

SHARING SCRIPTURE

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The Cry of the Prophets

For use: July 28 - Aug 3

Texts: 1 Samuel 8:10-18, Amos 5:10-15, Micah 6:8, Genesis 19:1-13, Ezekiel 16:49, Isaiah 1:15-23

In New Zealand, referees are walking away in droves from football games. Why? One referee explained this last week in an online article, “Why should I turn up, to make sure that the game is safe and fair for these players, only to be abused by those same people? Refereeing is a thankless job, and at the end of the day, trading in my mental health for these people who didn't even appreciate me most of the time was not worth it.” [1]

The surge in abusive behavior has kept a local sports federation regularly investigating “incidents involving inappropriate and abusive behavior rather than focusing on the management and delivery of competitions.” Two amateur football teams have been expelled from the league just halfway through the season. The abuse was so heinous toward one ref that he locked himself in a changing room to protect himself. Additionally, several referees admitted that the daily verbal vulgarity and threats were impacting their mental health.

Old Testament prophets would know just how these referees felt. In this week's Sabbath school lesson, “The Cry of the Prophets,” we hear the whistle blows of biblical “umpires” whom God has called to hold high the rules of this cosmic competition between good and evil. Unfortunately, the very players (God's people) not only step out of bounds, but behave abusively toward the Lord's prophets.

What messages were most often proclaimed by these heaven-sent referees? Idolatry and the abuse of innocent people. Condemning the worship of false gods certainly raised the outrage of these unwelcome voices, but the greatest condemnations were against taking advantage of the weak and poor, the widows and the orphans. Perhaps idolatry and the abuse of the poor are connected. After all, when you turn away from God's law of love and unselfish service, what is left but to live for yourself at the expense of others?

The book of Hebrews summarizes these unsung heroes, servants of God who were tortured, “had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:35-38).

~Curtis Rittenour

[1] https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hamilton-news/sport/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503364&objectid=12251153

For Reflection

Connecting: Have you ever observed abusive behavior expressed toward a referee at a sporting event? What happened?

Sharing: Considering the messages of the prophets in this week’s Sabbath school lesson, what issues would God’s referees most condemn in the church today?

1. The lack of dedicated spiritual leaders
2. The worldly lifestyles of members
3. The critical and antagonistic spirit of members arguing about church issues
4. The neglect toward the poor and marginalized in our communities
5. A forgetfulness toward members who have left the church
6. Other...

Applying: How does one determine which prophetic voices we hear today are reflecting the will of God and which voices are critical, divisive, and don’t truly defend heaven’s views?

Valuing: Has your heart been mostly open or mostly closed to the strong messages of the prophets? Take a minute and pray with another group member, asking God to help you receive the cries of the prophets.

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