

Receiving Faith: The Hospitality of God Amid the Crisis of Global Migration

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For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19

*no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well*
“Home” by Warsan Shire

According to the International Organization for Migration of United Nation’s World Migration Report for 2020², there are approximately 272 million migrants globally as of 2019. Factors contributing to global migration include war, economic upheaval, climate change causing food shortages, religious persecution, political unrest, violence, and failed state and local governments who cannot provide for or protect their people.

We now have 82.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, including 26 million refugees with 45.7 million people internally displaced within their countries and 4.2 million asylum seekers, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency.³ Mass migrations of people fleeing violence, persecution, and economic deprivation are changing both the countries they are going to and the countries they are leaving behind. As this phenomenon increases, it is being accompanied by a growing backlash among nations receiving migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as nationalists fear that they are losing their own countries to newcomers. Conflict between people groups is accelerating as immigration, migration, the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, and what happens to the vulnerable and persecuted promises to become one of the major challenges of the 21st Century.

What role will the global church play in all of this? Will we cling to our national identities and look to our nation-states to protect us from “foreigners” and those some say are “invaders” of our own cultures? Will we see our nationalistic identities as primary and enfold our church expressions back into our own countries? The possibility of this only exists for the church in countries with freedom of religion. Currently, OpenDoorsUSA lists at least 50 countries⁴ where

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²International Organization for Migration World Migration Report, 2020. (2019). Retrieved from https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr_2020.pdf

³United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020, June). Figures at a Glance. Retrieved August 15, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

⁴World Watch List. (2020, January 15). Retrieved August 15, 2020, from <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

Christians face high or extreme levels of persecution, so finding refuge in nationalist identities is not even possible for them. Or, forsaking our hope in the kingdoms of this world, will we see the bigger picture of what God is doing globally with 272 million migrants on the move?

Perhaps we might then embrace the full meaning of Acts 17:24-28, which says,

From one man he [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

If we believe that God is in control of the movements of people around the world so they will seek Him and reach out to Him and find Him, then instead of seeing mass migration as a threat, we might instead see it as a massive opportunity to reach the nations with the gospel not only by *sending* missionaries to the nations (*ethne*, or people groups), but by *receiving* the nations when they come to us. To receive the homeless poor cast out wanderer spoken of in Isaiah 58:7, we will have to take on the ethic and nature of Jesus as exhibited through his journey to the Cross and his death and resurrection where he lowered himself, gave up the divine prerogative, loved sacrificially, and took on the nature of a slave to secure our salvation and to be exalted above all things. This requires us to receive faith from God that exhibits itself in the hospitality of God, with sacrificial love for the stranger.

I met Hector⁵ at an incredibly difficult time for our entire community, but especially for his family and people. It was a day full of grief and rage over a senseless murder that shook the Mexican immigrant community in Montgomery, Alabama. Hector came up to me to ask me about what was going to happen next, and to talk to me about his own family. People were gathered all around the house — family, friends, neighbors. Police cars rode by slowly to check on the neighborhood and provide a secure presence. Teachers from Maribel's middle school came by to offer condolences to the family and to check on her younger siblings. We went by the day before to visit Maribel's grieving mother and found the family almost inconsolable. I'd never met Maribel or her family before this, but I was doing all I could to hold back the tears that kept welling up inside of me. This shouldn't have happened.

Hector was Maribel's older cousin. He spoke English well and he explained to me the dynamics of the family and the poor neighborhood in North Montgomery where Maribel lived with her large family. Hector and his family lived several doors down and, as an extended family, they were all close. As we talked, he told me his family's story — and his story. He was brought to America from Mexico illegally when he was just 2 years old. He was now 27. He grew up in America and this was the only country he knew. Hector was a beneficiary of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), a program for undocumented immigrants who were brought to America when they were children years ago. Hector married here and had children, all of whom were U.S. citizens. We talked about his life, his family, and his cousin, Maribel, and the tragedy that overtook this poor community of Mixtec immigrants in Montgomery, Alabama.

⁵ Name changed to protect Hector's actual identity.

I got the call about Maribel's murder a couple of days before. Our city's police chief called me looking for ministers who knew the Hispanic community and who could come in and help out. He told me that a 13 year old girl was shot and killed the night before at her home. He didn't have many details to share, but asked if I could come and help minister to the community. Of course. I was out of state at the time, but I headed home and went to the neighborhood the next day. I met up with Lisa, the community ministries director with our Montgomery Baptist Association, and we went to visit. Of course, Lisa had already been there the day before as soon as she heard.

When we arrived at the house where Maribel's mother was this first day (I met Hector a couple of days later), we saw a couple of dozen people standing outside. We said hello and went in the house where family was gathered. Maribel's mother was grieving deeply. I won't share all that happened inside the home, but it was a house of tragedy and great sadness. After listening and praying for them, we went outside and I saw the large group of Mixteco men who were gathered around the house.

I walked up to them, told them I was a Baptist minister in Montgomery, and introduced myself. The men were uncles, cousins, and friends of the Barrera family. They were there for support and to just be present. Most didn't speak English. They had their heads down and were shaken. Their cousin, niece, family member, Maribel, had been senselessly killed. I began to learn more about what happened. It was Spring Break and everyone was out of school. She was up late and was sitting in a room in her house when a drive by shooting happened. The house was sprayed with bullets and one of them struck Maribel, killing her instantly. This poor immigrant family and community were devastated.

Maribel was born in the United States. Her family had been here for many years. She was a U.S. citizen. Many of those gathered that day on the lawn telling me what happened were not citizens. Some were here illegally. Many arrived years ago. Some arrived more recently. They were family and extended family. And, right now, they were all grieving, afraid, and utterly powerless. What happened next wasn't planned, but it changed me and gave me a new perspective on immigrants, the immigrant community, and how we engage in Christian ministry to those who are new to our country, our cities, and our towns. In the midst of great grief and tragedy, I engaged in *welcoming faith* with those who were suffering.

After we talked for awhile, I asked them if we could pray together. The men said yes and we began to circle up. Around the circle were men, young and old. Some were grizzled and their faces had deep lines in them, their hands calloused. They came from their jobs as manual laborers and had ball caps on. Or, they were elders who were retired. Some of them were younger and had their whole lives in front of them. But, they were all family and they were connected and they were grieving. The thought occurred to me that they weren't "them" or "they." They were "we" and "us." We were together simply as neighbors.

I told these men gathered here that they were not Mexicans. They were not foreigners. They were not immigrants. They were Montgomerians. They were a part of this community and Maribel was one of us and her death affected us all. I told them that they were not powerless or separate from us who lived here longer than them, perhaps. This was their town and we were their people. I told them that the churches and schools and police and businesses and people of Montgomery would rally around them and embrace Maribel's family and that their pain was our pain and their struggle was our struggle and that we would look to Jesus together. We all bowed our heads and cried out to God for mercy and for justice for this family in the midst of this

senseless murder. When I made this declaration, I had no idea what was going to happen, but I felt it deep in my bones to be true.

The next day, I met Hector on the front porch of the family's house and heard his story. He was grieving for his family and trying to take care of his wife and children in the midst of all of this. A news station came out and I acted as a spokesman for the family there at the beginning and I said on the news the same thing that I told those men the day before. Something along the lines of this violence affected all of us in Montgomery and we are one community and we were going to suffer and get through this together as one people. Over the next couple of weeks, my words proved to be prophetic and the churches and city of Montgomery responded in amazing ways.

The city newspaper, *The Montgomery Advertiser*, perhaps tells the story better than I could,

Sometimes you don't have to speak the same language to understand the pain. Gloria Barrera speaks Spanish, but on a recent morning outside her daughter's school, she didn't have to say a single word in any language to know her hurt. Capitol Heights Middle School planted a Japanese maple tree in her daughter Maribel Barrera's honor after she was shot and killed in the middle of the night inside her home during a drive-by shooting. Police believe Maribel was completely innocent, and her home in the Chisholm neighborhood was an unintended target ...

Maribel was 13 years old. She was soft-spoken with a beautiful smile, family and school administrators said. Charming, intelligent and approachable, they said. She loved music and the color hot pink.

She didn't deserve to die.

...Churches and Maribel's school have rallied around the Barreras and cocooned them in love, compassion and tenderness. The show of humanity gives us great comfort, knowing that when a family has been broken, this community is there for them.

The Barreras are immigrants, but there was no wall trying to keep them out of comfort in their time of need. What their church and what Maribel's school did for them was love. It was the kind of grace we should all live in. It was the kind of empathy we should have for everyone we come in touch with.⁶

The newspaper described the reaction of churches and the community to this tragedy very well. A massive funeral at a local Catholic church with city leaders attending was followed by a large meal provided by the churches of the Montgomery Baptist Association and local businesses. Friends, relatives, close family members and the community itself came out to celebrate Maribel's life and grieve her loss with her family. A tragically shortened life of a little girl that most in the city didn't know ended up affecting us all.

I continued to talk with Maribel's cousin, Hector, after this. We'd talk on the phone and meet from time to time. As a DACA recipient, he had lots of questions about what was happening with immigrants. More than anything, though, I learned his story and what his life was like as an immigrant to America. He didn't choose to come here, but he was here nonetheless. His whole life was one of living between worlds. Not fully American because of legalities beyond his

⁶<http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/opinion/editorials/2017/04/06/our-view-after-girls-fatal-shooting-there-no-wall-communitys-compassion/100098830/> Retrieved October 21, 2017

control. Not living in Mexico. His children are U.S. citizens. He had nowhere to go, so he kept his head down and tried to provide for his family here. He'd write me and tell me he was afraid of what would happen to him and his family. What if DACA was rescinded? What if he could not work any longer? What if he were deported? What would happen to his family? Where would he go? We prayed together and I kept working to try and bring a solution to this situation for Hector. For Maribel's family. For those men I prayed with on the street after her murder when I told them we were all in this together.

The Mixtec are an indigenous people group from the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. A subgroup, the Metlatonoc Mixtec⁷ of Southeastern Guerrero state in Mexico came to Central Alabama by the thousands in the 1990s and early 2000s and by the late 2010s had put down roots. They migrated to the United States looking for work after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) severely altered the market for corn by introducing cheaper U.S. corn into their own economy. They had been growing corn as their main agricultural product to survive in the hill country of southern Mexico for generations. The men who migrated north to America for work to support their families after the collapse found it in America and those who became my friends found work in the poultry plants and agricultural industry of the Deep South.

This particular subgroup of Mixtec were considered to be the largest Unreached Unengaged People Group (UUPG) in the Western Hemisphere by the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention. And, the largest group of them lived in neighborhoods and communities close to both my church and where I lived. The Montgomery Baptist Association identified the Mixtec as our primary mission to unreached peoples and we both engaged them locally in Montgomery and in Central Alabama as well as connecting with their home region in Southern Mexico. As time went on, relationships were built, the gospel was shared, and a Mixtec church was formed in Montgomery. The IMB has now changed the designation for this people group to "engaged, but unreached." We were able to see the Bible translated into their language along with the Jesus Film. And, the gospel is now being shared among the Mixtec of Central Alabama and in Southern Mexico as well. Global Migration is a platform for Global Mission.

Overcoming Fear of Migration Through Gospel Eyes

Xenophobia is a Greek word that means "fear of the other" or, *xenos*. When we look upon the sojourner as a danger and as one to fear and pull away from, we no longer see them as fellow image-bearers of God, but rather, as those who are both less than us and those who would take from us. When our identity is found most significantly in our heritage, our blood, our race/ethnicity, the land (or soil), and our shared cultural history, we see sojourners from other lands, nations, ethnic groups, and races as a threat. We fear that they will change the world we know and love. We fear that they will take our jobs and that our lives will somehow be depleted by their presence. We fear that "the other" who has come among us will change our "way of life." None of that fear is from God and it demonstrates a perspective that fails to understand how God is working to shake the world to bring the gospel to those who have not yet heard and to strengthen the church around the world through the realignment of God's people.

⁷PeopleGroups.org. (n.d.). Southeastern Guerrero Mixtec of United States. Retrieved August 15, 2020, from <https://www.peoplesgroups.org/explore/groupdetails.aspx?peid=49275>

Instead of seeing global migration according to what we might lose, perhaps, as followers of Jesus, we should think about what we might gain.

How Migration Is Changing the World

Does global migration change countries? Yes, but not how you'd think. In a paper entitled "Migration and Cultural Change"⁸ from Hillel Rapoport, Sulin Sardoschau, and Arthur Slive released in June, 2020, the authors argue that migration has more of an affect on the home country that migrants are traveling from than it does on the host country that migrants are going to. The authors said, "While migrants do act as vectors of cultural diffusion and bring about cultural convergence, this is mostly to disseminate cultural values and norms from the host to the home country (i.e., cultural remittances)."

In other words, when migrants come to a country, their home country is changed more than their host country through these "cultural remittances." Rapoport, Sardoschau, and Slive say, "migrants can also affect cultural change in the home country by transferring host-country cultural values, preferences, beliefs and social norms to their home communities. Migrants are selected to be closer to the destination culture than their average compatriots and, moreover, may assimilate, be transformed by their exposure to new cultural, social and institutional norms. They can then transfer these norms back home through communication within family, social and community networks.

All of us concerned with global mission and the spread of the gospel should recognize how receiving migrants with sacrificial love and biblical hospitality not only affects the migrants, but also communicates back to their home countries the love of God and the salvation found in Jesus. In a globally connected world through technology and travel, global mission is not just about sending missionaries to the ends of the earth. It is also about receiving sojourners from unreached people groups with sacrificial love, hospitality, and the gospel. Just as we are preparing missionaries to go, we should also prepare churches to receive the sojourner, refugee, and wanderer that come to us.

In 2016, missiologist Ed Stetzer wrote an article entitled "The Immigration Crisis and the Great Commission."⁹ In it, he referred to the work of Philip Connor and his book, *Immigrant Faith*, which showed that "when people migrate they tend to become less religious rather than staying the same. Over time, however, they will become just as religious as the dominant culture around them. Connor calls this a 'disruption in religiosity,' followed by an 'adaptation in religiosity.'"

Stetzer went on to say,

"this means that migration as a disruptive event allows us, the Church, to speak into people's lives at a key time. We can be the hands and feet of Jesus, offering love in His name, showing and sharing the love of Jesus to immigrants. But, later on, this can be more difficult. Over time, immigrants become generally more religious in

⁸Rapoport, H., Sardoschau, S., & Slive, A. (n.d.). Migration and Cultural Change [Scholarly project]. From Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University. Retrieved August 15, 2020, from https://seminars.wcfia.harvard.edu/files/pegroup/files/silve_et_al_7.28.pdf

⁹Stetzer, E. (2016, January 19). The Immigration Crisis and the Great Commission. Retrieved August 16, 2020, from <https://factsand Trends.net/2016/01/13/the-immigration-crisis-and-the-great-commission/>

their homeland's religion if they are living in the southern U.S. (where the culture is more religiously active). If they live in the northern or western U.S. (where the culture is relatively less religious), they generally become even less religious. Either way, religious patterns start to seep in over time, and the opportunity to share the gospel and minister to felt needs starts to lessen. If both of these things are true—migration is a missiological opportunity and immigrants tend to shift in their religiosity when they migrate—we must seize the opportunity before us to care and share”.

Stetzer, building on Connor's work reflects the research developed by Rapoport, Sardoschau, and Slive as well as the work and testimony of thousands and thousands of Christian workers receiving and ministering to migrants around the world with the hospitality of God. Because of transition, hardship, a shaking and disconnection with old norms and relationships, and the need for new connections in their host country, immigrants and refugees are initially open to being welcomed and received by those who would engage them in hospitality. Those caring, welcoming relationships become the foundation for the gospel to be lived, shared, received, and then transmitted back to their home countries. This receiving of sojourners, sharing of love and life, and spread of the gospel back through relational networks has a transformative effect on everyone involved in these relational networks.

My own work traveling through the Southeast from 2015 to 2019 demonstrated this theory. I saw churches in rural areas and big cities open their doors to migrants and refugees in Christian love and hospitality. The result was that the gospel spread to newcomers who had recently traveled from other parts of the world and were filled with hope and dynamism for the future. Their energy and openness spread back to the churches who received them and an exchange took place where both receiver and guest were built up, encouraged, and assimilated. Fear gave way to faith and churches and communities were renewed, immigrants came to Christ or helped strengthen churches if they were already Christians, and the gospel spread back to their homelands.

I wrote about this dynamic in Alabama for the *New York Times* in April, 2019 in an article entitled, “Alabama Is More Pro-Immigrant You Think.”¹⁰ As I traveled across the state, I engaged pastors and church members who were following God's commands to welcome the sojourner and to share the love of Jesus with all people. One such place was a little town called Union Springs, Alabama and Eastside Baptist Church.

Eastside Baptist Church, located in Union Springs, an old cotton town around 45 miles southeast of Montgomery, began reaching out to the town's immigrant community eight years ago, providing tutoring, mentoring and other assistance. Gene Bridgman, the pastor, told me that it all started when a woman in the congregation brought by 10 children whose families came from southern Mexico, part of a large influx of agricultural workers. She was already doing what she could to help them — and soon the rest of the church was, too.

What gives me hope is that this openness isn't just on the individual or congregational level; it is spreading across communities, as their faith overtakes

¹⁰Cross, A. (2019, May 01). Alabama Is More Pro-Immigrant Than You Think. Retrieved August 16, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/30/opinion/alabama-evangelicals-immigrants.html>

their fear. Earl Hinson, a former mayor of Union Springs and a member at Eastside, said that while the arrival of so many immigrants had taken some adjustment, the town's residents have come to accept them. "Once people get to know them, their hearts change," he said. "The perception that people have against them mostly comes from the news ."

I once asked Mr. Hinson what would happen if the immigrants all left Union Springs. He told me that the town would dry up. The chicken plant would leave and the plant nurseries would go elsewhere taking the tax base that was left in the county with them. Then, the utility companies wouldn't be able to provide water and electricity because the businesses were gone. He said that it would be a disaster for the town and county. In many ways, the influx of the immigrant workers from Mexico years ago had saved the town. And the church was growing in vibrancy as it welcomed and ministered to forty Mixtec children each week.

But, receiving and welcoming immigrants is more than a church revitalization strategy. It is more than a way to reach the nations. It is that, but there is even more going on here. When we welcome the sojourner with biblical hospitality and sacrificial love, we connect with the heart of God and we are able to know Him better. Opening our homes, churches, and communities to refugees and migrants and receiving them as we would receive Jesus helps us to connect with God's heart for the stranger and the sojourner and helps us better understand the gospel. Receiving the wandering stranger is a way that we worship God.

The Hospitality of God

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me." — Matthew 25:35.

Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 25:31-46 that the nations would be judged and divided up like sheep and goats for the Great Judgment by how they treated the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison. When he said this, he did more than tell them to do good to those in need as good works that would gain them approval. He said that how they treated the "least of these" was how they treated him. He made their good works toward the poor part of their devotional lives. Our love for God is directly proportional to how we love those around us in need, especially those who are of the people of God. We are not saved by doing good works, but if we know Jesus and love Him, then we will love those that Jesus loves.

1 John 4:20 says, "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." This is the point that Jesus is getting at. If we claim to know God yet we turn away from people in need around us, then how can we claim to belong to Jesus who gave his life for the very enemies of God (Romans 5:6-8)?

The concept of biblical hospitality is a key theme throughout Scripture. We are commanded to be hospitable. 1 Peter 4:9 tells us to show hospitality without grumbling and Hebrews 13:2 tells us to not neglect to show hospitality to strangers. That is actually what the word hospitality, or *philoxenia*, means: love for the stranger. When Jesus tells us that those who belong to him and will spend eternity with him are those who welcome strangers, he is saying that receiving strangers (foreigners, sojourners, migrants) is the same as receiving him. If we have faith in Jesus, if we have received Jesus by faith, then we will also receive those whom he loves and died for. We will open our lives and hearts to strangers to welcome them the way that Jesus welcomes us.

The word that Jesus uses for *welcome* here is *synegagete*. It comes from the root word *sunago* and means to “gather together, collect, assemble, receive with hospitality, entertain.” It is a harvest word and the connotation is that we are to gather together strangers or sojourners and receive them unto ourselves with love, just like we would receive Jesus. When we have that kind of open heart to strangers and migrants who are fleeing violence, war, poverty, and persecution, we will welcome them in such a way that the love of Jesus will flow from us to them and the gospel will be proclaimed to them through the way that we love and receive them.

Furthermore, we get the concept of the *synagogue* from *sunago*, which was the Jewish gathering for the reading of Scripture, prayer, and worship. The New Testament church, or the “called out ones,” is very much based on the concept of the synagogue. It isn’t too much of a stretch to say that when Jesus told us to “welcome the stranger,” he was really saying that we were to open up our lives with the kind of faith that received Jesus himself and then receive into our lives the migrant, refugee, and wanderer in a way that would “church” them. Welcoming the Stranger is far more than a good work or command. It appears to be a major way that Jesus wanted the gospel to interact with the movement of peoples around the world and only those who know and receive him will really do this. The “goats” who reject the stranger, also reject Jesus and show that they do not really know him.

Now, at this point, an objection will arise along the lines of legality, rule of law, and our limited ability to receive and welcome all people. Are we really saying that our faith in Jesus is being held up for scrutiny by how well we welcome the stranger in need? Yes. I think so. While we are not able to set a nation’s immigration policy and while we agree that a nation has every right and ability to police its borders and enforce the rule of law and that we should obey the law unless it calls us to disobey God, the disposition of the Christian who follows Jesus should always be that of sacrificial love for the stranger (*philoxenia* or hospitality) in the same way that we love and welcome Jesus. Instead of pulling back in fear of the other (*xenophobia*), we are to open our hearts and lives in hospitality and love for the stranger (*philoxenia*). Followers of Jesus who are full of faith in God are to be different from those who do not see the world according to the Kingdom of God and who seek to protect their own way of life because of fear.

A Warning: Zechariah 7 and the Whirlwind

How we treat the widow, the orphan, the sojourner, and the poor is so important that God announced again and again to His people that they would be judged based on their hearts toward the least of these. One of those warnings comes in Zechariah 7 when the Jewish people have returned from exile in Babylon and they inquire of God about whether or not they should continue fasting at set times now that they are back in the land. God asks who they were fasting for? For Him, for themselves? Then, God puts before them what he really wants from them starting in verse 8:

And the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, 9 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

Do justice. Love mercy. Be humble. Treat the widow, the orphan, the sojourner, and the poor well. How we treat the least of these is directly proportional to how we see God and worship Him. If we want to influence nations for God, we must reflect the heart of God

toward the marginalized and dispossessed. That is how God wants the nations to see Him: through the lens of sacrificial love, which would then prepare the nations for the message of the Cross of Christ.

But, they refused to listen. The rest of the chapter reads tragically.

11 But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. 12 They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts.

There is a progression here that goes from not listening to instruction to turning away from God to removing themselves from God's Word altogether to their hearts becoming diamond hard. How God's people see and treat the poor, the vulnerable, and the sojourner is directly proportional to their relationship with God Himself. When they treat them badly, it is a sign that they have already been turned over to judgment and are living apart from God.

Often, we see mistakenly only God's judgment as a meteor from heaven, an earthquake, or some kind of massive calamity. But, what if God's judgment is being turned over to hard and rebellious hearts that don't adequately care for others around us and that grasp for power to protect our own way of life? What if the judgment and loss we fear is already at work within us when we refuse to love and care for the weakest among us that God has brought our way to receive? What if the sojourner, the immigrant, and the refugee in our midst is a test to reveal to us our hearts and whether or not we are with God or not? And, if we turn away from them, perhaps that just reveals that we have also turned away from God Himself.

God responds to them by saying, "As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear," says the Lord of hosts, 14 "and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and the pleasant land was made desolate."

Those who fail to treat the widow, the orphan, the sojourner, and the poor well and reject God's Word on this will not be heard by God. And the whirlwind will come and scatter them among the nations and they will be poor wanderers without a home to dwell in, cut off from relationship. Their pleasant land will be made desolate. This is quite a warning.

How we treat people matters. How we treat the sojourner who comes before us matters deeply to our own spiritual walk and our relationship with God and with one another. When we reject those in need around us, the result is a hardened heart that is then broken off from the relationships that we once had.

But, Jesus calls us to a better way: the way of the Cross. In Isaiah 58:7, we are told to provide the poor wanderer with shelter. The concept behind the "poor wanderer" is "one who is cast out." He is a refugee, so to speak. When we loose the bonds of injustice and oppression, share our food with the hungry, cover the naked, and bring the wanderer into our house, the result is an outpouring of the Spirit of God upon us.

Isaiah 58:8-9 says, "Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. 9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'"

The result of addressing injustice, doing right, opposing violence and oppression, and caring for the poor and the cast out wanderer is that God will cause our light to break out like the dawn and our healing will come upon us. Our influence upon the nations will grow proportionally to how we care for those God loves. And, then we will be strengthened by the Lord and we will get to see our age old foundations renewed and our cities rebuilt.

Isaiah 58:12 “And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.”

Conclusion

With the largest refugee crisis in world history upon us and almost 300 million migrants on the move, the opportunity before the church to reach the nations by welcoming and having the faith to receive the sojourner is before us like never before. When we open up our hearts and lives with concern and compassion, we will find an openness to the gospel emerges. We will gain the right to minister healing and welcome to those who have left everything they know behind. And, the love of Jesus will penetrate hearts through those relationships.

As we engage in this welcoming and receiving ministry, we find that we are actually welcoming Jesus into our midst and he strengthens and comforts us. The ancient ruins and foundations are rebuilt and our streets will be restored. God’s light will shine upon us and our healing will appear and we will be a light to the nations.

The way to express the influence of Christ upon us is through the Cross and through sacrificial love. When we grasp after power and try to protect ourselves against others, we actually lose power and our hearts become hard. The whirlwind comes and our land is left desolate. But, when we love God and love the people that Jesus loves and we gather them to ourselves with the hospitality that God shows us, we will see a chain reaction that will reach around the world.