

Broomfield



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The Unjust Judge

The Suffering of the Present Age¹

Chuck Frye was a gifted and intelligent young man of God; he loved the Lord and longed to serve Him. That is why, when in his first year at the University of Arizona School of Medicine he became convinced that God was calling him to the mission field, few were surprised. However, what surprised everyone was that in May of his first year of medical school, he was diagnosed with acute leukemia, and in November of that same year, he died.

In 1987, Steve White, son of Jerry White the then president of the Navigators, was driving a taxi to make money in order to pursue a career in broadcasting. One evening while driving his taxi, Steve was murdered by a man who later told the police that, “he had called for the cab with the intent of shooting whoever arrived to pick him up.” And so tragedy struck the Whites, a family that had honored and served God for years in full-time Christian service.

I could go on and on with story after story of tragedy and heartache in the lives of men and women of God. Stories of families who love the Lord, and long for nothing more than His service and yet suffer miserable trials.

And yet, as I think of these tragedies, I wonder how many more stories would it take before you and I started questioning God? How many more tales of suffering and woe must be told before we begin to doubt? How much would it take for us to lose heart? Would it be the death of a loved one? Perhaps an unfavorable diagnosis would cause us to doubt? Maybe it is a severe conflict that will be our breaking point?

In anticipation of His people shrinking back in their faith, Christ told the parable of the Unjust Judge. In Luke 17:20, the Pharisees ask Christ about the timing involved in the coming of the Kingdom of God — with the implication that perhaps it might be in their lifetime.

Christ responded by telling His disciples that He must first suffer and be rejected (Luke 17:25). Then He says that before the coming of the Kingdom, God’s people will “long to see one of the days of the Son of Man” and yet “will not see it” (Luke 17:22). He further says that they would long to see it because before the Second Coming life on earth will be as in the days of Noah and Lot. There will be times of great

¹ The following two stories are taken from Dobson, James; *When God Doesn't Make Sense*

wickedness, rebellion, turmoil, and hardship (Luke 17:26, 28-30).

The context of this parable is one of promised difficulty and hardship. The day will be characterized by wickedness and rebellion against God and man. It will be a day when living for the Lord could possibly mean a life of tragedy and struggle. The hearts of God's people will be inclined to grow cold in light of the iniquity of the day. It was with this expectation of a difficult future for His people, Christ told this story.

The Setting

Luke 18:2-8, “He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’”

“And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says.” And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

To understand this parable, notice the key players. First we have the judge. Christ links this judge to a “certain city.” This means that the judge was a city governor or leader. In the small towns that were scattered throughout Palestine in Christ's day, local people of prominence often times were appointed to act as officials when it came to justice. This “judge” most likely is one of these officials.

Further notice that this judge did not fear God, and did not respect man. This is a proverbial way to denote someone of questionable character.² And thus, the picture of the judge here is one who was godless and unsympathetic. He lived for himself. This is somewhat of an accurate picture of many a “judge” in Christ's day.³

Secondly, we have the widow. Christ's choice of a widow is quite significant. The Bible records that the widow and orphan hold a special place in the heart of God.⁴ As such, in the minds of those listening to this parable, the “widow” was the picture of weakness, and thus would have raised the expectation that grace and mercy should be bestowed upon her. Leon Morris said this:

“The widow was almost a symbol of helplessness. She was in no position to bribe the judge and she had no protector to put pressure on him. She was armed with nothing...”⁵

The Scene

Luke 18:3, “And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’”

² Compare Josephus Antiquities 10:83; Dion, Hal 10:10:7; Livy 22:3

³ The unscrupulous judge is referenced throughout ancient literature (compare Plato, *Laws* 11.917b; Dionysios of Halikamassos, 10.10.7; Livy, *History* 22.3)

⁴ Compare Exodus 22:22, 23; Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 68; Isaiah 1:17; 1 Timothy 5; James 1:27

⁵ Morris, Leon; TNTC, page 287

The widow came for justice and kept coming to the judge. This statement is an imperfect (past tense of repeated action) which implies a past repetition. In other words, the widow continually and constantly kept approaching this judge. She never gave up.

She asked the judge for legal protection from her adversary. This undoubtedly would have included punishment for the opponent. From this we conclude that this widow obviously had been mistreated, and her request was just and fair — she wanted legal protection. And so this poor, lowly widow urgently begs for justice.

Luke 18:4-5, “For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’”

Notice the phrase “for a while he refused.” Once again we see the constant, repetitive questioning on the part of the women of this judge. In fact, many have suggested that the repetitive “asking” was the result of the judge wanting a bribe, and yet not getting one. Regardless, the woman persisted such that we read that the judge gave her legal protection because of her importunity.

A couple points are worth noting here, evidently the judge knew that the widow's claim was just — he grants her “legal protection” — i.e., the protection that the law itself granted. The judge acts on behalf of the woman not for the sake of God, or the woman but for his own sake. The widow was wearing him out!

Literally the text reads that “she is giving me a black eye.” The idea of “giving a black eye” or as most translate it, “wear me out” denotes not so much of tiring out the man, but of tarnishing his reputation.⁶ Had this woman continued her pleading, this judge would have gotten “a black eye” — that is a bad reputation.

Significance

Christ asks two questions here for the purpose of teaching. Looking at the wicked judge who acted on behalf of a woman he did not love, HOW MUCH MORE CERTAIN IS IT THAT GOD (*theos* being in the emphatic position in this verse) WILL ACT ON BEHALF OF THE ONE HE LOVES?!

Luke 18:6-8, “And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

The contrast in this verse is between the character of the judge and the character of our God. If a wicked and evil man will uphold the right will not our God, who has set His love upon us⁷, whose plans are for our welfare and our good⁸, and who has entered into our lives intimately and graciously such that not only are identified as “His elect”⁹ but are free to cry night and day to Him to bring about justice for us?

The answer demanded here is an emphatic, “YES!”¹⁰ Truly, we need only consider the gracious character of our magnificent Lord to KNOW that God certainly will deliver us from the difficulty and heartache of

⁶ I. Howard Marshal, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC, page 673

⁷ Compare 1 John 4:20-21

⁸ Compare Jeremiah 29:11

⁹ Compare Luke 18:7

¹⁰ The question utilizes an *ou ma* construction which requires an answer of “Yes!”

this present world!

And yet, this raises the question, “What about the phrase in this text which seems to indicate that God will bring about this deliverance in our lifetime?”

Luke 16:8, **“I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.** Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

To answer this, notice that the thought behind “speedily” is NOT “quickly” as in soon, but “decisively” as in sudden.¹¹ This is an important qualification. Many misread this parable and conclude that if we ask of God according to His will, He promises here to give it to us. Yet, that is not what is being stated here. Rather, it is that when God acts, he acts decisively.

For example, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 tells us that we will be changed in the “twinkling of an eye.” This is the time it takes for a beam of light to pass from the outer perimeter of our eye to our retina. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 tells us that we will be suddenly “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, the teaching of this text is that God's delivering us out of trouble- God's vindication of our name and His work of redemption by which all things will be made new- will occur very quickly. When the time comes, nothing will be able to stop it.

And so, to those whose future looks hard and difficult Christ says, “Look to your loving Father who controls all things. Certainly He will not let you down!” This leads us to Christ's second question: **WHO WILL BE NUMBERED AMONG THOSE WITH LIKE-FAITH IN GOD?**

Luke 18:8, **“I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”**

When Jesus Christ returns to this world at His Second Coming, will there be found THAT faith that characterized the woman of this passage? No doubt there will be believers on the earth.¹² But will God's people at the time of Christ's Second Coming evidence a persevering faith? Will they have a faith that does not grow weary? Will they have reliance upon God that does not falter or fail? Will they have an implicit and unwavering confidence in God?

Let us not misunderstand what Christ is saying here. The “faith” mentioned in this text is not a faith that continues in order to get. Rather, it is a “faith” that continues because it **KNOWS IT WILL GET!** It is a faith that is confidence in God! Edersheim wrote this:

“The inference from the Parable is not, that the Church will be ultimately vindicated because she perseveres in prayer, but that she so perseveres, because God will surely right her cause: it is not, that insistence in prayer is the cause of its answer, but that the certainty of that which is asked for should lead to continuance in prayer, even when all around seems to forbid the hope of answer.”¹³
(The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book II, p. 285)

The faith in question is a faith that knows the character of God¹⁴ and so perseveres. It is as the faith of

¹¹ See Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT, footnote #s 8, 9, p. 448.

¹² Compare Matthew 24:44-46; Luke 12:37; 17:34,35; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book II, page 285

¹⁴ Compare Luke 18:6-8

Habakkuk who boldly declared this:

Habakkuk 3:17-18, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

What an important message and exhortation for us who live in an age of difficulty and trial! As we look around and see that even ungodly people care for their own and uphold justice our confidence can rest that the heart of our just, holy, and loving Lord will perfectly uphold us.

This serves as the message of this parable. In light of the lengthy and increasingly difficult period that will occur before Christ returns we must continue in our devotion to and trust in the Lord. He will by no means fail us! He is faithful — which simply means that He is “able to be trusted!”

Our Response

Now in light of this how ought we to respond?

Christ answered this question in the prologue of this parable.

Luke 18:1, “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

There are at least two responses we ought to have to the evil days in which we live. They are days in which people who love God suffer so much. They are days where godly people face tragedy and heartache. We must pray and not lose heart.

Let me briefly comment on each of these.

First, in light of the promised difficulty that awaits us all on this earth, we must pray! In the Bible, there are a variety of words used to denote prayer.

- Euchomai, eucha; ευχη;eucheis: a prayer which expresses a wish. It comes very closely to being a vow.¹⁵
- erotao, deasis; ερωταω: is a prayer of entreaty of supplication. This is used in contexts of asking or requesting.¹⁶
- Enteuxsis εντευξις: is a prayer used when petitioning a superior.¹⁷

Yet, the word most frequently used to denote prayer is προσευχομαι proseuchomai whose primary reference is to devotion. It expresses a God-ward look of dependence and communion. It is depending upon God to do what He says He is going to do. And it is this that Christ calls us to!!

Thus, in a world in which trial and difficulty are prophesied, we are called to a life of dependence upon God. It is a dependence in which we at all times lean upon our Savior in prayer.

¹⁵ Compare Romans 9:3, Acts 18:18

¹⁶ Compare 1 Peter 3:12, 1 John 5:16

¹⁷ Compare 1 Timothy 4:5

Secondly, in light of the promised difficulty that awaits us all, we must not “lose heart” when it comes to trusting God. This is such an important exhortation. The temptation for us all is to suffer well at first. BUT THEN after a while, when the trial seems to have no end, in the words of the Hebrew writer, we “throw away our confidence” in God” (Hebrews 10:35). Then we “shrink back” in our faith, (Hebrews 10:39). And thus, Christ calls us here to not “lose heart” — to not become weary, lose our courage, or be fainthearted.

And yet, how can we maintain this outlook of dependence in the day of difficulty? How can we not “lose heart” when so much is stacked against us? Turn with me to 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

During his third missionary journey, Paul received some shocking news about the Corinthian church he had just planted. Chloe's people came to Ephesus and informed Paul of certain factions.¹⁸ False teachers had crept into the body at Corinth.¹⁹ So, Paul visited the Corinthian church again. Yet this visit would prove to be quite painful.²⁰ Returning in humiliation to Ephesus, Paul wrote a harsh letter.²¹ Then he left for Macedonia in much distress and anxiety.²²

Now, somewhere in Macedonia, Paul received word that the Corinthian church had responded positively to Paul's harsh letter.²³ And so, 2 Corinthians is written as Paul looks back upon his recent anxiety and hardship, and yet looks forward to the Corinthian's continued growth in grace. Now in this context, notice this text:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

How is it that Paul in the midst of trial and persecution — persecution from the very ones he loved most — did “not lose heart?”

Paul looked not at the things that are seen. But at the things which are not seen — specifically God.

Do you see the point?

How is it that we are able to not “lose heart” in the midst of great trial and difficulty?

Because, as we have been called to pray at all times — to depend upon God at all times — we understand that the basis of our trust and confidence is NOT our conviction or decision to trust God BUT our unchanging God who loves us so much! And thus, we need never lose heart because the God who called us will never changed! Samuel Rutherford wrote further: “Your rock (Christ) does not ebb and flow, [just] your sea (affliction).”²⁴

¹⁸ Compare 1 Corinthians 1:11

¹⁹ Compare 2 Corinthians 2:1-2; 12:14; 13:1-2

²⁰ Compare 2 Corinthians 2:1-2

²¹ Compare 2 Corinthians 2:4, 9, 7:8

²² Compare 2 Corinthians 2:12-13

²³ Compare 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

²⁴ Letters of Samuel Rutherford, LXIX, page 149

Oh brothers and sisters, the parable we have looked at this morning was written to encourage and exhort ones who were promised severe difficulty and affliction.

What is its message?

Depend upon God! And when the waves of life come, let us never lose heart! For the God who has called us certainly will rescue us from all our foes!

Hebrews 10:35-38, “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith. “

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on October 3, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.