

PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 54, “The Judge and The Widow.” Part III, Luke 18:1-8.

THE JUDGE AND THE WIDOW LUKE 18:1-8

1. Read, Luke 18:1-8.

“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

2. 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

3. 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 change 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.
4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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).

7. 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).
8. 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)

9. A long list of commentators from Plummer to Jeremias has noted this account as being very beneficial in understanding the cultural background of this p.. Yet there is a crucial account in both Tristram's account and in the p. that goes unnoticed. Ordinarily women in the ME do not go to court. The ME was and is a man's world and women are not expected to be involved in the 'wrestling' that is described above. Furthermore, additional evidence for this comes from the Talmudic Times, The Tractate Shebuoth that reads; "Do, then men come to court and do not women ever come to court? You might say, it is not usual for a woman, because all glorious is the King's daughter within,". See Ps. 45:14, The Jewish woman is modest and stays within her home as much as possible. (Shebuoth). In light of this reticence to have women appear in court one could understand her presence there as meaning that she is entirely alone with no men in an extended family to speak to her. This may be the assumption of the story. In such a case her total helplessness would be emphasized.
10. Yet there is a more important element. The author recalls the Lebanese Civil War of the 70's, and a Palestinian woman of my acquaintance was caught in a tragedy. Her cousin disappeared thought to have been kidnapped by one of the many armed groups in the city of Beirut. The extended family searched in vain for him or his body. He was the only son of his mother and not part of any military group. In desperation the family sent 3 women to speak with the political/military leader of a nearby force where he disappeared. The went to see intentional strong political and military figures. The three women shouted strong words into an audience with him and there flung a torrent of hard words at him. The entire scene was recalled to him by a peasant friend the following day. "What would have happened if the men of your family said such things to the leader? With raised eyebrows and shake of his head, she stated that they would have been killed immediately!" Tristram heard, "dozen voices clamoring at once, such claiming that there case would be heard. Thus many people were shouting. How did the woman get his attention? Obviously, here shouting was different from the men/others. In traditional ME society the women are powerless in our man's world. But at the same time they were honored and respected. Men can be mistreated in public, women cannot! Women can scream at a public figure and nothing can happen to them. In the case of my Palestinian friend, the family had deliberately sent the women because they could express their openly their sense of hurt and betrayal in language guaranteed to evoke a response. The

men could not do the same and stay alive. This same background is reflected in the rest of the parable.

11. STANZA THREE—THE RELUCTANT JUDGE:

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

12. STANZA FOUR—THE VINDICATED WIDOW

4 Yet because she causes me trouble, this widow,

WIDOW

I will vindicate her

VINDICATE

Lest in continual coming she wear me out.”

COMING

13. The word “certain we have cautiously accepted in this text. It occurs in various Codex and some of the Syriac, Latin and Coptic versions. It reinforces the parallelism in verses 1 and 3, but may not be original. In any case the judge confesses the accuracy of the judgment passed on his character. He knows that he doesn’t fear God and that no one can call him into account make him feel ashamed. If anyone flings even such accusation at him it will have no effect. In the phrase, “He said to himself,” we have what Black has called a well-known Semitism....’to speak the mind to think,’ (Black). This kind of soliloquizing is common in the p’s of the; Rich Fool, Prodigal Son, Unjust Steward, and Master of the Vineyard. With the Semitic idiom note above, it marks the p’s genuineness.