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## **God Has Not Passed You By**

***By David Wilkerson***

February 27, 2006 I want to take you back to one of the darkest days in Israel's history. On this particular day, a widow stood before three caskets, surrounded by wailing crowds. In that mourning crowd were hundreds of other weeping widows, as well as scores of wounded soldiers, some with their wounds still bleeding.

At the center of this scene was the unnamed widow, who could barely stand before the three caskets. Pregnant and in pain, she was on the verge of collapse and had to be supported by two handmaidens. This woman was mentally and spiritually dead, with no life left, totally overcome by her grief and pain.

In one casket lay her eighty-eight-year-old father-in-law, Eli, the high priest of Israel. In another casket lay her brother-in-law, Hophni, also a priest. But the one casket that this woman hovered over was the third, containing the body of her husband, Phinehas.

At this moment in Israel's history, a great calamity had befallen the nation. A few days earlier, the Israelite army had gone out to fight the Philistines and had been overwhelmed. Some 30,000 men were killed in battle, including Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. When the high priest received news that the enemy had captured the ark of the covenant, and that his two sons were now dead, he fell backward from his seat and died of a broken neck.

Scripture suggests that this unnamed widow of Phinehas had a measure of love for the things of God. She had a respect for the presence of the Lord and was grieved over the loss of the ark to the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 4:19). Surely she was also grieved at how God's house had fallen into apathy and greed under her father-in-law's ministry.

With Eli as high priest, God's shepherds regularly turned a blind eye to all kinds of sin. Eli's own son Hophni was a wicked priest who committed fornication within the walls of God's house. Phinehas also was a backslidden, adulterous priest whose rampant lust continually brought shame upon the temple. For years, his sorrowful wife had lived with a prophetic warning ringing in her ears, delivered by an unnamed prophet to the house of Eli:

"All the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them" (1 Samuel 2:33-34).

Imagine the incredible pain this widow carried now at that gravesite. Her husband had seduced women in the temple, women whom she'd probably ministered to. The ministry was totally lust-driven, full of greed and apathetic toward the things of God. The Lord's true prophets had warned for years of impending judgments caused by the priesthood's corruption. And the people had grown disillusioned because of hypocrisy in the ministry. Now calamities were breaking forth on all sides. Worst of all, Israel's enemies had confiscated the ark, which represented the presence of God.

In this poor woman's mind, the Lord's enemies had triumphed. All around her, the church was in ruins and the nation was bereft of hope. There was literally nothing left for anyone to look forward to except judgment. Moreover, this woman carried her own personal pain over her husband's adulterous betrayals.

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Now, having just buried her loved ones, she suddenly collapsed at the gravesite and went into labor: “When she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. And ... the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son” (4:19–20).

There were many other women at that gravesite who had lost husbands in the battle with the Philistines. They tried to encourage Phinehas’ widow, telling her, “Cheer up. There’s hope now for you, a brand-new beginning with this baby boy. God hasn’t bypassed you after all.” They saw that in the midst of all the death and chaos, fresh hope was on the way.

But Phinehas’ widow had already convinced herself, “The Lord has abandoned me. Look at all the calamity, the apostasy, the ruin. My prayers haven’t been heard. There is no hope left.” She was utterly inconsolable. Even after she gave birth, she refused to look at her baby, pushing him aside. Her last words before dying were, “His name is Ichabod. Call him that, because the glory has departed from Israel. The ark of God has been taken” (see 4:21–22).

Simply put, she quit the fight, and with that, she died. I believe the actual cause of this suffering woman’s death was abject hopelessness. To this day, the word “Ichabod” signifies the loss of God’s presence and the absence of hope for his people.

In her despair and pain, the nameless widow speaks to God’s people today. Every Christian faces the same three streams of pain that Phinehas’ widow endured: pain over the nation’s condition, pain over the church’s condition, and pain over personal suffering and loss.

Like her, we’re living in a time of moral and spiritual decay. Almost daily we see devilish attacks coming against the name of Christ. The enemy is slowly chipping away at our moral values, which have served as the foundation not just for our own nation but for many others.

We have seen prayer outlawed in America’s schools. The Ten Commandments are being removed from federal and state courthouses. Some states are writing laws that forbid government chaplains to invoke Christ’s name. Meanwhile, our nation’s courts are shaking their fists at God’s authority and the very mention of his name.

Homosexuals and their powerful friends appear unstoppable in their obsession to establish gay marriages. A new movie featuring gay cowboys is being touted for the Academy Awards, with some observers calling it the best film ever made. It’s being advertised as a movie that will forever change our society. You can be sure it is only the first of many films of its kind.

Our ministry receives scores of letters and e-mails from grieving lovers of Christ across the nation and worldwide. They’re asking, “What is happening to America? It once was known for carrying the light of the gospel to the world through its missions efforts. Now it’s a totally different story. TV programs have become utterly filthy, mocking Christians, moral standards and Christ himself. These shows glorify homosexuality and tear down family values.

“Courts are mocking Christianity left and right. They make believers out to be fanatics or stupid for merely having faith. Where will it end? Nothing seems able to stop the moral landslide. When is the Lord going to put a stop to it all?”

The mockery isn’t just happening in the secular realm. Foolish, unholy things are taking place in God’s

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house across the land. A few weeks ago, I learned about something called “wrestling-match churches,” in which pulpits have been replaced by wrestling rings. Wrestlers who profess Christ bang chairs over each other’s heads, spurt fake blood and then give a testimony afterward. No! This ought not to happen in any church. Any minister of God’s Word knows that violence was the very reason God destroyed the earth with a flood.

In thousands of churches now, there is never any mention of sin, the Cross, sacrifice, judgment or hell. Godly watchmen aren’t allowed to speak, and there is no stirring of hearts. Instead, the whole focus is on success, with every sermon designed to make people feel good. It’s all resulting in apathy, greed, self-centeredness, coldness of heart. And it’s causing pain to godly believers everywhere, as they see God’s name brought to disgrace.

Imagine a similar picture in Israel. When Phinehas’ widow saw the sins of Shiloh mounting up to heaven, she knew God’s presence couldn’t remain with such a people. The Lord had no part in any of it.

In Shiloh, the church pastored by Eli, God shows us how he judges a self-focused, man-centered church. “He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent [church] which he placed among men” (Psalm 78:60). God wholly abandoned the church of greed, removing his glory from that backslidden house of flesh. And he judged it, writing “Ichabod” over the door of that church.

As we look down through the years to Jeremiah’s day, we find the prophet speaking to the same kind of greedy church of self-interest. Jeremiah declared that every man was out for himself, and that God’s shepherds preached only peace, happiness and prosperity. These pastors “made merchandise” of the people, growing prosperous at the expense of widows and other defenseless ones in society.

The Lord told Jeremiah in plain terms: “This is not my church. It is an abomination.” He then told the prophet to warn the priests: “Howl, ye shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves in the ashes ... The shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape ... For the Lord hath spoiled their pasture ... He hath forsaken (them)” (Jeremiah 25:34–36, 38).

Finally, God said, “I will make this house like Shiloh” (26:6). He was saying, in short, “This is how I’m going to judge every fleshly, greedy church in every age.” And he instructed Jeremiah: “Speak ... all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word ... So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord” (26:2, 7).

How did the people react to Jeremiah’s message? “The priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant?” (26:8–9).

Think about all the prosperity preaching in the church today. As I visited with someone recently, they had their TV tuned to a Christian channel. Every program focused on prosperity. Very little of the Bible was mentioned, and when it was, it was tailored to a message meant to build up self. I was grief-stricken.

This self-serving, get-rich gospel and the competitive church system that promotes it are now under the Ichabod anathema. It’s all cursed and dead, and soon we’ll see God do what he said he would do to Israel: “I will make this house like Shiloh.” He’s going to cut down the money tree, and a great spoiling will follow. All the hireling shepherds are going to face bankruptcy, and overnight their

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massive church programs will be gone.

The good news is that in the midst of God's judgment, he has a true church that is full of his glory — a Samuel Company. Here is what Phinehas' widow missed: God was bringing forth a new thing out of the ruins of that Eli church of greed. He was doing a supernatural work to bring back his glory. And it was all happening right in front of this woman, in her own house.

You see, in the midst of Shiloh, while judgment was falling on Israel, the Lord was raising up a Samuel Company. These were people who had been weaned from the world. They knew the voice of the Lord and were wholly dedicated to him.

Likewise, the Lord has a Samuel Company in this generation. He's raising them up out of the ruins of a greedy church and is calling them to himself. And he will never forsake them. I meet members of this invisible Samuel Company all over the world. They hear clearly from the Lord, and they're not afraid to bring a word to warn his church.

Moreover, God has multitudes of hidden, unknown prophets, and they're being trained in the school of hardship. They're part of the Samuel Company, and they know what's coming, because the Lord has told them. In spite of coming judgments, these godly ones are full of hope and rejoicing, because they see a new day coming.

The fact is, Phinehas' widow had no reason to worry about the ark of the covenant. That's because it was crowned with a mercy seat. Let me explain.

In ancient Israel, the ark represented the mercy of the Lord, a powerful truth that came to be embodied in Christ. We are to receive his mercy, trust in the saving blood of his mercy, and be saved eternally. So, you can ridicule the law, you can mock holiness, you can tear down everything that speaks of God. But when you mock or ridicule God's mercy, judgment comes and swiftly. If you trample on his blood of mercy, you face his awful wrath.

That's exactly what happened to the Philistines when they stole the ark. Deadly destruction came down on them until they had to admit, "This isn't just chance or happenstance. God's hand is clearly against us." Consider what happened when the ark was taken into the heathen temple of Dagon, to mock and challenge Israel's God. In the middle of the night, the mercy seat on the ark became a rod of judgment. The next day, the idol Dagon was found fallen on its face before the ark, its head and hands cut off.

Beloved, this is where America should be today. We should have been judged long ago. I say to all who mock and challenge the mercy of God: Go ahead, try all you want to bring Christ's church under the power of secularism or agnosticism. But if you mock the mercy of Christ, God will cast all your power and authority to the ground. Jeremiah says, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lamentations 3:22). Yet when men make a mockery of that great mercy which is Christ, judgment is sure.

It is only the mercy of the Lord that delays judgment. And right now America is benefiting from that mercy. Incredibly, our country is in a race with the rest of the world to remove God and Christ from society. Yet the Lord won't be mocked; his mercies endure forever, and he loves this nation. I believe that is why he's still pouring out blessings on us. His desire is that his goodness will lead us to repentance (see Romans 2:4).

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The Samuel Company of godly men and women know this. They're not despairing over the present condition in America, or over the horrible Eli church of greed. That simply isn't their focus. Yes, they grieve over the awful corruption, mockery and sin, and they know judgment is coming. But they have hope, knowing God is in full control. You see, they've tasted for themselves the mercy of God in Christ, and they know his mercies endure forever. And, unlike Phinehas' widow, they'll never concede that the enemy is winning the war against Christ and his true church.

Finally, there is also the matter of personal pain. I want to speak now to those who have experienced something of the pain of this hurting widow. I'm talking about types of pain that are severe, constant pain, pain that touches the body, the heart, the spirit. Trouble has piled upon trouble, with seemingly no end in sight. And the pain is indescribable.

Yours may be the pain of losing a precious loved one ... the pain of a debilitating disease ... the pain of rejection ... the awful pain of a broken marriage ... the pain of children living in terrible sin ... pain that nobody else can understand.

I talked to a minister recently who lives in such physical pain that it drives him to the floor in agony. This man has gone from doctor to doctor, but none has been able to explain or treat his condition. He's forced to live in a constant agony that is literally unexplainable.

Then there are pains that go deep into the spiritual world, a hounding of the mind. Some mental sufferings are so overwhelming that they do more than merely test your faith; they shake the very foundations of your belief in God. This kind of human pain makes you cry out, "Oh, Lord, have you forsaken me? Have you even heard any of my prayers? Are you even there?"

It's not uncommon for a believer to experience a "brass heaven" when he's been confused by a severe trial. He doesn't feel like praying, and when he does it's without passion. He's too burdened or wearied by his struggle to focus on God's Word, so when he does try to read the Bible it doesn't even register.

That's when Satan moves in. He comes to us at the very height of our pain and suffering and plants a hellish lie. It's the same lie that he infused into the mind of Christ during the Crucifixion: "God has left you. He has forsaken you and passed you by." These attacks can be relentless, bringing lies, accusations, condemnation, and adding a burden of guilt to the pain. He whispers, "You don't have what it takes to make it. You don't even pray anymore. How can you expect to be saved?"

His goal is for you to follow the example of the widow of Phinehas, to give in to abject hopelessness and quit the battle. That embattled woman made a fatal mistake, concluding in her awful pain: "God isn't with me. I don't feel his presence anymore. I've been forsaken." At that moment, she gave up completely, casting aside her faith.

This brings me to one of the greatest burdens I have as a shepherd of the Lord. I have been crying continually to the Lord, "Oh, God, how do I bring hope and comfort to believers who are enduring such great pain and suffering? Give me a message that will cancel their doubt and fear. Give me truth that will dry up the tears of the grieving and put a song on the lips of the hopeless."

The message I hear from the Holy Spirit for God's people is very simple: "Go to my Word, and stand on my promises. Reject your doubtful feelings." All hope is born out of God's promises.

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I received a letter recently that contains a beautiful, living illustration of this. It's from a mother who writes, "My daughter is sixteen years old. She has a physical degeneration of her muscles, ligaments and joints, and is in extreme pain twenty-four hours a day. I lost my son to suicide in 1997 due to the same pain. He was twenty-two when, after nine years of suffering, he took his life. He couldn't handle the pain.

"My daughter was a ballerina and was looking forward to going to Juilliard School in New York City. But her dreams were shattered when she was stricken with the same disease that tormented her brother. The doctors said her pain on a scale of 1 to 10 is at 14. The amount of painkiller needed to be effective for her would destroy her kidneys, so she can't take the medicine.

"She loves the Lord, and is a joy to be around. She is a wonderful poet whose writings have appeared in over fifteen publications, and she is listed in the 'International Who's Who in Poetry.'"

In the face of everything, amid a relentless shaking of body and soul, this mother and her daughter have put their hope in God's Word to them. And he has given them peace.

Has the enemy tried to tell you that God has bypassed you? Have you been tempted to conclude that the Lord isn't with you? Have you almost given up your faith? Put your hope in the Lord's Word to you:

- "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).
- "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee" (Psalm 9:9-10).
- "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread ... The Lord ... forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever" (Psalm 37:23-25, 28).
- "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).□