

1 TIMOTHY 5:9-16

(Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:1-28; 1 Tim.5:1-16)

The Widow In Her Place!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

We began our previous sermon on the verses 3 till 8 noting the lowly place a widow had in the time these verses were written.

As we saw of the way society was then, those women did not have a happy lot.

They were right at the bottom of society's pecking order.

You see, they had no husbands and so no income or status.

That's why the sight which met our Lord outside the town of Nain, with the widow following the coffin of her only son, was the saddest possible sight!

As the passage begins for our text this afternoon, however, we see virtually the opposite!

William Hendriksen says that while the previous passage was about "Widows and *their* need," this is about "Widows and *their* work."

You see, widows are so highly regarded here they form a very special part within the church!

In fact, you don't get to be on the list of widows unless there is no doubt **you are** the Lord's!

Here it is obvious the widow has her place.

But it is also obvious this is not every widow's place.

As we saw from verse 6 before the text, not all widows are deserving of being called widows in the early church.

So what we'll see this afternoon are three different groups in relation to defining who are the widows found in the early church.

The first of these, naturally enough, is **THOSE WIDOWS DESERVING OF SUPPORT.**

The verses 9 and 10 clearly outline key qualifications for being supported by the church as a widow.

There is a list mentioned here.

A list which meant not only that she had to be suitably eligible in a number of areas but also that there would be an ongoing commitment as a widow.

We realise this because it's said that she must be over sixty.

To be sixty at the time of the text meant you were regarded as a senior person.

This lady would have been well past child-bearing age and so quite differently motivated than a widow much younger than this age.

So she was not likely to be giving up her single status to get married.

On the outside there seems to be here an understanding as to what makes up the kind of women who can get help from the church.

And going on through verse 10 one has to say that this is quite some list as to what a woman had to have done before she's eligible for aid.

There are a number of specific characteristics spelt out.

And they're not so easy either!

This is describing someone quite definitely above reproach.

So those who are able to get help from the church are also very much those who are able to give help to the church.

The reference to being faithfully married means that these widows can be models to those younger.

We get the same thought from Titus 2.

The younger women spoken of there learn about being subject to their husbands through the example of those older women.

To say that she must be "well known for her good deeds" is what's expected of all Christians.

The Ephesian believers had already been told in Paul's letter to them about this.

As Ephesians 2 verse 10 said, "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works."

In Titus 2 it also appears.

Verse 14 there summarises our service for the Lord as being part of a people "eager to do what is good."

And this quality then leads into what follows.

For isn't "bringing up children" vitally important here?

One tragedy that happens too often in the life of the church is that of parents who were so committed to serving the Lord in His Church they didn't spend enough time with their own children.

It's the warning every young minister should be told when he sets off all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed into the fulltime pastorate.

Because what has to come first is his own family.

That warning consists first of all in taking heed to his marriage.

And as his marriage comes first so then his children will have the utmost importance to him also.

For the widow the bringing up of her children shows she's got the runs on the board.

She knows what it's like being a mother and homemaker.

The showing of hospitality was an especially helpful thing in that time.

Believers needed safe places to stay when they travelled.

And while we might not need exactly the same for accommodating fellow saints nowadays we must always have an open door and a warm cuppa ready to be served.

You see, we have to show we're here to serve them.

As the Master said that he was here to serve and not be served so His servants must also show the same!

This was something noted of Lydia in Acts 16:40.

But it has always been found in godly women, as the widow of Zarephath showed to Elijah in 1 Kings 17, and the Shunammite woman demonstrated by lodging Elisha in 2 Kings 4.

Washing the feet of saints adds further to this same picture.

This means caring for those on the road.

And in the early church there would no doubt have been the early preachers in mind here.

They would have come into these Christian home after a hard day on the road.

A day of preaching and teaching and long distances.

It was our Lord in John 13 who washed the feet of His disciples.

He gave that example so that they might do it to each other.

And certainly washing someone else's feet, the task of the lowliest servant, was one way such a person showed their humility.

Helping those in trouble meant that this type of woman took risks.

Because when you help those in trouble you're putting yourself in harm's way.

It's a risk to help in this way.

We need only to think of the early Christians who were the only ones staying in a city when the plague struck in its most deadliest form.

While everyone else would flee for the countryside, the Christians would help relieve the dying.

And then the list ends as it began.

These women devote themselves to all kinds of good deeds.

Christianity is so very practical – and can't you see it in them!

On the one hand this tells us that having served others throughout their life-time the time has come for these widows to, in turn, receive help also.

But, on the other hand, when does one ever stop giving in the church?

And as Titus 2 verses 4 and 5 tell us, isn't this still carrying on through these women in the covenant community?

Dear sisters in the faith, this is quite some list.

And you might have thought it was a bit over the top in terms of the requirements needed before you get some assistance from the church.

Shouldn't the church of all organisations be the one that's most forgiving and gracious?

But, then again, what's this got to do with the church?
Shouldn't it be the Lord of the Church who we look up to here?
And what do you think Jesus expects of you right now?
Is He pleased when we treat the greatest gift of salvation through His doing and dying
disrespectfully?
Are you pleased to give Him second-best?

This is how we come now to the second aspect in the text this afternoon.
For next we consider, **THOSE WIDOWS WHO OUGHT NOT TO BE.**

The verses 11 till 15 turn our focus on those who shouldn't be put on the widows' list.
But unlike verse 6 above which speaks about those widows who aren't looking to
God as not being worthy widows, this addresses our attention upon those widows who are
younger.

Thus we assume that they are those younger than sixty.
Indeed, verse 11 says that they are those who can be influenced by
their sensual desires.

They are those who might still marry.
It's a natural desire and it could affect them to the degree they're willing to marry
even unbelievers.

Sad and as devastating as that is, it does happen.

A friend of mine who had such a blessed Christian marriage with his first wife, upon her
death from cancer quickly married again.

But it was a relationship based on the wrong reasons, and how much heartbreak
didn't that bring?

This is what verse 12 speaks of in saying that when those younger widows marry this
way they have broken their first pledge.

They have gone against the Lord.
They deliberately disobeyed Him.
He who saved them is being ignored by them.

There cannot be the Lord's blessing upon those relationships.
And while those marriages may seem to be alright on the outside, a divided
loyalty is not one that can be a model to be emulated within the covenant community.

There were also other hazards in having younger widows placed on this list.
As those who were younger these women would have had a lot of time and energy
on their hands.

That had to be used profitably.
Yet giving them a widow's support could instead lead to unprofitable lives.
As those who didn't need to work to support their families they could end up
wasting time by constant socialising.

They say too much time on their hands is not good for you.

And it's so true.

Verse 13 succinctly describes what could happen then.

They could get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house in their boredom.

And then, because of that going about house to house, they become gossips and busybodies.

I mean, visiting as much as that, you've got to have something to talk about.

And when you've run out of the good news, there's always the bad news, isn't there?

The weekly women's magazines even give you that stuff if you can't think of any!

I will never forget sitting behind two Sydney ladies as they were going back to their homes in the eastern suburbs.

What they were talking about was so scandalous!

And it wasn't about anyone I knew.

But I could imagine how those being talked about that way felt.

Because they were probably saying the same about these two women!

The whole bus ride they spoke like this.

It was all so petty and vindictive.

And it was all because they had the means and support to do exactly this!

There is an old Spanish proverb which goes, "If someone gossips **to you** about someone else, you can be sure they'll be gossiping **about you** when they're with someone else!

How true!

You can imagine how destructive such a scene would have been.

And perhaps those believers then didn't have to imagine it.

They may have had such a situation like this happen.

Some younger widows had been put on the list.

And so they had become involved with ministry amongst the women of the church.

Women who were busy trying to live faithfully with their husbands and raise their children.

But they had infected those homes with this gossip.

Families had been destabilised.

As a result there had been much division in the congregation.

And all because they've got nothing else better to do!

Well, Paul says, then they should do something with their lives!

In verse 14 he clearly outlines what the will of the Lord is for those younger widows.

He recognises what we read in 1st Corinthians 7 that sexual self-control is not a gift given to all Christians.

In fact, for most believers the married state is the one we have to be in.

And when Paul speaks about marrying here it is clear this is the marriage that must be **in the Lord**.

Using the word counsel here doesn't only mean some handy advice, it means a clear direction for their lives.

A direction which the rest of the church has to be active in fulfilling for them as well.

You see, much as we might not like the idea of match-making, within the church it fills a very valuable purpose.

While some of us may not have had a lot of success with it, it is coming from the right motivation.

And how many times hasn't the Lord blessed it?

In this way, the arranged marriages of the past did have something in their favour.

There were older adults looking at relationships for those younger in a more mature way.

And while those possible marriage prospects might not be the most handsome or pretty to look at, you will get a lot more out of someone like that than someone who's quite full of themselves!

I like the way this is pictured in a pre-marital counselling article.

There it says: "Quite often, people are looking for the wrong things in marriage – hankering after what is unattainable for them, and failing to appreciate the blessings they actually possess.

"Carol sits in the cinema and compares George, sitting by her side, with the film star on the screen.

"By that standard, poor George doesn't come out very well.

"What Carol needs to accept is that she wouldn't have an earthly chance of marrying the film star; that even if she did, he would probably act very differently off the screen; and that good, solid, dependable George can really contribute far more to her fulfilment in life than her celluloid idol ever could."

And, furthermore, there is counsel given to those then marrying to have children.

This will certainly keep them busy!

In particular, though, aren't we reminded here of the creation mandate?

Genesis 1 verses 26 till 28 commanded mankind to go forth and multiply.

And since we know the Creator God through the Saviour God don't we know how much this is what we were made for?

It's in the sphere of the family that the woman finds her true worth.

Managing their homes again brings up the picture of Proverbs 31 where we see the important influence she does have.

By Paul saying that this gives the enemy no opportunity for slander shows how healthy relationships within the family are the best promotion for the gospel.

Satan uses all kinds of deviances to distract us away from the Lord.

And whenever he can lead believers astray there you'll find the gospel in a bad way!

But the word for 'enemy' here can also mean the devilish opposition in human form.

The world is looking upon us very closely.

And while they allow themselves to get away with all kinds of immoral behaviour they won't let us get away with even a hint of scandal!

Then it will be front page news, I can assure you!

Then you will see how important it is that we live the way that pleases God, as verse 4 has told us.

The situation in the churches then has meant, however, that some of these younger widows have completely turned their backs on the Lord.

Verse 15 sadly describes this.

In fact, the language here is such that these women have walked right back into this world.

These are those who have been too desperate to marry again.

And in so giving over to their passions, they have married unbelievers and so broken their first pledge.

You can imagine the hurt that would still be there amongst those early New Testament churches.

Those who had been so much part of them.

And now they had just walked out from them!

Congregation, this is all about family.

First about the spiritual family - God's Family.

This is the most important family.

We certainly see that with those widows who have followed their own desires.

Because they are now totally lost.

But as much as it depends on the church no one else should be allowed to drift like that.

And so it is that while the spiritual family is the most important Paul recognises that it depends on the physical family doing its job!

As we see the different groups in relation to the situation of widows in the early church here we note that **THE WIDOW'S FAMILIES HAVE TO ACT.**

Our third group.

Having dealt with THOSE WIDOWS DESERVING OF SUPPORT and THOSE WIDOWS WHO OUGHT NOT TO BE, now we turn to consider THOSE WIDOW'S FAMILIES HAVE TO ACT.

This is where verse 16 comes in.

Because while it addresses women in particular it does so exactly as they are the managers of the home.

While some commentators see this as tying in with the general subject of widows and thus it is speaking about widows, it is wider than that.

For sure, this may mean that a widow like Lydia is involved in helping other widows in her family, or in the church, because she is materially able to do so.

Lydia was wealthy, she had a spacious home, and she can use such a woman in her staff.

Perhaps she could provide a place for more than one widow!

But the real focus here is that places are being provided for these women.

They're being taken in by their families.

And so they're not being left in a situation where they feel they need other help outside the church.

It's that other help which can distract these women away from the gospel.

Much as those young women may say it's because they fell in love with that unbeliever, it's really a case where they ended up in a position of being open to being lead that way.

How else would they have met that person and developed that relationship?

You see, these young women have lost their husbands.

And while there will have been a lot of concern and help for them when that happened, it's a love which has to keep being shown to them.

Any of us who has lost a loved one realises this.

The connection with their families ties this in to what we heard of in verse 4.

It's that woman's own family who should put their religion into practice by helping her.

And while that care here may well be for a younger widow than the older one alluded to in verse 4, it is still a commitment to her.

It's also relevant to note that a woman here is specifically assigned the task of helping the widow.

That is most relevant especially given the absolute purity there must be between the different genders and age groups.

She can relate personally to what a woman goes through.

And it's also important to note that this doesn't abrogate the church of any responsibility at all.

If there is no one else to help the church must help.

And notice the church will be prepared to help then because the leaders will be monitoring the help that is being given before they step in.

So here is a real challenge for the immediate families of these women – and for us all.

Because if there is no immediate family this burden falls on the church.

And if the immediate family is poor or unbelieving then it falls to the rest of us also.

Congregation, the Christian religion is the one faith that truly cares for the weak and the despised.

It is the greatest religion because it has regard for the very least amongst us.

Those who in other religions would be too weak, or the wrong gender, or the wrong caste or colour, through faith in Jesus Christ are equally regarded.

And don't think the welfare state changes any of our responsibilities in this.

For not only must we be well aware of the available help from the government for those needing it, but especially we must do what we can to get people off that kind of dependency, if at all possible.

And, just think, these principles can be just as well applied to all those other disadvantaged groups within the Christian community.

Whether widowed, unemployed, disabled, homeless, or terminally ill, there is a place in our hearts for every one!

And, most of all, don't they need the comfort and challenge of the gospel to help them through their hardship?

Christian fellowship is especially needed then – whether they think they need it or not.

And how much has a card or a phone call come to mean so much at such times?

Paul said in Galatians 6:10 that we should “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the household of believers.”

And didn't Jesus say in Matthew 25 to those going to heaven that it was what they had done to the least of His brothers which showed their faith?

Congregation, may we be found doing the same.

Don't look to what pleases man, because that's only about pleasing your self.

Instead, let's be found pleasing the Lord!

This is the way we help those who are really in need.

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Loving Heavenly Father, how much haven't we seen Your love for us shown in Your Son?

Through Him You went all the way so that we would be here worshipping You today.

And not only are we to worship You today but we are also called to serve You every day.

Help us to so do that, also through helping those in need amongst us.

Then this world will know and declare, "You **can** tell the Christian by their love!"

This we pray in the name of the Son of Your love, Jesus Christ.

Amen.