Articles by Ross Woodward

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Exemplary Widows (Feb 1959)

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Dr. Ross Woodward is a medical missionary in Angola, Africa. He was commended to the Lord's service there by the Dan-forth Assembly, Toronto, Canada. Our attention is called by the doctor, to the interest that Luke, the beloved physician of the early Church, manifested to sisters enduring bereavement. This is a needed message for today. —Ed.

It may have been through his medical practice or through his contact with Mary the widowed mother of Jesus that Luke, the beloved physician, gained in certain widows the interest that he manifests in his writing. Let us look at five such widows mentioned in his first book, his Gospel. Let us also consider any possible moral lesson found in these citations.

Depart Not

Like Anna, we may find a reward in constantly remaining in God's presence. The divine commendation of this woman reads, "And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37). Anna, widowed after only seven years of marriage joy, and now 84 years of age, sought to remain in the temple of the Living God, serving Him with fastings and supplications night and day. Anna was what the Apostle Paul would have called "a widow indeed" (I Tim. 5:5). In her bereavement she trusted in her God and with Simeon gave thanks when her departing not from His presence was rewarded by

seeing the Lord's Salvation, the consolation of Israel. Are we bereft of a loved one? God has not left us! Let us linger in His presence; yea, cling to Him. Naomi found herself in her widowhood and sore bereavement in Moab, a land characterized by independence from God. On her return to Bethlehem (the house of bread), she asked to be called Mara. How much better, even in deep sorrow, to be called Anna (Grace) than Mara (Bitterness)! Anna's eyes and heart were filled with a vision of consolation.

Fear Not

Fears can depress us as much if not more than they depressed the widow of Sarepta to whom God's mantled prophet was sent for sustenance during a famine. When she detailed her plight to him, his message to her heart was, "Fear not; go and do" (1 Kings 17:13). Her own life and that of her son were at stake; nevertheless, in obedience to the word of Elijah, she took the remaining handful of meal and prepared it for the three, the prophet, her son, and herself. To her the promise was made, "The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail" (1 Kings 17:14).

Well might Luke record the comment of the Lord upon such obedience and faith: "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land: But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow" (Luke 4:25-26). Surely to her was imparted divine courage.

Weep Not

In the Sacred Record, Christ brought back to this scene of sorrow, suffering, sin, and sickness only three which had passed beyond the veil of death. Perhaps, as Dr. Campbell Morgan suggests, there was reticence to do this on our Lord's part, but in compassion for the loved ones of an only daughter, an only son, and an only brother Christ spoke those words of power: "Little lamb, arise," "Young man, arise," and "Lazarus, come forth." With a look of the compassion of Heaven upon His blessed face, the Saviour said to the widow of Nain, "Weep not." Moreover, "He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise" (Luke 7:13-14).

Christians sorrow not as others which have no hope. That empty bier of yesterday foretold the empty tomb of to-morrow. God's only Son also arose from among the dead, the First-fruits of them that sleep, their Forerunner. Consequently, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thess. 4:14).

This widow experienced the touch of the Lord's compassion.

Withhold Not

One day as the Lord Jesus stood in the temple, the trumpet-shaped receivers of the thirteen coffers rang loud as the rich, of their superfluity, cast in their handfuls of brass coins. Nine coffers were used supposedly for the Lord, four for the poor. A black-shawled widow approached and cast in her two mites. The Son of God, Who was watching how they cast in,

said, “She, of her penury cast in all the living that she had” (Luke 21:4). Thus did she, in real sacrificial giving, manifest her love to God and to her fellow-men. In her act was the evidence of real consecration.

Weary Not

“Ye shall not afflict any widow,” said the Lord to Israel, “If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto Me, I will surely hear their cry” (Ex. 22:21-23). Although the judge to whom she appealed was unjust and feared not God, neither regarded man, the widow in her importunity changed his mind. Said the Lord Jesus concerning this, “Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them” (Luke 18:7).

“Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate,” said Paul to Timothy, “trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day” (1 Tim. 5:5).

Through the importunity of this widow in her trouble, we receive a message of constancy.

The moral lessons gathered from these brief sketches show us the pathway of life, faith, hope, and love. Anna and the widow of Nain saw beyond a babe and a bier and express to Christ a hope, the anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast. Let us ever remember that the Lord Jesus is our Forerunner Who has fixed our anchorage within the veil.

The widow of Sarepta tells us of faith for in spite of an empty barrel she looked to the Living God, and Jesus Christ Whom He had sent as the Author and Finisher of faith.

The widow of the treasurery tells of love, active love that poured out its all in sacrifice. The fountain-head of divine love in the heart of the believer is God.

Since by observation we may learn such precious lessons from the experiences of certain widows, we ought to let our interest in them deepen into a real solicitous care.

Turning to Luke's second treatise, we find our responsibility to those who are thus bereft. In Acts chapter six, we learn that the ministration among early Christians was daily and personal. The fact that it was conducted daily suggests regular, methodical assistance that is neither haphazard, spasmodic nor erratic, The ministration was at tables; the widows being served by the hands of the Spirit-filled chosen deacons. Though methodical, it was not cold, but rather warm and loving. "Pure religion", says James, "is to visit the widows…in their affliction."

Laws were given by God to His people of old that the widow might be "satisfied and filled." The third triennial tithe (Duet. 26:12), the forgotten or missed olive, grape, and sheaf, and an equal place at the feasts were her portion (Duet. 24:19:21).

May we manifest grace to the widows of our day, and as we learn more of God through their experiences, may we in turn be used of God to comfort and sustain them. Said the Lord Jesus, "Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me" (Matt. 25:45).