

## “Pray...and Don’t Faint”

Luke 18:1-8

In the early 1900s a Danish noblewoman, Baroness Blixen, lived in Kenya as the owner of a large Coffee plantation. There was a tribe known as the Kikuyu that Blixen had grown to love. Some of the Kikuyu lived on the plantation. After World War I, financial obstacles caused the Baroness to lose the plantation where the Kikuyu lived.

The new owner of the plantation wasn’t concerned with these people, only the land. This meant the Kikuyu would be a tribe without a home. Baroness Blixen didn’t have the money to buy back the land she’d lost. So she took her cause to government agencies to help preserve the land of the Kikuyu tribe; but to no avail.

But the Baroness wouldn’t give up. She made a plan to take her passion for the Kikuyu tribe to a reception for the new Governor of Kenya. She was shameless in her endeavor, disregarding “protocol,” bypassing others in the crowd until at last she reached the Governor. There, she fell on her knees and, grabbing the governor’s hand, pleaded for the Kikuyu. Some guests were embarrassed by her actions and tried to get her up from her knees. But she continued to persist that the governor look into the matter and she asked him to give her his word.

It was then that the Governor’s wife stood up and stated, “You have my word.” Baroness Blixen had succeeded.

Our study in Luke’s Gospel brings us to the opening verses of chapter eighteen. These verses are closely connected with the ending of chapter seventeen where Jesus is teaching about the coming kingdom of God.

You’ll recall that Jesus used many parables in teaching the people. In fact, Matthew 13:34 tells us “...*he said nothing to them without a parable.*” Often, after giving a parable, Jesus would explain the meaning to the disciples in private. But the two parables Jesus uses in the Luke chapter 18 are unusual in that we’re told the meaning before the parable is given.

In today’s study we’ll focus on the first parable in verses 1 to 7. Keeping in mind that parables have only ONE primary meaning, I’ve titled our study “Pray...and Don’t Faint. Listen now as I read the text, **Luke 18:1 to 7.**

As I said in my opening comments, this parable is closely connected with the end of chapter seventeen. There, Jesus was describing the conditions His followers would experience as

they waited for the coming kingdom. His statements in chapter 17 indicate there would be a significant time lapse between His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and the establishing of His earthly kingdom. The first verse of our text reinforces that understanding. Because of this, there is a need for prayer and perseverance.

In this parable Jesus teaches us the need for prayer and perseverance in faith as we await the coming kingdom of God. He uses three CHARACTERS to open our understanding.

The First CHARACTER is,

### **The Imperious Judge**

Before we look at the character of this judge, we need to understand the New Testament setting. Warren Wiersbe describes it this way.

“The courtroom was not a fine building but a tent that was moved from place to place as the judge covered his circuit. The judge, not the law, set the agenda; and he sat regally in the tent, surrounded by his assistants. Anybody could watch the proceeding from outside, but only those who were approved and accepted could have their cases tried. This usually meant bribing one of the assistants so he could call the judge’s attention to the case.” These insights help us to understand the imperiousness of this judge Jesus is talking about.

Jesus said this judge “defied the vengeance of God and despised the opinion of men; wow! What hope of justice did anyone have from him? He was domineering in a haughty manner, dictatorial, and overbearing.

Separating himself from God and truth meant he had no standard for righteous judgment. Nor did any of the “milk of human kindness” motivate this judge in his deliberations. He was imperious, arbitrary, and capricious! While the people of Jesus’ day were familiar with unjust judges, this fellow was extreme.

We must further examine this man’s character; but in order to do that we need to meet the next character in the parable.

The Second CHARACTER is,

### **The Importunate Widow**

To this imperious judge comes a woman, a widow; weak, desolate, defenseless. In Israel widows were the personification of dependence, helplessness, and vulnerability. The Law of Moses gave specific prohibitions about taking advantage of a widow in any way. But that law was often ignored, even by the Pharisees who were supposed to be scrupulous in keeping it.

We know from the wording in verse 3, and from the judge's response, that she didn't just come to him once; she came again and again. If what Wiersbe says is true, and she had to bribe the judge's helpers to get to him, she must have spent all, or nearly all, of her meager existence just to get his attention. She asked the judge repeatedly for protection from those who opposed her, but not for their punishment. Here's why I believe that's significant.

The widow in this parable represents the Church; she is, in a sense, a widow because the Bridegroom is gone, He is not here. We are awaiting His return. This is the context of this parable. Followers of Jesus are dependent on God for protection from those who have no fear of God. But because Jesus followers know that judgment ultimately belongs to God, they don't call for vengeance; instead they cry out for protection and relief.

Now, let's see what happened. The judge says "because this widow is 'forever' coming to me, nagging me, I will provide relief for her. If I don't, she may beat me down." The word, weary, used by the Authorized Version is not strong enough. *Hupopiadzo* literally means to "strike under the eye." It's used only one other place in the New Testament. In First Corinthians 9:27 Paul says "I buffet (*hupopiadzo*) my body." Some translators phrase it this way, "*I will provide relief for her lest at last she come and assault me.*"

Whether the judge is literally worried that this woman is going to attack him physically, or whether he's exaggerating for effect we don't know. But one thing we do know; he didn't want a black eye, literally or figuratively. He didn't want a stain on his reputation. So he decides he will give her the justice she seeks. This brings us to the third character in the story.

The Final CHARACTER is,

### **The Compassionate God**

Jesus said, "Listen to what the judge of injustice says." He would only provide justice for this widow to rid himself of an irritation! What a contrast. If the judge of injustice speaks like this, how much more shall God, the just judge, avenge his own children who cry to Him day and

night? The emphasis in verse seven is on God. A more literal reading puts God first. “And God, shall He not avenge His elect?”

Jesus had just finished teaching the disciples about the trials and suffering that would make up the interval between His present ministry and His future return. The opening verse of chapter 18 clearly indicates this interval would be a long time rather than a short one. The disciples would need to be always praying and not fainting. Today, you and I are in that time -- and the end is not yet! This admonition is for us too. Without the trials and suffering during this time there would be little to motivate prayer or call forth perseverance.

Some have mistakenly made the widow the focus of this parable. They have held her up as a model of persistent prayer. She eventually received what she needed because of her persistence. But is it our insistence that moves God’s hand on our behalf? Jesus made it clear that those who expect to gain God’s ear by speaking many words will be disappointed; that’s Matthew 6:7. Mechanical prayers are empty prayers.

The focus of this parable is that the Church perseveres in prayer because she knows God will eventually right her cause. He will ultimately provide justice for His people – on His schedule. Knowing this, the Church does not pray for retribution on her enemies but for grace, strength, and divine enabling to endure until the end. She is confident in God’s sovereignty, His grace, and His goodness.

Make no mistake my friend; God, the Heavenly Judge, The Just Judge, has the good of His people on His heart! He is not like the unjust judge who delayed justice for the widow because of his own indifference; and then only gave it to protect himself. No, God is not like that! Though He delays the outpouring of judgment on those who have wronged His people, He has by no means forgotten. He doesn’t extend our suffering needlessly and heartlessly. He waits for ALL the elect to be gathered in and only He will know when that has happened. Until that time there is a need for prayer and perseverance in faith.

If there is any doubt among God’s people of the fulfillment of His promises, verse 8 provides the assurance you and I need. There are two parallels in these final verses. Let’s look at them together. The first one answers the question “But God, shall he not do judgment on behalf of His elect?” The answer is in verse 8. “I tell you, He will do judgment on their behalf shortly!” The time may not seem short to those who suffer, but in comparison to eternity the apostle Paul

says our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory we'll experience. That's Romans 8:18.

The second parallel is related to the phrase "although He long delays his final interposition on their account." The response is Jesus question "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" After all this suffering and delay would He find intellectual belief on the part of some, and genuine, heartfelt trust and longing in the true Church? It is a sad but penetrating question.

And it is also sad, but true, that many today are giving up the faith, falling away. Their current struggles and trials have caused them to lose sight of the goal. They have failed to latch hold of the grace God has extended to them in their time of need. Oh, they may have an intellectual grasp of faith. They may know the right words to say; but their choices reveal they are choosing the way of the world instead of the way of the Master.

And I would note that most of these falling away are not in areas of the world where there is actual physical, psychological, and spiritual persecution. No, most of those leaving the faith are in places where there is relative ease and freedom.

Jesus' question is one you and I must answer, my friend. Will we exercise genuine faith in Him until the end? Will we be trusting, longing, and praying because we are anticipating His coming? Will the prevailing unbelief around us motivate more intensity of prayer and the conviction to persevere regardless of what you and I may face?

If we want to answer YES to these questions there is only one way it will happen; by keeping our eyes fixed on the prize. And what does that mean? The apostle Paul sums it up for us in Philippians 3:13 and 14; "*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.*"

My friend, if you and I join the apostle Paul on this quest to know Christ, we will be able to pray...and not faint!