

The Parables of Jesus #36
The Parable of the Persistent Widow
(Lk. 18:1-8)
Bill Denton

Introduction

A. Have you ever felt like just giving up?

1. Maybe you were facing some hardship of life
2. Maybe it was something frightening like a life-threatening disease
3. Maybe it was simply a frustration you had born too long

B. What do you do when you reach that point?

1. I have known people who did give up (at least on God)
2. I have known people who abandoned their faith, their family, their job, their friends -- everything that is normally supportive
3. Giving up isn't the answer

C. Then what is the answer? How can we keep going?

1. Faith is the key to overcoming everything that tries to destroy us
2. That's why it's so important to regularly check our "faith-level"

D. Jesus once told a parable to illustrate the importance of faith

1. He tied together two important aspects of our discipleship
 - a. faith
 - b. prayer
2. Lk 18:1 introduces the parable and tells us the intended lesson
 - a. that men ought always to pray
 - b. that men should not lose heart
3. Some have suggested that the parable teaches that prayer pays off if we'll just pray enough
 - a. that certainly may happen
 - b. however, it seems that Jesus is giving us a reason to pray
 - c. that reason is that we can trust and have confidence in the one to whom we pray
 - d. ultimately, we pray because we have faith in God

I. THE PARABLE

A. The introduction in 18:1

1. To appreciate the parable, we must see what Jesus is contrasting
 - a. always praying is not contrasted to never praying
 - b. always praying is contrasted to not fainting (faint= ekkakein; to be utterly spiritless, to be wearied out, exhausted)
 - c. the problem is not with praying, the problem is in becoming so spiritually depleted that we can, won't or aren't able to pray
2. It's important to understand that it is not simply a matter of going through the motions of prayer, it is a matter of having a faith strong to motivate us pray, because we believe and trust God

B. To illustrate the point, Jesus told a parable about a persistent widow

1. In a city, there was a judge
 - a. Jerusalem had the great Sanhedrin, consisting of 71 men
 - b. cities which had 120 men or more had a lesser Sanhedrin of 23
 - c. cities of less than 120 men had a court of 3 men
 - d. it was permissible for one judge to hear disputes
 - e. this was a self-confident judge who did not fear God nor regard man (judged according to his own wishes?)
2. In the same city, there was a widow
 - a. Ex 22:22-24 -- God prohibited the affliction of widows and orphans and promised to hear them and judge their oppressors
 - b. Deut 27:19 -- cursed anyone who perverted judgment against widows and others considered to be helpless
 - c. Mal 3:5 -- God again threatened judgment and to be a witness, himself, against oppressors of widows and others without the power to protect themselves
3. The widow had an adversary
 - a. we don't know exactly what the problem was
 - b. we do know that it evidently involved someone who was an opponent in a law suit
4. She petitioned the judge to avenge her of her adversary
 - a. most likely she was asking for protection; for the judge to act justly and free her from the burden she was under
 - b. she was not asking for favor, only justice

5. For a while, the judge would not respond
 - a. perhaps she was simply unimportant and he considered others and other problems more significant
 - b. but the widow would not give up -- she evidently made it a regular practice to petition the judge for justice
 - c. eventually he changed his mind
 - 1) not because he feared God or man
 - 2) ultimately, he did not want to be worn out by her constant, persistent petition

C. We must avoid some mistakes in understanding the parable

1. God is not compared to the judge in this story
 - a. the judge is not an example of righteousness
 - b. the judge simply didn't want to be exhausted by her persistent petition
 - c. if anything, the judge here is contrasted to God, who is always righteous and always dispenses justice
2. The judge does say something, however, that Jesus said we should pay attention to (cf 18:6)
 - a. Luke 18:5 -- yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. (NKJ)
 - b. it might be easy to assume that the key here is her persistent petition (it is important)
 - c. there is another contrast here that helps us:
 - 1) 18:1 - men ought not become worn out (exhausted)
 - 2) 18:5 - the judge didn't want to become wearied (lit. beaten black and blue)
 - d. the key factor in the story is the widow's never-ending persistence
 - e. the judge's statement is a testimony to the widow's firm trust that the judge was her source of justice
3. The story, then, is really a story about faith, not just persistent prayer
 - a. if the widow had not possessed something beyond her petition, then the judge would not have had to worry -- eventually she would have given up
 - b. the judge gave in to her request for judgment because he knew something about the woman, herself -- the one who so persistently petitioned him

II. LESSONS TO LEARN

A. Learn the secret of staying strong and vital instead of wearing out

1. The secret is faith -- and here it is the believing / trusting side of faith
2. Mark 9:23-24
Jesus said to him, ""If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ""Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (NKJ)
3. I Jn 3:23
And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. (NKJ)

B. There is a definite connection between faith and prayer

1. In the story, there was a connection between the woman's confidence that the judge would eventually give her justice and the fact that she was so persistent in her request to him
2. Luke 18:1
Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, (NKJ)
 - a. the parable was intended to accomplish two things
 - 1) to teach that men always ought to pray
 - 2) and not lose heart
 - b. if one loses heart, he isn't going to pray because there's no confidence in him, no faith
3. 1Thes 5:17
pray without ceasing, (NKJ)
 - a. the biggest barrier to prayer is a lack of faith
 - b. build your faith by practicing confidence in God

C. Learn from the comparison / contrast of the unjust judge with God

1. The woman was persistent with an unjust judge
 - a. why? -- because he was her hope
 - b. this kind of thing is a real challenge to many Christians because we do not exercise the same hope in God
2. Mt. 6:25-34 (read)

3. Phil 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (NKJ)

- a. “be anxious for nothing” -- requires trust / confidence
- b. “prayer and supplication” -- our petition to God
- c. “with thanksgiving” -- another statement of confidence and gratitude
- d. “the peace of God”
 - 1) “surpasses all understanding” -- not a human product
 - 2) “will guard your hearts” -- emotions calmed
 - 3) “will guard your minds” -- mind eased
 - 4) “through Christ Jesus” -- the object of our faith

CONCLUSION

A. So, do you always pray or have you lost heart?

1. This is the whole concern here
2. The issue is your faith

B. Have you decided for God where His limitations are

1. Maybe you don't pray because you don't see how God could possibly provide any answers there
2. It's easy to lose heart if all we have to hope in is you and not God

C. Perhaps the persistent widow could teach you something

D. Invitation