

Lesson 41

Don't Lose Heart

Icebreaker:

When is the last time you had an answer to prayer?
What was it you prayed for?

Introduction:

When Jesus finished telling the disciples about His second coming to deliver the saints from God's wrath upon the earth, He followed it with the Parable of the Unjust Judge. The parable is meant to be an encouragement to all of His disciples and its purpose is to show them that at all times they should pray and not lose heart. It has a practical everyday application in the lives of all Christians. And more pointedly to those who are alive just prior to His second coming, as Jesus concludes the parable with the statement, "*However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*"

Reading The Scripture:

The Parable of the Widow and the Judge

Luke 18:1-8

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a journey with Jesus)

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 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?"

The Commands:

1. Hear what the unrighteous judge said.

The Lesson:

Lets begin the lesson by carefully listening to what the parable says before we attempt to make any observations about it or draw any conclusions from it. *Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to **pray and not to lose heart**, saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ' Give me legal protection from my opponent.' For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.' "* And the Lord said, "*Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*"

Jesus often used parables to teach people difficult to understand truths or principles. Many of these parables are considered **comparative**. In other words, “something is **like** something else.” For example, *the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea*. And some of the parables He told are **contrasting**. In other words, something is **unlike** something else. The Parable of the Unjust Judge is a contrasting parable, as God who is a just judge is **unlike** the unjust judge.

Group Discussion:

In the parable the woman is likened to or identified with the elect of God. (I.E Christians)

1. Did the woman know where to go to get justice? How do you know that? Yes. She went to the one responsible for justice, the judge.
2. Was she afraid of the judge? How do you know that? No. She sought him out originally and then just kept pestering him.
3. Were her motives wrong? How do you know that? No. She sought only the protection that was due her according to the local laws.
4. Did the woman have faith in the judge? How do you know that? No. The parable states that he was not worthy of trust as he neither feared God nor had any respect for man. That's why she had to keep bringing her case to him.

The Lesson Continued:

Since the parable is contrasting, the opposites are true with a just judge. Therefore the parable is indicating that with God you do not have to keep coming to Him with the same request; He heard you the first time. You do not have to wear God out; He is willing to make judgment in your favor and will do so quickly. But from Jesus' opening and closing statements “*ought to pray and not to lose heart*” and “*will He find faith on the earth*” it appears that some Christians are not praying with **faith** but only **hope**.

Group Discussion:

5. Doubt is the enemy of faith. What are some doubts you have when praying?

The Lesson Continued:

The Parable of the Unjust Judge clearly indicates that if a Christian has faith that God will answer his just prayer request, then God will answer it favorably and quickly. However, many Christians are quick to point out that the Apostle Paul had a “thorn in the flesh” from which he was not delivered after repeatedly asking God to take it away.

The Apostle Paul relates the story of his “thorn in the flesh” in his second epistle to the Corinthians about 56 or 57 AD. This is how it reads.

*Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will **go on to visions and revelations of the Lord**. I know a man in Christ who **fourteen years ago**—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was **caught up to the third heaven**. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows— **was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak**. On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.*

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment

me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12:1-9)

According to Paul’s testimony he was given a “thorn in the flesh” evidently by God as a gift to him or at least with God’s permission. The reason he was given the “thorn in the flesh” was to keep him from exalting himself or becoming prideful. This was a result of having seen great visions and revelations of the Lord in either 42 or 43 AD while he was in the area of Antioch. Therefore, he must have been given his “thorn in the flesh” sometime after 42 or 43 AD. As a matter of record, Paul was converted to Christianity in 37 AD and began his first missionary journey in 45 AD.

There has been a lot of speculation among scholars as to what was Paul’s thorn in the flesh was. There are five prevalent views concerning the “thorn in the flesh”: two deal with physical ailments and three deal with spiritual adversity.

1. *Physical*

- a. Some think that Paul had poor eyesight as a result of his conversion on the Damascus Road when he was struck blind. *Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.* However, he was healed of this. *And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.”* Please note that this event occurred in 37 AD, several years before Paul received his revelations.
- b. Some think that Paul’s appearance was marred as a result of being stoned. *But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.* Since the stoning of Paul took place in 46 AD this is a possibility.

2. *Spiritual*

- a. Some think that Jewish opposition to his message was his thorn in the flesh. *But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ. When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him.* This seems highly unlikely since there has always been opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in this particular case it occurred shortly after Paul’s conversion in 37 AD.
- b. Some think that Paul was constantly being tormented by one of Satan’s demons. This is a possibility since God allowed a demon to torment King Saul. However, Paul was certainly not possessed by any demon since the Holy Spirit was indwelling him. Evil spirits have tormented some Christians but normally they can be dealt with by casting them away.
- c. Some think that Paul constantly had to deal with Judiazers, those who were trying to get Gentile Christians to observe the Law of Moses. This is a distinct possibility since the problems did not begin to occur until after his first missionary journey in

45 AD. It also has a Biblical basis. *But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as **pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides**, and they will trouble you in the land in which you live. (Numbers 33:55)* Paul could have sought legal relief from God because Proverbs 16:7 says, *“When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”*

Though we may never know what Paul’s thorn in the flesh was, we can draw some conclusions about Paul’s prayer life. It appears that Paul believed his prayers would be answered if he prayed with the right motive, didn’t fear the circumstances and believed that what he prayed for would come to pass. He exhibited his faith by his actions. He didn’t just pray for the salvation of people but actually preached to them.

Since Paul says he prayed three times for the same thing it appears not to be normal to continually ask God for the same thing. The greatest elapsed time between the potential onset on the “thorn in the flesh” and his reporting of it to the Corinthians was fourteen years. **So it appears that when Paul prayed he gave the Lord adequate time to answer his prayer. But he also didn’t give up until God answered him.**

The Point Of The Lesson:

Pray and do not lose heart ... have faith in the God who is both just and loves you.

Application:

Start a prayer journal for your major prayers recording the date of the prayer, what was asked of God and the date on which you observed the first fulfillment. There can be multiple fulfillments or greater and lesser fulfillments.