

PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 53, “The Judge and The Widow.” Part II, Luke 18:1-8.

THE JUDGE AND THE WIDOW LUKE 18:1-8

1. Read, Luke 18:1-8.
2. 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. Marshall 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.
3. **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 p. at a later state in the life of the early Church.

4. THE PARABLE:

The first stanza tells of the judge and the second of the widow. The third returns to the judge with the same motifs, and there four then returns to the widow. The three themes of JUDGE-GOD-Man of the stanza one are repeated in the identical order in third stanza. Stanzas two and four on the widow have the same themes, but in the last stanza the order is reversed. It is pointless to commit one more rash act 'metri causa' and suggest that the last stanza may have had the theme of vindication at the end (like stanza three). Such may be the case, or the language originally may not have been that precisely aligned (as in many cases of parallelism in the Psalms). Yet the stanzas are intact, w/o any extra interpretive details. Each them has a balancing line and the overall effect is symmetrical and artistically satisfying.

1 "A certain judge there was in a certain city

JUDGE

God he did not fear

GOD

And man he did not respect

MAN

2 And a widow there in that city,

WIDOW

And she was coming to him
 COMING
 Saying, "Vindicate me from my adversary."
 VINDICATE
 3 He did not want to for a (certain) time.
 JUDGE
 Then he said to himself, "Although I do not fear God."
 GOD
 And do not respect man
 MAN
 4 Yet because she causes me trouble, this widow,
 WIDOW
 I will vindicate her
 VINDICATE
 Lest in continual coming she wear me out."
 COMING

5. STANZA ONE-THE PAGAN JUDGE:

"A certain judge there was in a certain city
 JUDGE
 God he did not fear
 GOD
 And man he did not respect"
 MAN

In 2 Chronicles Jehoshaphat chooses judges for the land and tells them, "...consider what you do, for you judge no for man, but for the Lord;...now then, let the fear of the Lord be upon you, take heed what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the Lord, our God or partiality in taking bribes." Such admonitions are always needed in every society, and the OT keeps trying to establish justice in the gate. Amos in particular was upset over the corruption of Judges, see Amos 2:6-7, 5:10-13. In NT times the same problem surfaced. Ederheim (Life), describes judges in Jerusalem that were called 'Dayyaney Gezolah,' Robber-Judges rather than 'Dayyaney Gezeroth,' judges of Prohibition, which was their real titles. The Talmud speaks of judges in villages who pervert justice just for a dish of meat (BT Baba Kamma). In perversion of Jehoshaphat's directive, the judge in our p. cares neither for man nor for God. Plummer points out the

word often being translated, “respect,” (entripo) can also mean being “abashed, having a feeling of awe” (Plummer). The active of the verb is to make ashamed and the passive is either ‘be put to shame,’ or ‘have respect for’ (Bauer). But starting with the Old Syriac to other Syriacs to all Arabic versions for a thousand years, the only translation we have from the ME is “he is not ashamed before people.”

6. A very important aspect of the judge is thereby overlooked when we read with our Western translation tradition is ‘to have respect for.’ The point is that ME traditional culture is a shame-pride culture to a significant degree. That is a particular pattern of social appeal is encouraged by appeals to shame. The parent does not tell the child, “That is wrong, Johnny,” (with an appeal to an abstract standard of right and wrong), but, “That is shameful Johnny,” (an appeal to that which stimulates feelings of shame or feelings of pride). Such a society the vocabulary that surrounds the concept of shame is very important (Bailey, Poet). One of the sharpest criticisms possible for an adult in ME village today is ‘ma jikhtashi,’ (They do not feel shame). The point is that he does not feel ashamed. His inner sense of what constitutes a good act and what is a shameful act is missing. He cannot be ashamed.
7. In this regard we are dealing with another case where very ancient attitudes are reflected. Jeremiah had the same problem. We are told, “the wise men shall be put to shame.” (Jeremiah 8:9, but in regard to the prophets and priests he writes, “Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, there were not all ashamed; they did not know how to blush (8:12). The Hebrew text uses two strong words for shame (bwhs, klm) and speaks precisely to the problem faced with the judge... “nothing shames him!” There is no spark of honor left in his soul to which anyone can appeal! The problem with this judge is not a failure to ‘respect’ other people in sense of respecting someone or learn of a high position. Rather it’s the case of his inability to see the evil in his actions in the presence of one who should make him feel ashamed. In this case, he is hurting a destitute woman. He should feel shame! The whole world can cry, “Shame,” and it will make no impression on him as he does not feel shame before men/others. We have precisely the same concept and the same word in The P. of the Rebellious Tenants in Luke 20:13. The tenants refuse to give some of the fruits of the vineyard to the owners. They treat the servant of the owner, “Shamefully!” Finally, the master says, “I will

send my beloved son; it maybe that they will feel shame before ((entrapensontai) him” (so translated in all Syriac and Arabic versions). The hope is not the they treat him kindly, but rather that in his presence they might feel ashamed of what they have done and give up their rebellious acts. But there are also tenants involved could not be shamed. In both texts the Greek word carries this meaning. ME culture requires it and ME fathers give us this meaning in their translations.

8. Thus we have in Luke 18 a clear picture of a very difficult man. He has no fear of God; the cry for “God’s sake” will do no good. He also has no inner sense of what is right and wrong and what is shameful to which one can appeal for justice. Thus the cry, “For the sake of the destructive widow!” will likewise be useless. Obviously the only way to influence such a man is through bribery. To such a man came the widow.

9. STANZA TWO-THE HELPLESS WIDOW:

“And a widow there in that city,

WIDOW

And she was coming to him

COMING

Saying, “Vindicate me from my adversary.”

VINDICATE

The widow of the OT is the typical symbol of innocent, powerless and oppressed. See Exodus 22:22-23, Deut. 10:18, Job 22:9, and Ps. 68:5. Isaiah 1:17 calls rulers and people to ‘plead for the widow.’ Then in verse 23, we are told, “everyone loves a bribe and the widows’ cause does not come to them.” The Jewish legal system based on Isaiah 1:17, states, “The suit of an orphan must always be heard first, then the widow.” (Debmritz). Thus this woman had legal rights that were being violated. Bruce writes of her, “Too weak to compel, too poor to buy justice.” (Bruce, “Parabolic”). Plummer observes, “She had neither a protector, a coerce nor money to bribe.” Ib al-Tayyib, comments on the plight of a widow in ME society; In every time and place the greedy have fund the widow vulnerable to oppression and injustice for she has no one to protect her. Thus God commands the judges to give her special consideration, Jeremiah 22:3. Jeremias suggest that a “debt, pledge, or a portion of an inheritance is being withheld from her (Bruce). As Bruce observes, “A widow was one who was pretty sure to have plenty of adversaries if she had anything to devour.” The issue is clearly money, because, according to the Talmud, a qualified scholar could decide money cases sitting alone. (B.T. Sanhedrin).

10. Her cry is one for justice and protection, not vengeance. Smith translates it, "Do me justice with regard to my opponent." (C.W.F. Smith). By way of the summary, the p. thus far makes three assumptions.
- a. The widow is in the right and being denied justice.
 - b. From some reason, the judge does not want to serve her (She has paid no bribes?)
 - c. The judge favors to serve her adversary. (Either the adversary is influential or he has paid the bribes). Smith comments, "She may be presumed to have been incapable of rewarding him, and we may assume further that it would probably be to his advantage to let her oppressor have his way (C.W.F. Smith).
11. In the last century a western traveler has witnessed a scene in Iraq that gives us a wider picture behind the p.. He writes, "It was in the old city of Nisibis in Mesopotamia, on immediately entering in the gate of the city on one side was a prison with its barred windows, through which the prisoners thrust their arms and beg for alms. Opposite was a large open hall, the court of justice of the place. On a slightly raised dais in the further end sat the 'Kadi,' or judge half buried in cushions. Round him squatted various secretaries and other notables. The populace crowded into the rest of the hall, a dozen voices clamoring at once, each claiming that their cause is heard first. The more prudent litigants joined in the fray, but held but held whispered communications with the secretaries, passing bribes, euphemistically called fees, into the hand of one or another. When the greed of the underlings was satisfied, one of them would whisper into the ear of the Kadi, who would promptly call a case. It seemed to be ordinarily taken for granted that the judgment would go to the one who paid the highest bribe. But meantime, a poor woman on the skirts of the crowd perpetually interrupted the proceedings with loud cries for justice. She was sternly bidden to be silent, and reproachfully told that she came there every day. "And so I will," she cried out, "till the Kadi hears me." At length at the end of the suit, the judge impatiently demanded, "What does that woman want?" Her story was soon told. Her only son had been taken for a soldier, and she was alone and could not till her piece of ground; yet the tax gatherer had forced her to pay the impost, from which as a lone widow she could be exempt. The judge asked a few questions and said, "Let her be exempt." Thus her perseverance was rewarded. Had she money to fee a clerk she might have been excused long before." (Tristram)