.
Billy Graham got it right when he spoke of the wealth, pride, and decadence of today:
“God must either judge America or apologize to Sodom.” (Wright, 150)

b. The Family Restoration (16:53-58)
But Ezekiel is not finished with his shock therapy!
There is yet another shock in store for Jerusalem:

53 “I will restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes in their midst, 54 that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, becoming a consolation to them. 55 As for your sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state.

The theme of restoration/return runs through verses 53-55.

That God would restore Jerusalem makes sense.

That God would restore Samaria (Ahab’s city) seems a little strange,
but not impossible, since that was the northern kingdom of Israel.

But Sodom?

“Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former state.”

How can this be?

Sodom was utterly destroyed!

Sodom was wiped off the face of the earth!

How can Sodom be restored?

Jerusalem needs to understand *how far gone* she is.

Sodom had undergone a picture of the final judgment.

Sodom passed through the fire of God’s eschatological wrath – and was destroyed.

Sodom stands for all the heinous corruption of Canaan.

Israel had been commanded to utterly destroy the Canaanites,

also as a picture of the final judgment –

as a foretaste of God’s last-days wrath.

But Israel failed to destroy the Canaanites entirely.

And in fact, Israel has proved to be *worse* than the Canaanites,

and so God will have mercy on the remnant of the Canaanites,

and he will restore them as well as Jerusalem and Samaria.

You have to get it through your head that *you are worse than Sodom!*

And so, if God can restore you – after all that you have done –
then surely God can restore Sodom!

After all,

56 Was not your sister Sodom a byword in your mouth in the day of your pride, 57 before your wickedness was uncovered?

You once mocked Sodom –

you thought you were secure, and thought of Sodom as “those terrible people” –
but now:

Now you have become an object of reproach for the daughters of Syria and all those around her, and for the daughters of the Philistines, those all around who despise you. 58 You bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations, declares the Lord.

We need to remember this!

It is easy for us to become complacent and think of ourselves as superior to others.
But how does God view us?

The restoration of Sodom should remind us that no one is ever beyond hope!

Rather, the restoration of Sodom –
and our *own* restoration –
should humble us – and in a proper sense –
should *shame* us!

4. Shame and Atonement: an Everlasting Covenant (16:59-63)

a. I Will Remember My Covenant (16:59-60)

59 “For thus says the Lord God: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant,

The LORD will deal justly with Israel.
God will give to Jerusalem according to her deeds.

Jerusalem has violated the terms of the covenant – not just in some minor details –
but in whoring after the gods of the nations –
in a wholehearted renunciation of the marriage covenant.
And so God will bring the judgment against her that the covenant called for.

And yet...

60 yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth,

What covenant is this?

If you go back to the story of verses 1-43,
the covenant with Jerusalem is the covenant with David.
Some have argued that Ezekiel is reaching back beyond this
to the covenant with Abraham,
but 16:8 seems pretty clear:

“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love,
and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness;
I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD,
and you became mine.”

The echo of Ruth (with the corner of the garment) reminds us of David –
and of course, it was to David that God took Jerusalem as his bride.
(Though there seems to be an intentional linkage in 2 Chronicles 3:1

of the temple site on Mount Moriah, with the land of Moriah in Genesis 22, where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac.)

God's point is that he will be faithful to his covenant –
in spite of Jerusalem's faithlessness.

and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant.

By now it should be pretty clear.

If your salvation *depends* on your performance –
if your faithfulness and obedience are the foundation for your future,
you are really [I can think of a lot of words I probably shouldn't say here]
you are really in trouble...

All the prophets affirm that only God can save.

But with Ezekiel, there is almost no place for human effort at all.

The one thing that he leaves for Jerusalem:

b. Then You Will Remember and Be Ashamed (16:61-63)

61 Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you.

God is going to give Samaria and Sodom to Jerusalem as daughters.

In other words, Jerusalem is going to become a mother.

But it will not be based on the old covenant.

We see here the new birth of Jerusalem.

There will be a new covenant that will include the restoration of Samaria and Sodom.

Or to put it in the words of our Lord:

“You will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

62 I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, 63 that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord God.”

Jerusalem had been griping against God.

Jerusalem had been saying “where is God?”

“Why isn't he saving us from our enemies – like he promised?!”

But when God establishes his covenant –

when they come to know that *he* is Yahweh –
and when *he* atones for all that they have done,
then they will shut their mouths in shame.

Jerusalem needs a fundamental spiritual renewal.

Usually the priest would make atonement for the people.
But this time, Jerusalem's sin is beyond all earthly fixes.
Here, Yahweh himself must make atonement and purify his people.

But why does grace produce *shame*?

Grace should not prompt us to become proud.
Rather, grace should make us *ashamed* of ourselves.

No, I did not say that grace should make us *feel* ashamed.
Shame is not just a feeling.
Shame is also an objective condition.

Think about this in the context of guilt:
you can *be* guilty without *feeling* guilty.
Guilt is an objective condition.
If you stole that piece of candy,
then you *are* guilty, regardless of what you feel.

Likewise, the fact that God has been gracious to you *in spite of your pride* –
shames you –
whether you ever admit it or not!

Christopher Wright says well,

“Our shame is the realization that God's judgment is just
and that his salvation is entirely a matter of his incredible grace, not our merits.”
(Wright, 154)

Israel had thought that their shame was that Yahweh had failed to defend and protect them.
Ezekiel is saying, NO – your shame is your own failure –
your own betrayal of the covenant.
And therefore, when God restores you,
you will be ashamed.

Yes, there will be joy in our salvation –
but there will also be a deep and profound *shame*
(an objective condition – that you should *also* feel!)
as you recognize your horrific failures to live as God's people!

Now, that shame should not mire you in some morbid slough of despond!
But it should forever prevent you from boasting that you are “better” than Sodom!

When you see the horrific sins of others,
even the phrase, “there, but for the grace of God, go I”
can have a little too much of the braggart about it.
The truth is far more uncomfortable.

Remember Fikkert's description of poverty?

“For a poor person everything is terrible – illness, humiliation, shame.

We are cripples; we are afraid of everything;
we depend on everyone.

No one needs us.

We are like garbage that everyone wants to get rid of.” (Fikkert 52)

This is the biblical description of our condition apart from Christ.

Remember Jesus' words to the church at Laodicea:

“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,
not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.” (Rev. 3:17)

In other words –

the church at Laodicea (the lukewarm church)
is like the Jerusalem of Ezekiel's day!

And what does Jesus say is the solution?

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich,
and white garments so that you may clothe yourself
and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen,
and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline,
so be zealous and repent!” (Rev. 3:18-19)

We saw last week how grotesque and ugly sin is.

It is only when you see how awful sin is that you see the price of atonement.

When you think about the betrayal of Jerusalem –

how Jerusalem despised the covenant and whored after other gods –

and when you think about the penalty that Jerusalem deserved (and received) –
then you begin to understand what Jesus has done.

Because Jesus has taken upon himself the last-days judgment of God.

He has made atonement for Jerusalem,

and has established the heavenly city as his pure and radiant bride.

And the fact that God has saved you should not cause you to become proud and arrogant.

Rather, it should cause you to be *ashamed*.

If you become proud in your sanctification –

if you return to the arrogance of Jerusalem,

looking down your nose at Sodom and Samaria –

then you have missed the point of Ezekiel 16.

And so the fairy tale ends with something of a happy ending.

Cinderella is restored.

But it is a chastened, humbled, and ashamed Cinderella.

And that's a good thing!