Chapter 10

Persistence

The Parable of the Persistent Widow
{Luke 18:1-8}
Matt Heupel

One Main Thing

As human beings we are a forced to live in a world that will treat us unfairly, but as Christians we cannot afford to give up.

Introduction

Jesus tells his parables within a specific context. Within that context lies the original meaning of the parable. The context for our parable begins in Luke 17:20 with the Pharisees asking Jesus about the coming of the kingdom. Jesus responds by saying that the kingdom can't be viewed as a onetime event, or something that they could take notice and say "there it is!" The kingdom of God was in reality right there in their midst (17:21). After revealing some things that must take place before and when the "Son of Man is revealed" (17:30), Jesus uses a parable to encourage his hearers to

just keep on doing what they should be doing so that ultimately God will find faith.

Setting

This parable is applicable to us today because of the two characters involved. Within the city there was a judge. Under the Law of Moses each city was to have a judge who would make impartial decisions to make "righteous judgment" (Deut 16:18). These judges were warned to make sure that they did not pervert justice by accepting bribes or judging with partiality (Deut 16:19). These judges were to be careful because they were judging for God and not for man (2 Chron 19:6–7). However, the judge in this parable has obviously ignored such warning as he "neither feared God nor respected man" (Luke 18:2). Sadly, this may have been more of a true reflection of their current setting under Herod Antipas rather than a rare occurrence.

The second character of the parable is the widow. To be a widow in ancient times was just another way of saying that someone was hopeless. Without having a husband to defend her, a widow was typically the prey of those who were greedy and covetous. To protect these widows God had made laws to protect them against those who would seek

to devour them, with warnings of punishments to be enforced (Exod 22:20; Deut 24:17; 27:19 and Mal 3:5). In Mark 12:39–41, Jesus even takes note of this mistreatment of widows. By understanding the main characters in the parable we will be more apt to understand and apply the parable to our lives in today's world.

Interpretation

We have noted that it wasn't uncommon for a widow in the ancient world to be abused; in fact it was probably the norm. So when Jesus uses this parable concerning a widow who had been mistreated and had gone before the judge, His audience understood full well the situation. As mentioned above, many judges of that day under Herod Antipas could not have cared less for God nor for what was right, fair, and just. Such was the case with the judge within this parable. Upon her first attempt to receive justice, the widow is refused. Time after time her request is denied; that is, until the judge grew weary of her request. He would have rather given in to her request than have to deal with her persistence. Jesus then shifts from the parable to its explanation. The judge was worldly and unrighteous, but God is righteous and just. If, therefore, we make our requests made known to God in prayer and are persistent with

our petitions, He will certainly also give justice to those of us who are His.

The Pharisees had been looking and waiting for the coming of the kingdom of God. In their opinion, the kingdom would offer to them relief from the clutches of the Roman empire and restore the Jews to the glory days of David. They questioned Jesus about what would be the signs or evidence of the event. As they wait, what are they to do? Jesus answers that they should continue the practice of their faith in God and their petitions made to Him. When the Son of Man returns it will be sudden and without warning. Persistence in their prayerfulness and faith would ensure that they would be ready no matter when He might come. In this way when the Son of Man returns, He will find faith within His elect.

Application

"That's not fair!" How many times have we heard or uttered those words? The unfortunate fact is that while we live on this earth, life is not fair. Out of all of the promises of God there isn't one that reads "I promise to make your life on earth fair and just." Why is that? Is making our lives fair just something that is beyond God's reach? As Paul might say, "God forbid!" Life isn't fair

because we live in a world that oozes selfishness and unrighteousness. We live within a world under the control of the devil (John 12:31). It doesn't matter where you live, when you live, or how well you live, the Christian will face injustice. Not only does the Bible promise these injustices, but it encourages us to be happy about them (James 1:2–4 and 1 Pet 1:6–7). So what can we do? How can we live in such a world that treats us so badly? We must follow the example of this persistent widow. She persisted in her request to the judge because of the treatment she was receiving from her adversary. I find it very interesting that Peter also describes the devil as our "adversary" (1 Pet 5:7–8). The widow's persistence was manifested in her "continually coming" to the judge. Likewise, our persistence in our faith can be manifested in our "continually coming" to the Judge, our Father in Heaven. In doing do, not only can we make known our requests to God on a consistent basis, but we are affected, as well.

First of all, persistence in prayer helps us remain focused. As long as I continually pray to God, I constantly remind myself of the power of God. The judge within the parable was unrighteous and was not God-fearing, yet he still had the power to control the situation. How much more power does our Heavenly Father have? It is really easy

for us to lose our focus in this life because of all the ungodly, immoral people and unchristian situations with which we are placed. Yet if we are in constant communication with God, we can easily be reminded that our Judge spoke the world into existence, parted the waters, calmed the sea. The well-known preacher Adrian Rodgers once said, "God was with Noah, God was with Moses, God was with Elijah, God was with King David. We have it better than they did, GOD IS IN US!" If that isn't encouraging enough, notice the words of Paul to the Ephesians: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Eph 3:20). When we consider all our injustices, being persistent in our prayers will certainly remind us that God is able to deliver us!

Not only does persistence keep us focused on His power, it helps us to recognize that we are powerless. Why else would Jesus use a widow within the story? She is the most powerless of all people in the ancient world. No matter how hard she tried, she was powerless to resolve the situation herself and was at the mercy of her judge. How often do you feel helpless in this world? We are at the mercy of our circumstances. No matter how on top of things we are, we are never in complete control of things. It is only when

we are persistent in our prayers that we recognize His awesome power in comparison to our own weakness. Yet with Him, even "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10).

Finally, being persistent with my prayers will help me remain focused on the task at hand. I may be powerless in the situation, but I can turn it over to God in prayer and allow Him to display His power. Until He acts, I can keep on doing what I know I need to do. I may not be able to control my circumstances, nor the attempts of my adversaries, and the hand I have been dealt may be unfair. I can still continue doing what I know I need to do. Jesus said that if I seek the kingdom of God first and His righteousness, then all of my physical needs will fall into place (Matt 6:33). This will enable me to focus on what is at hand and not on my injustices. Paul said, "one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13–14).

Conclusion

At the end of the parable, Jesus reverts to the questions of the Pharisees concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God. If we remain focused on

doing what we know to do, which is constantly making our requests made known to God, our religion morphs into a relationship. Having this type of relationship with our Father strengthens our faith, which in turn answers that question of the Pharisees. If we are doing what we know we are supposed to do and are focused on our faith, then it doesn't matter when He returns because we will be prepared. Hence the question that Jesus addresses to the Pharisees and those that hear His parable, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith…?" (Luke 18:8). If we are persistent, then the answer is yes!

Discussion

1. What kind of injustices face Christians today?

2. What are some ways in which we can remain persistent with our prayers, without using "vain repetitions/ empty words" that Jesus warns against (Matt 6:7)?

3. James 2:14–26 suggests that prayer alone is not sufficient. What are some things that a persistent prayer life might bring about?