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Sermon Notes

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Run for Your Lives!

Isaiah 15-16

I will never forget the haunted look in their eyes... the most pitiable people I've ever seen in my life. They were refugees from Afghanistan in the summer of 1987, and we were ministering to them in Peshawar, Pakistan

Over seven years before that, on December 27, 1979, Russian paratroopers landed in Kabul, Afghanistan, to prop up a tottering communist regime. Over 100,000 troops followed, pouring in from the north, and the Soviet Union entered a war that became for them as deep a quagmire as Viet Nam had been for the U.S.

The Soviet invasion had a devastating effect on the Afghan people. Because the rural population fed and housed the mujahidin, the Soviets tried to eliminate or remove civilian populations from the countryside where resistance was based. Soviet bombing destroyed entire villages, crops and irrigation, leaving millions of people dead, homeless or starving. Land mines maimed unsuspecting Afghans, especially children who mistook them to be toys.

Refugee camps around Peshawar, Pakistan sprang up and quickly became overcrowded, unsanitary and insufficiently supplied. The total number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan rose to over three million. These were the people we had gone to minister to. They barely had the clothes on their backs; many of them had seen loved ones killed by the Russians or by the mujaheddin... by landmines or by other tragic accidents. They were not really welcome in Pakistan and had dim prospects for the future.

Since that time I have seen many poor places around the world... in India and in Haiti especially... but I have never seen destitution, terror, and hopelessness like in the refugee camps around Peshawar.

Refugee... a word that evokes a strong reaction based on the horrors of the last century

Documentaries of WWII show seemingly endless lines of European refugees fleeing Hitler's war machine... pathetic lines of people with a similar haunted and terrorized look on their faces... an elderly woman pushing a baby carriage with a framed painting, a lamp and a party dress down the road in France in the summer of 1940... that was all she had left of her former life before the Germans invaded

Even worse, the lines of refugees being strafed by Nazi dive bombers... innocent civilians machine-gunned in the road, with nowhere to hide. This is the image we have of refugees: terror-stricken people clinging to tatters from a formerly comfortable and prosperous life... now all they want is simply to live and not die

Chinese people running in Manchuria from the invading Japanese... Russian peasants running from the Germans in the Ukraine... Polish people fleeing the Germans at the beginning of the war and the Russians at the end... European Jews fleeing everywhere, trying to escape the concentration camps

Refugees... fleeing hearth and home, possessions and comfort, stripped of everything of value, hearts beating wildly, looking for a safe haven where they can simply survive

The modern refugee scene is more complex, but just as overwhelming

The United Nations High Commission on Refugees estimates that there were over 65 million displaced persons in 2007... some fleeing wars, some fleeing for political reasons, some fleeing religious persecution... some fleeing the effects of natural disasters like tsunamis and earthquakes

That is the issue that faces us in Isaiah 15-16... the little Gentile nation of Moab was crushed by some unnamed invading force and they ran for their lives... a terrified little flock of refugees seeking asylum from Judah, their ancient enemy

It is a picture of salvation in Christ for every person

I. Moabite Refugees Fleeing in Terror

A. Prophecies Against the Nations

1. Isaiah 13-23: one oracle after another from Almighty God over the nations
2. the Sovereign God rules all the earth, orchestrates the issues of all the earth
3. here he speaks an oracle concerning the tiny, ancient people of Moab... the Moabites
4. for according to these two chapters, within three years of the oracle, the Moabites would become refugees, fleeing for their lives

B. Who Are the Moabites?

1. descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew
2. Lot himself was a refugee, fleeing from the wrath of God poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah
3. his wife turned back and looked and became a pillar of salt

4. his two unmarried daughters fled with their father to a cave where they survived the fire and brimstone
5. the daughters thought the whole human race had been extinguished, and they induced their father to drink wine; then each of them had a son by their own father
6. those two sons became the heads of two peoples—the Moabites and the Ammonites
7. the Moabites took up residence in a tiny piece of land east of the Dead Sea... stretching from the Arnon River which dumps into the Dead Sea to the ZERed River on the border with Edom... a small piece of land no more than thirty miles long by thirty miles wide
8. the Moabites were usually enemies of Israel
 - a. during the Exodus, they refused to allow Israel to pass through their territory
 - b. they hired Balaam to curse Israel
 - c. it was Moabite women who seduced Israel to worship the Baal of Peor, bringing terrible judgment on Israel
 - d. as a result, the Law of Moses forbade any of them to enter the assembly of the Lord

Deuteronomy 23:3 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation.

- e. During the time of the Judges, God gave Israel over to the Moabite king Eglon for 18 years, till Ehud killed him
- f. David defeated the Moabites and only allowed a third of their soldiers to live
- g. Moabite wives seduced King Solomon and led him to worship Chemosh, their detestable god
- h. Moab occasionally organized armies to fight Israel or Judah, but they usually lost
- i. At the end of Kings and Chronicles, Moabite raiders were still plundering Israel

9. Yet it was a godly Moabite woman, Ruth, who was David's great grandmother, included in the genealogy of the Messiah, Jesus Christ... a picture of God's saving intention toward even His corrupt enemies

10. these are the people who are running for their lives!!

Isaiah 15:1-5 An oracle concerning Moab: Ar in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night! Kir in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night! ² 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. ³ In the streets they wear sackcloth; on the roofs and in the public squares they all wail, prostrate with weeping. ⁴ Heshbon and Elealeh cry out, their voices are heard all the way to Jahaz. Therefore the armed men of Moab cry out, and their hearts are faint. ⁵ My heart cries out over Moab; her fugitives flee as far as Zoar, as far as Eglath Shelishiyah. They go up the way to Luhith, weeping as they go; on the road to Horonaim they lament their destruction.

C. Why Are they Fleeing?

1. destruction has come on Moab suddenly

Isaiah 15:1 Ar in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night! Kir in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night!

- a. Ar-moab is their most powerful citadel... a walled fortress, their ancient capital city
- b. Kir in Moab was situated on a steep mountain in the midst of the land... seemingly powerful
- c. BOTH have fallen in a single night
- d. Night time terror the worst of all... imagine running for your lives in the middle of the night

2. the people resort to their false gods and their high places, but they come up empty, for they are no gods at all

Isaiah 15:2 Dibon goes up to its temple, to its high places to weep

Isaiah 16:12 When Moab appears at her high place, she only wears herself out; when she goes to her shrine to pray, it is to no avail.

- a. Chemosh, their detestable god can do nothing to help them
- b. The foundations of their hopes are swept away in a single night
- c. Military strength gone, religious hope gone

- d. The shock leaves them shaving their heads, weeping pleading... no avail
- e. Nothing left to do but to run for their lives

Isaiah 15:5 her fugitives flee as far as Zoar, as far as Eglath Shelishiyah. They go up the way to Luhith, weeping as they go; on the road to Horonaim they lament their destruction.

- f. Like all refugees, they carry whatever they can of their possessions

Isaiah 15:7 So the wealth they have acquired and stored up they carry away over the Ravine of the Poplars.

- g. The slaughter is terrible

Isaiah 15:9 Dimon's waters are full of blood, but I will bring still more upon Dimon--a lion upon the fugitives of Moab and upon those who remain in the land.

- h. They run from one threat only to face another... an army chases them, a lion awaits them
- i. The image of their women running for their lives brings tears to our eyes

Isaiah 16:2 Like fluttering birds pushed from the nest, so are the women of Moab at the fords of the Arnon.

D. Turning to Judah for Help

Isaiah 16:1 Send lambs as tribute to the ruler of the land, from Sela, across the desert, to the mount of the Daughter of Zion.

- 1. In utter desperation, they seek refuge from Judah, their ancient enemy

E. Historical Details

- 1. No clear indication of what is happening here
- 2. No mention of this event in archaeology
- 3. Probably in 715 B.C., the Assyrian army tramped through little Moab en route to a conquest of the Arabian tribes that were in revolt... as the Assyrians swept through, they did what they always do: slaughter innocent people and take their possessions

F. The End is Near

Isaiah 16:13-14 This is the word the LORD has already spoken concerning Moab. ¹⁴ But now the LORD says: "Within three years, as a servant bound by contract

would count them, Moab's splendor and all her many people will be despised, and her survivors will be very few and feeble."

II. Weeping for the Refugees

A. God Does Not Willingly Afflict People

Lamentations 3:32-33 *Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. ³³ For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.*

1. the consistent teaching of Scripture:

- a. God brings these disasters
- b. But He does not delight in the misery they cause
- c. It is not God's home base to use His sovereign power to bring suffering

Isaiah 28:21 *The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon-- to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task.*

The "strange work" of God, His "alien task" is judgment, affliction, suffering, death

God does not delight in the misery He brings on the nations

- d. Rather He afflicts the nations to teach them their need of a Savior... to get them to consider something they would never consider any other way
 - e. The Moabites were enemies of the Jews... but salvation is from the Jews
 - f. The pride of the Moabites would have prevented their fleeing to Christ
 - g. But when you're a refugee, it's hard to have pride!!
- #### 2. so God seems to weep while bringing suffering on people
- a. Isaiah is God's spokesman
 - b. And Isaiah weeps for the Moabite refugees here
 - c. How much greater compassion does God have for them?

B. Isaiah Weeps for the Nations

Isaiah 15:5 *My heart cries out over Moab; her fugitives flee as far as Zoar, as far as Eglath Shelishiyah. They go up the way to Luhith, weeping as they go; on the road to Horonaim they lament their destruction.*

Isaiah 16:9-11 So I weep, as Jazer weeps, for the vines of Sibmah. O Heshbon, O Elealeh, I drench you with tears! The shouts of joy over your ripened fruit and over your harvests have been stilled. ¹⁰ Joy and gladness are taken away from the orchards; no one sings or shouts in the vineyards; no one treads out wine at the presses, for I have put an end to the shouting. ¹¹ My heart laments for Moab like a harp, my inmost being for Kir Hareseth.

1. one of the most striking aspects of these prophecies... Isaiah's astonishing compassion for the Gentile nations who were enemies of Judah
2. he actually says he weeps for them as much as they weep for themselves
3. in so doing, he is actually moved by God's own compassion
 - a. notice the use of the word "I", "my" in these verses

vs. 9 So I weep, as Jazer weeps, for the vines of Sibmah. O Heshbon, O Elealeh, I drench you with tears!

- b. Who is weeping? Is it Isaiah the prophet? Yes... but in the Spirit of the Lord
- c. For it is the same one who puts an end to their joyful celebrations that also weeps for them... and Isaiah had no power to put an end to the shouting!! That was God alone:

Vs. 10-11 Joy and gladness are taken away from the orchards; no one sings or shouts in the vineyards; no one treads out wine at the presses, for I have put an end to the shouting. ¹¹ My heart laments for Moab like a harp, my inmost being for Kir Hareseth.

- i) The word translated "inmost being" refers to the stomach
- ii) Like a feeling in the pit of his stomach, Isaiah feels the passion the Lord has for the Moabites... even though they live like enemies of God

C. Christ Wept for His Enemies

1. God has no body... he has no "stomach" to be moved
2. yet when Christ became incarnate, He took on a body... and the most common emotion He felt was deep compassion for suffering sinners
3. He even displayed that compassion for His enemies
 - a. For the rebellious city of Jerusalem

Luke 19:41-44 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-- but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

b. For the men who were murdering Him

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

D. The Apostle Paul Wept for His Enemies

Romans 9:1-4 I speak the truth in Christ-- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- ² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel.

E. Do We?

1. do we grieve at the great sufferings that people go through in China, with an earthquake that displaces tens of thousands of people
2. do we weep at the miseries of Muslim refugees in Bosnia... even though they are Muslims?
3. above all, do we weep for the lost... for those in darkness?

The scholarly pastor Andrew Bonar lay on his bed on a Saturday night in Scotland, and as people below tramped the streets from taverns and shows, he used to call from his tortured heart: 'Oh! they perish, they perish!'

Oswald J. Smith, brought the gospel to over fifty countries:

Can we travail for a drowning child, but not for a perishing soul? It is not hard to weep when we realize that our little one is sinking below the surface for the last time. Anguish is spontaneous then. Nor is it hard to agonize when we see the casket containing all that we love on earth borne out of the home. Ah, no; tears are natural at such a time? But oh, to realize and know that souls, precious, never dying souls, are perishing all around us, going out into the blackness of darkness and despair, eternally lost, and yet to feel no anguish, shed no tears, know no travail! How could are our hearts! How little we know of the compassion of Jesus!

Isaiah the weeping prophet represents the desire of Almighty God to allure even pagan Gentiles like the Moabites to safety in Christ

But to accomplish it, the Sovereign God brings great suffering on the nations... to strip them of their astonishing pride

III. The Great Advantage of Refugees

A. Advantage? How Can It Be?

1. the most pitiable people I've ever seen in my life... these Afghan refugees
2. what advantage can there be to running for your life, leaving everything you ever cherished behind, wondering if you will survive the night?
3. well... it strips you of the greatest obstacle to salvation: pride

B. Foundations Removed

1. military power gone... their fortress citadels were destroyed in a night
2. religious hope gone... their highplaces and false gods—like Chemosh—cannot help them
3. possessions gone... the invading army has taken whatever they left behind... the only wealth they have left is what they are carrying with them
4. God has maneuvered them exactly where He wants them

C. Pride Removed

Isaiah 16:6 We have heard of Moab's pride-- her overweening pride and conceit, her pride and her insolence-- but her boasts are empty.

1. unless these invaders had come, they never would have fled to Judah for refuge
2. and unless we suffer affliction, we will never think we need a Savior
3. every human being naturally STINKS...REEKS ... with pride

French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau was bold to proclaim the arrogant, overweening pride that most of us learn to conceal with false humility:

What could your miseries have in common with mine? My situation is unique, unheard of since the beginning of time. The person who can love me as I can love is still to be born. No one has ever had more talent for loving. I was born to be the best friend that ever existed. Show me a better man than me, a heart more loving, more tender, more sensitive. Posterity will honor me because it is my due. I rejoice in myself. My consolation lies in my self-esteem. If there were a single enlightened government in Europe, it would have erected statues to me.

Uggh!! Yet within every human heart lurks this same monster!

What has the power to cause us to abandon our fortresses of power and money and false religion and success and RUN FOR OUR LIVES to a Jewish Messiah for salvation??

4. only affliction and the Law of God cures us of this pride and causes us to seek a Jewish carpenter as a Savior from our sins

D. Nowhere Else to Turn... So they Turn to Judah

IV. The Only Safe Refuge: Christ

A. An Invitation for Refuge, and

1. with their pride stripped, the Moabite refugees have nowhere to turn but to Judah, their ancient enemy

Isaiah 16:1 Send lambs as tribute to the ruler of the land, from Sela, across the desert, to the mount of the Daughter of Zion.

2. they beg for help from the Jews

Isaiah 16:2-4 Like fluttering birds pushed from the nest, so are the women of Moab at the fords of the Arnon. ³ "Give us counsel, render a decision. Make your shadow like night-- at high noon. Hide the fugitives, do not betray the refugees. ⁴ Let the Moabite fugitives stay with you; be their shelter from the destroyer." The oppressor will come to an end, and destruction will cease; the aggressor will vanish from the land.

B. A Stunning Prophecy: A Ruler from the House of David

Isaiah 16:5 In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it-- one from the house of David-- one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness.

1. Isaiah predicts the establishment of a throne that will rule in righteousness
2. one from the house of David who will bring justice to the nations
3. there at last is every refugee's place of safety
4. there at last can every terrified sinner find refuge...
5. in the shadow of Christ's eternal throne every terrified refugee can find eternal life, security... and no one will ever make them afraid again
6. in the Old Covenant, no Moabite could ever enter the assembly of the Lord even to the tenth generation
7. but in the New Covenant, every Gentile people will have a representative around the throne in heaven

8. and only affliction, suffering, sadness, death... and even being a refugee... can bring proud sinners to the point at which they come to Christ

C. Someday the Whole World Will Become Refugees

1. the Lord will upend all nations and shake them out

Isaiah 13:13-14 Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger. ¹⁴ Like a hunted gazelle, like sheep without a shepherd, each will return to his own people, each will flee to his native land.

Haggai 2:6-7 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations

Isaiah 30:27-28 See, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. ²⁸ His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction

Hebrews 12:26-27 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷ The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

2. the ground beneath their feet will be moved from its place

Hebrews 1:10-12 He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ¹¹ They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. ¹² You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

3. everyone will be moved from their earthly home to their final home
4. nothing will remain of all they ever knew
5. the people will be fleeing a terror unlike any they have ever seen in history: the wrath of God and of the Lamb, Jesus Christ
 - a. a "refugee" is one fleeing something terrifying
 - b. the Afghan refugees were fleeing the Russian army, the invading force that came with overwhelming power... including the terrifying Hind helicopter gunships that would appear out of nowhere and strafe columns of fleeing refugees

- c. at the end of history, during the tribulation, people will flee the pouring out of wrath

Revelation 6:12-17 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, ¹³ and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. ¹⁴ The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶ They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The whole world will be fleeing the wrath of God at that point... refugees, every last one of them!!

- d. but the coming wrath is Judgment Day... and that terror should make refugees of us all

Isaiah 13:9 See, the day of the LORD is coming--a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger-- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.

Matthew 3:7 Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

The real issue is Judgment Day... at the wrath of God poured out not for a day but for eternity, in hell

Fleeing from the wrath to come should make refugees of us all!!

The question is always, "Where should we run? To whom can we flee?"

D. Christ is the Only Refuge for Spiritual Refugees

1. the wrath of God is coming for sins
2. but the wrath of God has already come once before
 - a. Christ suffered and died on the cross that He might propitiate God's wrath
 - b. Christ is the only refuge that will enable refugees to survive that coming terror
3. Christ has promised to rescue us completely from that coming wrath

1 Thessalonians 1:10 wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

E. Run for Your Lives!! Flee to Christ

At the beginning of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian realizes that the city he's living in is rightly called the City of Destruction, and that to survive he must leave behind everything he's ever loved and known and go on pilgrimage. So he puts his fingers in his ears so he can't hear the pleas of his unbelieving family and the taunts of his mocking neighbors. He then runs with all haste, fleeing the coming wrath... running toward Christ, running for his life!!

This world is going to be destroyed and everything in it

We ought to be living as Christian did in *Pilgrim's Progress*... as on pilgrimage through hostile territory... with only occasional moments of refuge from Christian brothers and sisters who also know that we are in an alien world

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: the clearest mark of a Christian is found in how he looks at this world

V. Applications

A. Nothing Here is Eternal... So Flee Every Day to Christ

1. look at your possessions differently
2. look at your time here on earth as a refugee just passing through

Hebrews 11:13-16 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

3. understand the constant need for Christ's protection from the wrath to come

B. Live a Holy Life Worthy of Our Future Home... Personal Holiness

2 Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will

bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

C. Cry Out over our hardness of heart

1. why do we not weep for the lost as Isaiah wept for the Moabite refugees?
2. why do we not weep for the lost as William Carey for the heathen of India?
3. why do we not weep for the lost as Andrew Bonar did for those tramping to and from the tavern on a Saturday night?
4. simple answer: our hearts are hard
5. cry out against the hardness of your own heart as I dry out for mine... until we show the kind of compassion Isaiah, Paul and Christ did

D. Consider a Ministry to Refugees

1. hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled for their lives all around the world, persecuted
2. Persecution Project specializes in ministering to Christian refugees... especially in Darfur