



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Volume 17 Issue 12

March 25, 2018

### The Unjust Judge

The Parable of the Unjust Judge has two distinct applications. One is to stress the “justness” of God and the other is to exhort us unto persistence in our devotion to Christ.<sup>1</sup>

We have looked at this parable from the perspective of the former, the “justness” of God. But we need to examine this parable from the perspective of the call for us to be persistent in our trust and devotion to the Lord!

Relationally speaking, sinners tend to drift in one of two directions — and sometimes both, depending on the person and/or the relationship — either they idolize or they demonize.

This is how it works. Boy meets girl and discovers that the girl is rather amazing. Immediately he begins comparing her to any and every girl he has ever known... and to his amazement, no one can compare! Now if he lives there long enough AND if the feelings are mutual, wedding bells are soon heard. But when the voluntary becomes obligatory (which is marriage), true colors eventually emerge, and disappointment sets in. Now disappointment gains momentum as it is discovered that the person they thought they married was a phantom, a figment of their imagination. Disappointment then turns to anger. And if anger is allowed to fester, it becomes bitterness which then in time gives way to resentment. Yet resentment needs an escape which it takes by demonizing the other individual. *Whereas before the person could do no wrong; now they can do no right!*

I have no doubt that most of you know couples who have lived through these extremes; maybe you are one of those couples! So why do we do it? It is because we were made for worship (cf. Isaiah 43:6b-7). We were made to appreciate the only One who truly is beautiful, awe-inspiring, and amazing! And because we are sinners, our need to worship easily can be misdirected with the result that we seek from people and things what only can be found in God. Recall the words C. S. Lewis:

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably, earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. (Lewis, 1960, pp. 118-121)

The Parable of the Unjust Judge addresses a desire which this earth could never meet. Yet it does so by way of comparison- which is its genius! Christ gave this parable toward the end of His third year of ministry, in fact just a couple of weeks before He would be crucified. So we are getting down to Christ's final words to His disciples which is a warning to that which must occupy their focus and desire.

Luke 18:2-3a, "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. And there was a widow in that city..."

With this we have the key players in this story. First there was a judge: κριτής (*kritēs*); that Christ links this judge to a "certain city" tells us that this judge was a city governor or leader. In the small towns that were scattered throughout Palestine in Christ's day, local people of prominence oft-times were appointed by the populace to act as officials when it came to justice. This "judge" most likely is one of these officials.

In terms of the character of this judge, we learn that he did not fear God, and did not respect man: this was a proverbial saying in Christ's day to denote someone of questionable character.<sup>2</sup> And thus, the picture here of the judge is one who was godless and unsympathetic. He lived

for himself<sup>3</sup> which was an accurate picture of many a “judge” in Christ’s day.<sup>4</sup>

The second character was a widow: χήρα (*chēra*); Christ’s choice of a “widow” is rather significant. The Bible says that the “widow” and “orphan” hold a special place in the heart of God.<sup>5</sup> Do you recall when Christianity is at its best?

James 1:27a, “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress....”

As such, in the minds of those listening to this parable, the “widow” was the picture of helplessness, and thus would have raised the expectation that grace, mercy, and protection should be granted to her. Leon Morris said:

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... (Morris, 2008, p. 287)

So the setting presented here has all the makings for a clash of two peoples... two cultures. One was that of a powerful overlord who cared only for himself. The other was that of a weak individual who would have been the object of special care on the part of society which brings us to the ugly scene.

Luke 18:3b, “...and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent’”

Once again, consider the particulars. “And she kept coming to him.” This is an imperfect (past tense of repeated action) which implies past repetition. In other words, the widow continually and constantly kept approaching this judge; she never gave up! Every day the judge sat in the judgment seat, she would appear! As we’ll see, it would get to the point where it became embarrassing for the judge! What was her plea? “Give me legal protection from my opponent.” From this we deduce two things: that (1) the widow obviously had been mistreated and (2) her request was just. Her passion here was NOT for vengeance, BUT justice, “legal protection.”

Luke 18: 4-5, “And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out’”

Let’s walk our way through this.

Luke 18:4a, “For a while he was unwilling.”

Once again, we see the constant, repetitive questioning on the part of the women when it came to 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, day in and day out, such that we read this:

Luke 18:4b-5, "...but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.'"

Clearly the judge knew that the widow's claim was just, for in the end he grants her "legal protection" which was nothing less than that which was granted by the law. Secondly the judge acts on behalf of the woman NOT for the sake of God or the woman, BUT for his own sake! Notice, the widow was "wearing him out"! Literally, "...lest she gives me a black eye."

The idea of "giving a black eye" or as most translate it, "wearing me out," denotes not so much of tiring out the man, but of tarnishing his reputation.<sup>6</sup> Had this woman continued her pleading, this judge would have gotten "a black eye"; his neighbors and the community in which he served would have begun thinking less of him which could have led eventually to him being replaced!

So herein is an Ugly Scene. We've got a selfish individual who cares nothing for God, man, or justice. He is powerful which most likely is why he is serving as a judge. Then there is a widow whose presence in the community would have aroused pity, love, and concern. Then there is the neglect of this woman, a neglect that went on for days. Soon the community would have begun talking and public opinion would have begun to sour when it came to this judge. So the judge acted on behalf of the woman! The woman received care; her need was met! Yet we know it was NOT out of love, BUT out of selfish ambition. The judge wanted the approbation of man!

Luke 18:6-7, "And the Lord said, '[Did you] hear what the unrighteous judge said? Now shall not GOD [who is the polar opposite of this judge. Whereas this judge was wicked, God is supremely good!] bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them [lit. 'Will He grow weary of them?']?"

The contrast here NOT only is between the justice of man (as in the case of the judge) and the justice of God, BUT it also is between the *CHARACTER* of the judge (or any idol for that matter) and the *CHARACTER* of our God.

If a wicked/evil man will uphold what is right (if you can derive some satisfaction from an idol, a false god, or that which is NOT God at all), will NOT our God uphold what is right and so fill you to the utter limit?

- He who has set His love upon us (1 John 4:20-21)?
- He whose plans for us are for our welfare and our good (Jeremiah 29:11)?
- He who has entered into our lives intimately and graciously such that we NOT ONLY are identified as "His elect" (Luke 18:7), BUT are free to "cry to Him day and night" (Luke

18:7)?

The answer is a resounding “YES!”<sup>7</sup> Truly, we need only consider the gracious character of our God to KNOW that the Lord certainly is worthy of our adoration, love, devotion... our lives! Consider the next phrase.

Luke 18:8, “I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily.”

The focus of Christ’s teaching here NOT only is on the attaining of justice, BUT also the fulfillment of the heart’s desire when set upon God. In this regard, consider the word for “speedily.” The word has two connotations. The first is speedily *as in decisively* (as in “the twinkling of an eye,” 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). This is how the justice referenced in this parable will be met out at the last day. The second connotation is speedily *as in time/short order* which again is what I want to focus on.

Accordingly, when you and I set our heart upon God and endeavor to love, know, and serve Him, the point of this parable is that the Lord will fill us THAT VERY MOMENT! It is as we are taught in Psalms.

Psalm 81:10, “I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide and I will fill it.”

Yes Christian, in your service of the Lord, you’ve just lost everything! You are on the run, living as an alien and stranger on this earth with nowhere to lay your head! Yet in your cardboard box which rests under a bridge, you need only open your mouth wide in love and devotion to the Lord, and He will by all means fill it! It is as Samuel Rutherford said, “They lose nothing who gain Christ.” Listen to the heart of Asaph:

Psalm 73:25-26, “Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

This is the heartbeat of one in love with Christ! And herein we arrive at THE question of this and every age. Notice how this parable ends?

Luke 18:8b, “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

When Jesus Christ comes in His glory the question is: will there be found *THAT* faith that characterized the woman of this passage? No doubt there will be believers on the earth when Christ returns,<sup>8</sup> but will they at that time evidence a

- Persevering faith?
- Unwavering faith?
- Undistracted faith?

- Devoted faith?
- Living Faith?
- Active faith?

Now, 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 be satisfied! Do you see it? God’s people throughout every generation have attested to one and the same:

- What is wealth?
- What is power?
- What is privilege?
- How important is comfort and convenience?

All of this and more can never satisfy! What we want... what we long for most is Christ, who fills the moment we seek Him! It is as Job said:

Job 19:25-27, “And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me.”

Christ is the believer’s all-in-all! If you and I will depend upon Him, we will never be in want! Recall the faith and so focus of Habakkuk:

Habakkuk 3:17-18, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”

Again, when you have Christ, you have everything! A lack of food, clothing, protection is insignificant when you have Christ! In fact consider, what amounts to a beautiful summary of the point of the parable, the Apostle Paul’s summary:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 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.”

What an important message and exhortation for us who live in an age where imposters and cheap imitations abound! We were created to find our joy and gladness in Christ! But let us beware! Your bank account, beauty, health, looks, spouse, children, boyfriend, girlfriend, job...

ALL will gladly take God's place! All of these are happy to be *Idolized!* The wise man, describing not simply the adulterous, but the allure of all sin wrote:

Proverbs 7:11-15, 18-21, "She is boisterous and rebellious; her feet do not remain at home; *she is* now in the streets, now in the squares, and lurks by every corner. So she seizes him and kisses him, and with a brazen face she says to him: 'I was due to offer peace offerings; today I have paid my vows. Therefore I have come out to meet you, to seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you... Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with caresses. For the man is not at home, he has gone on a long journey; he has taken a bag of money with him, at full moon he will come home.' With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him."

In fact, consider the context for the giving of this parable. In Luke 17:20, the Pharisees asked Christ about the timing involved in the coming of the Kingdom of God. Christ then turned to His disciples with this warning:

Luke 17:22, "And He said to the disciples, 'The days shall come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.'"

This is the context of the parable before us. It is one in which God's people will long to see Christ, to be with Christ, and so to walk with Christ! Why so? What is going to happen that will make them long for their Savior? Christ tells us this:

Luke 17:26, 28a, 30, "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man... It was the same as happened in the days of Lot... It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed."

It is tempting to take from this a teaching on the suddenness of Christ's return, BUT that is NOT the only point. As we have seen, Christ's concern here also is the misdirected love and devotion of those alive when Christ returns. They will NOT be seeking the Lord. Rather, they will be on a mad dash for fulfillment and satisfaction from their eating, drinking, marrying, and living! Accordingly, Christ here warned:

Luke 17:32-33, "Remember Lot's wife [who forever will stand in testimony of the peril of loving this life more than God]. Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and whoever loses *his life* shall preserve it."

So what ought we to do? Battle and struggle to remain steadfast in your love and pursuit of Christ! Don't settle for the cheap imitations which are constantly being paraded before you in this life! Joel Green wrote:

Read against the horizon of 17:22-37, Jesus' teaching here is particularly oriented toward the necessity of tenacious, hopeful faith in the midst of present ordeal. (Green,

1997, p. 637)

That means we must NOT grow weary in doing well- weary with Bible study, quiet times, biblical worship, living as aliens and strangers in this world, and so much more. We must neither idolize or demonize the things of this life. But keep it all in its proper place and perspective.

With that, I want to close by looking with you at the preface of this parable which contains THE point in Christ's mind for the telling of this parable.

Luke 18:1, "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart."

There are at least two responses we ought to have to Vanity Fair in which we live, specifically a world which offers so many idols for us to worship. What ought we to do? Notice, we must (1) pray and (2) not lose heart!

First, we must pray! What does this mean? Recall that in the Bible there are a variety of words used for prayer.

1. εὐχόμεαι (*euchomai*), εὐχή (*euchē*) speak of a prayer which expresses a wish. It is very close to a vow (cf. Romans 9:3; Acts 18:18b).
2. ἀδέομαι (*deomai*); ἐρωτάω (*erotao*); δέησις (*deēsis*) all denote a prayer of entreaty/supplication. These are used in contexts where specific requests are made (cf. Romans 1:9-10; 1 Peter 3:12).
3. αἰτέω (*aiteō*); ἔντευξις (*enteuxis*) are used when one in a lesser position addresses someone higher than them. This is the prayer made in reference to a superior (cf. 1 John 5:16; 1 Timothy 4:5).
4. Yet, the word most frequently used for prayer is προσεύχομαι (*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. It is the heart of Psalm 42.

Psalm 42:1-2a, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God..." - that is the heart and soul of προσεύχομαι (*proseuchomai*)!

It is this that Christ calls us to! And thus, in a world with thousands of idols and imitations, we are here warned and so exhorted to persist when it comes to (1) finding your all in Christ, and so (2) seeking Him on His terms!

Secondly, in light of the promised difficulty that awaits us all, we must not "lose heart" in our pursuit of God! This is such an important addition to the exhortation here! The temptation for us all is to be satisfied with beginning well. BUT THEN life occurs and things get difficult!



Before long, we mis-take the means of grace (the word, sacraments, prayer) as magical portals of fulfillment. Then when these portals don't pan out, we reject them saying, "They don't work!"

Accordingly, Christ calls us here to not "lose heart"- and so NOT become weary in our pursuit of God! Christian, take this calling seriously! If there is one universal in Redemptive and Church History, it is this: Devout and serious servants of the Lord weary! In fact, if the Kingdom years/the Theocracy could be summarized by one question, it would be this:

- Will God's people remain "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58)?
- Or will they be allured by the Baals which transform religion into a passionate lust for self-fulfillment and self-realization by which the worshipper endeavors to experience the divine?

So which will it be for you in your life? Will you be content with Christ? Will Christ remain your sufficiency? Will you persist in Bible study? Will you remain steadfast in your worship? Or, must God give you an exciting life? Must the study of His word, His worship, and church service be fun/fulfilling? This is the question that faces every generation of God's people.

Listen! God made you for the purpose of worship! Though your sinfulness would have you worship and so seek satisfaction from that which is not God, we must be wary and so resist! Idols and false gods can never fill. Describing the folly of God's people at this point, the Lord said this:

Jeremiah 2:13, "For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

In contrast when Christ is your all, God will satisfy you speedily- which brings us to a call given to God's people so long ago.

Joshua 24:25, "And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."- how important it is for you and me to understand that this choice is NOT made at one moment in your life, BUT over the course of thousands of mini-decisions as to that which you will seek in your life on a daily basis. And thus, based on these decisions, Christ ended our parable with a simple question, "Will the Lord find faith in your life when He comes?"

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Joel Green wrote, “Jesus’ message has two foci, associated with the two primary characters of the parable of vv 2–5. On the one hand, based on an argument from lesser to greater, we hear in Jesus’ words an affirmation of the faithfulness of God: He will assuredly act with dispatch on behalf of the elect. On the other, we see in the widow’s action a model of perseverance in the midst of wrong.” (Green, 1997, p. 637)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jos. Ant. 10:83; Dion. Hal. 10:10:7; Livy 22:3.

<sup>3</sup> And based on context, this character was/is a fitting symbol of the people living in the last day. Luke 17:26-27 says, “And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.” At first glance this may sound like ordinary living, but clearly it is not. Listen to Gen. 6:5 which is a divine commentary on the people in Noah’s day, “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Such was the character and mindset of the people in Lot’s day. Yes they were eating and drinking, but it was all about self!!!

And so it was in the days of Lot, “It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.” (Luke 17:28-29). Again, though ordinary activities which convey the idea of shock and surprise, nevertheless when we think of Lot’s day, one theme ought to come to mind... wicked abandonment! Gen. 19:5 says, “And they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.’” Such was the gutter-living of the generation living in Sodom and Gomorrah. They were thoroughly corrupt and self-centered. All that there was was themselves! Nothing else mattered. And so it was with “the judge” of this parable!

<sup>4</sup> The unscrupulous judge is referenced throughout ancient literature (cf. Plato, *Laws* 11.917b; Dionysios of Halikarnassos, 10.10.7; Livy, *History* 22.3).

<sup>5</sup> cf. Exodus 22:22, 23; Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 68:5; Is. 1:17; 1 Timothy 5; James 1:27.

<sup>6</sup> (Marshall, 2017, p. 673)l.

<sup>7</sup> The question utilizes an “οὐ μὴ” (*ou ma*) construction which requires an answer of “Yes!”

<sup>8</sup> cf. Matthew. 24:44-46; Luke 12:37; 17:34, 35; 1 Thesalonians 4:13-18.