

The Parables of Jesus

WEEK 2: LECTURE OUTLINE

THAT PESKY WIDOW (LUKE 18:1-8)

READ THE PARABLE

¹ And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; ³ and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.'

⁴ For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, ⁵ yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

MAKING THE FAMILIAR STRANGE

- Luke's Introduction
 - Luke seems to start with the "punch line." He says, right away, that the parable is about persistence in prayer. Why is he starting this way?
 - *Probably* because he suspects that if he doesn't "set it up" right, the parable could be misunderstood.
 - Luke invites us (wants us!) to read the parable through this lens: *somehow* it's about prayer.
- Luke's Characters
 - There's a petitioner and one who is petitioned – a widow, and a judge, respectively. But did you hear how they are described?
 - ♦ How is a judge like *that* supposed to be a figure for God?
 - ♦ Are we supposed to follow the example of the widow's importunity?
- The "big question" seems to be: *If the judge neither fears God nor cares for people, and if the widow holds no power over him (as indeed, culturally, she wouldn't), what finally moves the judge to change his mind?*
 - There is no hint of reconciliation or conversion in this parable; there's no sense that the judge has become more pious; we aren't even told if the widow is "in the right."
 - The judge is just worn down: ". . . because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming." (18:5, RSV)

SHE WILL "WEAR ME OUT" (18:5)

- Literally: "By means of her coming, in the end, she will strike me under the eye" (*hypōpiazē*)
 - "to strike under the eye"
 - "to give a black eye"
 - "to bruise"

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- Reconsider what is happening:
 - “By her continual coming, she will give me a (metaphorical) black eye.”
 - “By her continual coming, she will embarrass me, put me to shame.”
 - She is not “bothering” him so much as her unanswered consistency is besmirching his reputation.
 - The judge (still) doesn’t care about the widow; he cares about himself.

SO HOW IS THIS PARABLE ABOUT PRAYER?

- We still find this unjust judge who hears petitions in a parable we are told is about prayer. How? Pay attention to how Jesus discusses the parable afterward.
- God is *not* like the “unrighteous” judge: if someone like *that*, who cares only about his own reputation, can be moved to justice, *how much more* can God be moved to vindicate his “elect”? This is a parable of contrasts.
- But God *is also, paradoxically, like* the judge:
 - God is keen for his own glory and reputation; he hears and responds to our prayers for our good and for his glory.
 - Think of many Old Testament prayers (paraphrased): “God, you aren’t looking too good right now” – stirring God to action so that his name, his reputation would be advanced.
 - The Lord’s Prayer is itself a prayer that God would do something on behalf of his own name and kingdom. Old Testament prayers most often ask God to do something for the sake of his name.
- We *are* to be like the Widow.
 - We don’t change the mind of an unwilling God by badgering him.
 - We persist in pursuing God’s just causes in prayer (“thy kingdom come! thy will be done!”) that we show ourselves to be people of faith like the widow’s faith when the Son of Man returns.

REBELLIOUS PRAYER

“Prayer is rebellion against the status quo.” (David Wells)

- Through sin we exist in rebellion against God; prayer is a part of taking up God’s side in rebellion against the status quo.
- Prayer is rebellion *in collusion* with God, on behalf of, and for the sake of, furthering God’s kingdom.

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A DIAGNOSTIC

- Suppose in any 12-month period that God granted every prayer as we prayed it; what would have happened?
 - We'd certainly all have safe trips; things complicated and unpleasant would be uncomplicated and pleasant; sicknesses and illnesses would be healed.
 - But . . .
 - ♦ could people at enmity with one another and estranged become reconciled in the love of Christ . . .
 - ♦ would those who do not know the love of Christ our Savior come to know it and join the joyful fellowship of his people . . .
 - ♦ would marriages that were on the verge of falling apart be restored and reconciled and families knit back together in love . . .
 - . . . if God gave us everything we asked for?
- Often our conveniences and our annoyances preoccupy our prayers more than the Kingdom of God, the glory of God, and the righteous purposes of God for us, for the church, and for the world.