

The Persistent Widow

Luke 18: 1-8

There is a story told that Andrew Jackson's boyhood friends just couldn't understand how he became a famous general and then the President of the United States. They knew of other men who had greater talent but who never succeeded. One of Jackson's friends said, "Why, Jim Brown, who lived right down the pike from Jackson, was not only smarter but he could throw Andy three times out of four in a wrestling match. But look where Andy is now." Another friend responded, "How did there happen to be a fourth time? Didn't they usually say three times and out?" "Sure, they were supposed to, but not Andy. He would never admit he was beat—he would never stay 'threwed.' Jim Brown would get tired, and on the fourth try Andrew Jackson would throw him and be the winner."

Picking up on that idea, most of us have faced and will continue to face many setbacks, but we must take courage and go forward in faith. Then, through the Holy Spirit's power we can be the eventual victor over sin and the world. The battle is the Lord's, so there is never any excuse for us to stay "threwed"!

I think this applies this morning as we continue our study in the Gospel of Luke. Today's text brings us to the context where Jesus has been discussing the coming Kingdom in Luke 17. As we look at these beginning verses in Chapter 18, we see that Jesus begins teaching the disciples that they need to persist and be confident of God's faithfulness and be faithful themselves as they wait for the coming of the kingdom, in spite of the adversity, persecution, and injustice which would lead many to believe that the coming of the kingdom and the establishment of justice on the earth seems unlikely. We may feel at times as if the Lord will never return but in this text, Jesus seems to say, Remember who I am and do not grow weary in doing what I've commanded you to do – no matter what the world will throw your way. Let's look at this passage and may God speak directly to each of us and our individual situations this morning.

I. The Faithfulness of God

- a. Note that Jesus focuses on the unjust Judge – why an unjust Judge? I believe that this contrast to God, the faithful judge, is to drive home the obvious.
 - i. This earthly judge is unjust in comparison to God who is Just
 1. Isaiah 61:8, "For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity..."
 - ii. This earthly judge is uncaring in comparison to God who is compassionate and merciful.
 1. Lamentations 3:22, 23
 - iii. This earthly judge is selfish in comparison to God who is selfless.
 1. John 3:16

- iv. If an unjust, uncaring and selfish Judge granted justice not because it was the right thing to do or because the law required it but solely because it saved him the headache of this nagging woman, then how much more can we rely on a righteous and Holy Judge to do what is right. We can depend on God to bring Justice in His time.
 - 1. Romans 12: 17-19 – “vengeance is mine, says the Lord”
- b. Because HE is faithful, then we should never grow weary of going to him in prayer. He wants what is best for us. He will show compassion and mercy. He will bring justice.
 - i. 1 Thessalonians 5: 18 – “pray continually” – always, always talk to God.
 - ii. Hebrews 4:16 - “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”.

II. Will We be found Faithful?

- a. When I study passages regarding perseverance and passages about not growing weary or losing heart, I’m always reminded of the children’s story of the little choo choo train who kept saying “I think I can, I think I can...”. Are you and I little choo choo trains – do we believe that Paul’s encouragement to the Philippians in 4:13 is true:
 - i. “I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me”
 I believe this is a second truth of which Jesus wanted to remind HIS disciples of in this passage. Press on – don’t give up even when the odds seem unsurmountable.
- b. This persistent widow – this nagging woman as some would describe her – would not go away. She was that annoying gnat or fly or mesquito that just will not leave you alone. She was determined. She was the squeaky wheel. This judge was not a righteous man and he really didn’t care what happened to this woman – it had nothing to do with justice. He simply got tired of hearing her. But she is to be commended because she did not grow weary. I’m reminded of the mother of the U.S. Soldier who was killed several years ago in Iraq and she has tormented President Bush for years now. She, right or wrong, believes in her cause and would not quit – camping out in front of his Texas ranch, etc.
- c. Jesus uses this parable to describe the type of commitment that drive people when they believe they have encountered unjust behavior. It

drives them, they are focused, they are diligent, they are fanatical – because they believe in what they are doing. Do we believe this strongly – are do we just roll over and play dead like a possum, hoping that we can just live our lives in peace and harmony or at least with as little commotion as possible.

d. I believe that Jesus was indeed trying to prepare the disciples for what they would encounter. History shows what would happen to the disciples:

- i. Andrew was crucified
- ii. Bartholomew was crucified upside down
- iii. James, son of Alphaeus, was stoned to death
- iv. James, brother of John, was beheaded
- v. John is believed to have died of old age but he was imprisoned as we know for a long period of time.
- vi. Matthew died of natural causes evidently
- vii. Peter was crucified upside down by Nero
- viii. Philip was crucified
- ix. Thaddeus died of old age
- x. Simon the Zealot died of old age also
- xi. Thomas was speared to death
- xii. Paul was beheaded in Rome

e. Throughout the New Testament we see references to the persecution and opposition that the disciples encountered and surely they would question if they would ever see justice prevail and the coming of the Kingdom for which they worked so diligently.

1. Hebrews 12:3

- a. We are reminded that Jesus suffered – so much more than we can even fathom.

2. Galatians 6:9

- a. We are reminded that things happen according to God's timetable, not ours.
 - i. Ecclesiastes 3 – there is a time for everything.

3. Ephesians 3:13

- i. Paul encouraged the Ephesians not to lose heart because of how he was suffering because if Paul wasn't suffering, many would not know of Jesus.

1. I'm reminded of the missionary Jim Elliot (movie – End of the Spear). Had Jim Elliot and his fellow missionaries not sacrifice their lives an entire tribe would never have experienced the joy of salvation.

2. My mom suffered with cancer for many years off and on. I often questioned God why my mom – she was truly an amazing woman. But I know that if you were to ask my mom, in Heaven, today why? She would tell you that God used it to prepare me for ministry – and in spite of me, God has brought many to Jesus through me.
3. Romans 8:28 ff – God will use all things for Good for us, His Children.
4. 2 Thessalonians 3:13
 - a. Paul encourages his Thessalonian brothers and sisters that they should never tire in doing what is right basically no matter what the cost and even when they saw others being lazy.
5. 2 Corinthians 4: 1, 16
 - a. In this section of Scripture, Paul encourages the Corinthian believers to keep persevering, even in the midst of trials and tribulations and I'm reminded of Isaiah's words in Isaiah 40: 28-31,

Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

But those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

I believe Jesus is telling us in this parable that: “You can bet the house and know for a fact that I will return and that I will bring about justice on the earth when I come (as is shown to us in the book of Revelation). So we do not need to concern ourselves with this incessant complaining for justice or grow weary in doing what is right. We need to do as the Solomon told us in Proverbs 3, “Trust in the Lord with all of our hearts and lean not on our own understanding. Acknowledge Him in all our ways and know that HE will direct our paths” and know that HE will be victorious. The battle may still be raging but the outcome has been determined and Jesus will conquer the enemy, once and for all when God’s timing is perfect. The longer He waits, the more who will come to know HIM. Friends, we only need to concentrate on whether we will be found faithful when He returns. We don’t need to worry about His faithfulness. Are you faithful or are you growing weary. Do not lose heart, do not lose faith for the new day is near. As Paul wrote the Philippians in chapter 4, verse 6, “rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near!”