

PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 52, “The Judge and The Widow.” Part I, Luke 18:1-8.

THE JUDGE AND THE WIDOW LUKE 18:1-8

1. Read, Luke 18:1-8.
2. As in many P, there is a deceptively simple story that hides a complex series of theological theme and interpretive issues. A close look at the literary background, the rhetorical form, and the culture will help unlock some of the theological secrets of this treasured story. In this p there is a clearly identified literary background. As observed in the p of The Barren Fig Tree, a careful comparison between the p in the mouth of Jesus and its prototype is crucial. In doing so we can see what is borrowed, transformed and of equal importance of what is left out. In this case, the prototype is Ben Sirach. Text in question is as follows;
3. “He will not ignore the supplication of the fatherless,
Nor the widow when she pours out her story.
Do not the tears of the widow run down her cheek
As she cries out against him who has caused them to fall?
He whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted,
And his prayer will reach to the clouds.
The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds,
And he will not be consoled until it reaches the Lord.
He will not desist until The Most High visits him
And does for justice for the righteous and executes justice.
The Lord will not delay,
Neither will he be patient with them.,
Till he crushes the loins of the unmerciful,
And repays vengeance on the gentiles.” (Ben Sirach 35:15-19).
4. Points of similarity and dissimilarity are many and significant. These need to be examined in three categories;
-points of complete similarity,

- points of similarity (but with a difference)
- and points of dissimilarity.

5. POINTS OF COMPLETE SIMILARITY:

- a. In each, the text begins with a topic of prayer in general, then after an illustration, each moves on to discuss the specific topic of justice for the righteous in the face of oppression.
- b. Both use the rabbinic principal of 'from the light to the heavy,' (From a 'light' illustration from daily life to a 'heavy' application).

6. POINTS OF SIMILARITY (BUT WITH A DIFFERENCE):

- a. The basic figure of a widow crying is similar in both stories. Yet, the repeated action in Jesus' p is more prominent. Unlike Jesus, Sarach's shift to the persistent, humble man who will NOT be consoled until he has an answer, that is Jesus makes more of persistence and Ben Sirach shifts to a male figure.
- b. The patience of God is mentioned in both texts, yet Sirach's says God is not patient with the ungodly. As we will see, Jesus affirms that God is patient with the ungodly.
- c. Both texts discuss the vindication of the righteous. (Yet in Sirach, God act in two ways, He executes justice on the patient and vengeance on the unrighteous. In Jesus' p the 2nd is omitted.
- d. Each has a concrete illustration, the widow. (Yet Jesus use of the illustration is expanded into a full parable.

7. POINTS OF COMPLETE DISSIMILARITY:

- a. In Sirach the way to get your prayers heard is to render service that is pleasing to God. Such a one is accepted and prayer reach the clouds. None of this "God hears you if you serve Him theology is reflected in Jesus' p."
- c. The figure of the unjust judge is a dramatic new thrust in Jesus p, it is bold and risky. A negative character symbolically represents God. This then gives a sharper cutting edge to the 'from the light to the heavy' principal of interpretation.

8. Thus it is obvious that some material of Sirach has been used, some transformed and some omitted. The similarities are so numerous that we assume with Montefiore that there is a conscious borrowing. These point of similarity and dissimilarity will be examined in detail as we proceed. The p of the Judge and the Widow and the p that follow obviously relate to prayer. The close parallels of Luke 11:5-8 have been noted. Elsewhere I

have argued that the central section of Luke has an outline that brings Luke 11:1-13 into a parallel position with Luke 18:1-4. (Bailey). In the first case there are three traditions of prayers and in the second there are two. At the same time, these relate to the coming of the Son of man and thus to the previous passage in 17:22-37. This latter relationship is reinforced by the Lucan introduction in 18:1 and the conclusion in 8b. Thus two themes are woven into the passage: The topic of prayer and the topic paradoxical suddenness/delay of the Parousia/2nd coming. Indeed, as we will observe each of these two passages (18:1-8, and 9-14) has a unique thrust in relation to prayer.

9. The question of authenticity for the present passage is two crucial to be ignored; the passage breaks down into three sections;
 - a. The Evangelist's introduction.
 - b. The p. proper
 - c. And finally the home/Dominical application of the p..The intro is the work of Luke or his part is not part of the p. Significantly, the next p. (Luke 18:9-14) also begins with at the evangelist's introduction which we will see as it is his commentary on which the p is all about. In our view these introductions must be taken seriously as important indications of the original meaning of the p.. Bultmann has placed this p in a list of p for which the original meaning. But if we take the literary background in Sirach and the evangelists introductions seriously we have evidence for the original intent of the p.
10. In regard to the p and in particular the Dominical application at the end opinion is sharply divided. Linnemann argues that both are secondary. Jeremias presents weighty linguistic arguments for the authenticity of both. Kummel finds specific measures that mark the Dominical as original and in no way is a reinterpretation, since the p as a metaphor, can bear particular and general application. (Kummel). His point is that the text talk of God's salvation coming quickly and that this particular emphasis was strong in Jesus' own teaching.
11. In the prototype of the p (found in Sirach) we noted an application of the figure of a weeping widow to prayer in general. Which then turned at the end of the passage to a specific discussion of God's intervention for the community of the faithful. The same move occurs here. Marsha observes an historically closer parallel;

- a. In fact, we have a similar structure to that of the p. of the prodigal son, where a story, whose central character appears to be the father and whose central concern is to depict the character of God, turns out to have a 'sting in the tail' as it presents the picture of the elder brother and asks the audience whether they behave like him. So here, after depicting the character of God, the p turns in application to the disciples and asks whether they will show a faith as persistent as the nagging of the widow. (Marshall).
- b. Thus from a linguistic, theological and literary points of view that are important reasons for affirming both the p and the Dominical application as authentic for Jesus.

12. THE INTRODUCTION:

"And he was saying in a p to them to the effect that they ought to always pray and not lose heart/be afraid." The audience is assumed by the text to be the disciples, Luke 17:22, the following p., 18:9-14, is addressed to those with a self-righteous spirit like some Pharisees. In the parallel teaching on prayer (Luke 11:1-13) we can observe the identical shift. There the initial material is spoken to the disciples and the p/poem on the father's gifts (vv.9-13) is mostly like spoken by the Pharisees (Bailey). The introduction reinforces the general persistence in prayer at the same time the specific application at the conclusion of the p is hinted at in this introduction. Not only in regard to God's decisive intervention in history are the faithful to be persistent in prayer, but they are to seek Him whenever He seems far away and the confidence of the believer wavers. The solution to fear is prayer. In Shakespeare's famous play, Macbeth is fear full lest their plans fail. His wife tries to steel his nerves with the command, "But screw your courage to the sticking place and we'll not fail!" (act 1, scene 7). Macbeth does so and yet his great plans disintegrate into tragedy for himself and all around him. Here is a simple piety expressed in trusting prayer is commanded as a solution of the fear that robs the believer of his tranquility and the will to endure. Jesus and his little band were faced with intensified rejection and hostility on all sides. Surely this generalized introduction/interpretation of the p can be seen as authentic to the specific situation Jesus faced., as well as an appropriate introduction to the pa at a later state in the life of the early Church.

