

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE

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### Luke 18:1-8

Christian believers must be patient in prayer until the Lord's return. That is the teaching of Jesus in the parable of the unjust judge. Let's read this story. Luke 18:1-8.

*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,  
2 saying, "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man.  
3 "And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.'  
4 "And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,  
5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out. "'  
6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said;  
7 now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?  
8 "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"*

We should not let the introduction cause us to miss the connection of this parable with the previous chapter. At the end of Luke 17, Jesus was speaking about His second coming – the coming again of the Son of Man. And this parable is still on the same theme. That is why in the last verse, v. 8, we read the question, *When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?* This is important to observe.

### A persistent widow

What is the message that the Lord Jesus wants to convey to us in this story? One point becomes very obvious as we read the story: the persistence of this widow. She kept coming to the judge again and again. She did not stop pestering him until he finally gave her the legal protection she was asking.

Widows were a vulnerable group in the society of the time. For a wife to lose a husband was to lose her position and status in society. That is why both the OT and the NT insist that these people be properly cared for.

Here is a helpless widow who is facing a problem. And she brings her problem to a judge. This judge was probably some prominent local citizen, perhaps having ties with the Herod family, who had authority to manage legal affairs. He is described as an unrighteous person who neither fears God nor respects people.

The widow has basically no hope of gaining the justice that she seeks from such a judge. So she uses the only weapon she has: her persistence. Day after day, she goes to him with the same plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary'.

After sending her back several times, the judge begins to engage in some internal reflection. 'She is getting on my nerves. If she keeps coming to me like that, she is going to wear me out (v. 5)'. In Greek, the word *hupopiazō* literally means 'black eye'. She is going to give me a 'black eye'. Used figuratively, it means to wear down someone emotionally. 'She is driving me crazy with her constant requests. I don't fear God and I don't care for man, but I care for myself. I have to stop her from bothering me. That's enough. Whatever she wants, I'll give it to her'. And so, in order to get rid of her, he sees that she gets justice. The woman's persistence has brought success. Here is an example that the disciple should imitate when he prays.

### **Comparison of the judge to God**

How does that story relate to God? Jesus then asks the disciples to pay close attention to the words of the judge. 'This is what the unrighteous judge did and said. What do you think God does in regard to His chosen ones who cry to Him day and night'? *Shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night (v. 7)*? Here we find a comparison between the unrighteous judge and God. How should we understand it? Can we really see the judge as in some sense standing for God? Well, the answer is, yes and no, depending on your perspective.

No, God is obviously not like this judge. We are not to suppose in any way that the character of God is represented by this judge, or that His principles of conduct are like those of the judge. The point of comparison is one in which Jesus uses an argument from lesser to greater, i.e., if a lesser case is valid, then a greater case must be valid too. It goes like this: If an unjust judge responds to repeated pleas from someone he does not know or care about (the lesser case), how much more will a righteous God respond to His children when He hears their persistent cry (the greater case)? The point is that God hears and answers prayer.

But on the other hand, yes, God can look like this unjust judge. How? Have you ever had the sense that after you have prayed and prayed, it seems that God never answers you? You cried to Him for a long time and nothing happens. You probably felt like this widow who had been turned down so many times by the judge. 'Don't treat me like this. I'm just a poor widow. I am a weak and lonely person in deep need. Why do you refuse to hear my case?' Then God appears to you as an unjust judge.

Job had this experience. He was saying, 'What have I done wrong? My children are dead. My property is gone. Even my wife rebels against You. I cry out to You and You don't respond'. On at least five occasions, Job complains that God doesn't hear him (Job 13:3, 24; 19:7; 23:3-5; 30:20). Listen to Job 30:20: *I cry to you and you do not answer me; I stand, and you merely look at me*. In a moment like this, God appears to Job as an unjust judge.

### **Praying until the Lord's return**

When we have been praying for a long time and there is no sign of answer, we feel discouraged. We just want to quit. And Jesus says, 'No, don't give up. Do not lose heart. Keep on

praying'. V. 1: *Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.*

The application of the parable is therefore to encourage persistence in prayer, and notice, prayer in the specific context of persecution. This parable comes immediately after a long section of teaching concerning the second coming, and it is applied specifically to the promise of the Lord's return in vv. 7-8: *Shall not God bring about justice for His elect ... I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?* These two verses tell us that the intercession described in the parable is related to the persecution that the believer undergoes for his decision to ally with Jesus. As he waits for Christ's second coming, he wrestles with the difficulties of living righteously in a sinful world. He is to identify with the widow's persistence in praying for the decisive coming of God's justice and the full expression of His kingdom. We see from this that not only does the parable illustrate the need for persistence in prayer in general, but it also teaches the need to persist until Jesus returns.

If an unjust judge will respond to constant pressure, how much more will a loving God respond to His people. They can believe that He hears their prayers. It may seem that for a time their cries for justice go unheard. But one day, God will make sure that they get justice.

The last verse says this. *I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily* (v. 8a). God will vindicate His people. He will defend them. This parable is in effect a promise. It is the promise that if we stand firm to the end, God will certainly take up our cause. We will not be disappointed. We have to know that adversity is part of the process by which God brings salvation and that He may let us come to the limit of our endurance. But He will stand with us. He will bring about justice for His people. His faithfulness will never fail.

But then, the question is, Will we fail? Will we keep the faith until the end? Though God's vindication is sure, there is some doubt whether His followers will maintain their faith. This concern is expressed in the second part of the last verse.

*When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?* This is a rhetorical question which expects a negative answer. The implication of a question like this is that when Jesus returns, He will find little faith on the earth. Obviously, the Lord Jesus does not expect to find faith in the world. People of the world never recognize the ways of God and they will not seek His vindication either. Jesus' question indicates that He will be looking for those who are looking for Him. He is hoping that when He comes, He will find disciples still waiting for his coming. But the fearful implication of His question is this: In the last days, many will not persevere in prayer and in faith.

## **When Moses came back**

'When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith'? When I think about this question, I think of Exodus 32. What happened to the Hebrew nation in Exodus 32? Moses had gone up to the mountain to receive the Commandments of God. The Israelites saw him disappearing into the clouds and they are now waiting for his return. One day, two days, three days, four days passed. What happened to Moses? Ten days, fifteen days passed. Still no sign of Moses. The people began to worry because of Moses' delay. 'This Moses', they said, 'we don't know what has become of him. Maybe God is going to keep him in the mountain and he is never going to come back again'.

And so it went on for twenty days, for thirty days, without any sign of Moses. 'We have lost Moses. We will never see him again. What shall we do? We have to find something to worship. Let's make a golden calf and worship it'. It is at that point that the people committed idolatry.

Forty days later, Moses came back. Did he find faith among the people of God? No. When he returned, he only found a bunch of stiff-necked people (Exodus 32:9) who were worshipping a molten calf. Moses was so angry that he smashed the tablets of the Law at the foot of the mountain.

### **Unfaithfulness in the last days**

In Matthew 24:12-13, the Lord Jesus warns His disciples that in the last days, many will depart from the faith. *And because lawlessness is increased, **most people's love will grow cold**.* This passage, taken in its context, speaks of the sufferings to come with reference to Jesus' disciples. Here it says that lawlessness will lead most people's love to cool off. The expression 'most people' is seen by almost all the interpreters as meaning the majority of the disciples. They will cool off in their love, whether for God or for their fellow-men. It is indeed a somber picture of a church in decline at the end of the times. V. 13: *But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.* The person who sticks to the end is the one who will be saved. Every address of Jesus to this point in his discourse in chapter 24 has been in plurals. And now, remarkably, we have one verse that paints a picture of one solitary Christian hanging on to the very end. Jesus makes this contrast in order to alarm every disciple that there will be only a few true Christians at the end.

When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith? The return of the Son of Man cannot be called into question. His second coming will be fulfilled in God's appointed time. The question is whether the disciples will still be faithful in following Jesus. The great tragedy is that there will be few men of faith and prayer when Jesus returns to earth. It will be just like in the days of Noah and Lot. Remember that v. 8 harks back to the last part of the previous chapter where Jesus talked about His coming in the last day.

*Luke 17:26. And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man:*

*27 they were eating, they were drinking...*

*28 It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking...*

*30 It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.*

In the last day, unrighteousness will be widespread on earth and opportunity for unfaithfulness will be great. Steadfastness will be hard to achieve. And Jesus is asking His disciples, 'Will your faith persevere until I return'?

### **When a Christian did not take up his cross**

What can cause a disciple to break? Or, to use the words of Matthew 24, what will cause the disciple's love to grow cold? One reason is this: he breaks because he has never really taken up his cross.

You see, the path of faith is the path of the cross. Remember this well. The path of faith is the path of the cross. In other words, there is no saving faith without the cross. And not just the cross that Jesus bore, but also the cross that I bear with Him and by which I am crucified with Him. 'Unless any man', the Lord Jesus says in Luke 14.27, 'unless he takes up his cross, not My cross, his cross, the cross that I command you to pick up, and follow Me, he cannot be my disciple'. Why? Because God's plan of salvation is one that requires that we learn to be finished with the flesh. And in order to be finished with the flesh, you have to be crucified with Christ.

Jesus died on the cross for you and for me. In that sense, He was our representative. He took all of our sins with Him and died on the cross for us. We know this to be true with all our heart. But if we stop there, an essential part of the Lord's teaching would be missing. His sacrifice will never free us, in our own experience, from the power of sin just because we believe it with our heads. Jesus died

on the cross for our sins, and then what did He say? He said, You follow Me. It is not simply a matter of believing in some intellectual sense that Jesus died. It is following in His footsteps.

This is expressed in many ways in the NT. Let me just give you two verses. One is from Peter and the other one is from Paul.

*1 Peter 2:21. For you have been called for this purpose (what purpose?), since Christ also suffered for you (that is the part we all believe. Christ suffered for you by dying on the cross. But don't stop reading this verse at this point. We would be untrue to the word of God. What does Peter say? Christ suffered for you), leaving you an example **for you to follow** in His steps (of His suffering).*

Jesus suffered in the sense that He died as our substitute, bearing the penalty for our sins. But that is not all. The way He suffered becomes the pattern which His disciples must follow. He bore the cross. So must His disciples.

The apostle Paul says the same thing in Philippians 1:29.

*Philippians 1:29. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, **not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer** for His sake.*

It has not been granted to us only to believe, but also to suffer. Faith in the NT is the readiness to respond to Jesus, a response that involves a readiness to suffer for His sake. That is why I said that the path of faith is the path of suffering through the cross.

I believe in the cross of Jesus Christ. I believe with all my strength that He died for my sins. But we cannot stop there. We have to believe in such a way that His death becomes effective in our life. 'Unless you take up your cross, you cannot be His disciple'. I must not only believe that He died for me. His cross must be applied to my life so that I can say, like the apostle Paul, 'I have been crucified with Christ. I don't live anymore. I am dead to the world and the world is dead to me (Galatians 2:20)'. There has to be a fundamental change of relationship in which I cut my ties with the world so that I now stand in relation with Christ.

*When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?* The Christian who claims allegiance to Jesus but does not take up his cross will not be found among the faithful in the last day.

## **Conclusion**

Let us conclude with this question. How does faith relate to prayer, prayer being the point of the parable in the first place? The implication of Jesus' question is that persistent prayer is needed in order to maintain a healthy faith. The relationship is mutual: faith prompts prayer, while prayer strengthens faith. It is a matter of living in constant fellowship with God, looking for Him for present needs and for the completion of His kingdom. Thus the question serves also as a warning to the disciple to be persistent in prayer so that when the Lord returns he will be found faithful. From that perspective, the message becomes, 'Be vigilant'.