

# PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 55, “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. 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)
3. 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.

4. 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. They 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, "a dozen voices clamoring at once, such claiming that their case would be heard. Thus many people were shouting. How did the woman get his attention? Obviously, her 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.

**5. 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

**6. 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

7. 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.
8. The word here translated, “wear me out,” is a prizefighting term for a blow under the eye, see 1 Cor. 9:27. It has led many commentators to suggest that the judge is fearful lest the woman becomes violent (Linemann). But the language does not require this interpretation and the cultural milieu of the ME excludes it. The widow can shout all kinds of insults, but if she tries to get violent she will be forcibly removed and not allowed to return. Enough is enough! Derrett argues the word means to blacken the face, and this statement is common in the East. However, it means to ‘destroy the reputation of’ and describes a man with a sense of persona honor, which he is anxious to preserve. Derrett observes this explanation and tries to defend the interpretation by suggesting the phrase, “have no respect for the man” is really a compliment offered to an impartial judge. Against Derrett the author argues that “God he did not fear and man he did not respect.” It is meant to be a double edged negative statement, not part compliment and part insult. Thus the judge is indeed shameless and as a result you cannot ‘blacken his face.’ We prefer the Arabic slant; it gives the variation of ‘lest she gives me a head ache.’” Ibn al-Tayyib is particularly helpful. He notes that the language can refer to a blow on the

head and comments, “this exaggeration on the part of the judge is to indicate the extent to which her persistence has irritated him.”

9. The Greek, ‘eis telos,’ is translated by the author as continued. Ibn-al Assail gives this an added emphasis of the wording, ‘Lest she forever continue coming and wearing me out.’ The Greek phrase is strong and implies the will to go on forever. The judge is convinced that this woman would never give up! T.W. Manson calls it a ‘war of attrition,’ between the two of them (Sayings). As we have observed the p. is a clear case of ‘from the light to the heavy.’ The woman seems to be in a hopeless situation. She is a woman in a man’s world, w/o money and powerful allies. The judge can’t be appealed to duty to God nor can any human can be made to feel ashamed about the evil act they perpetrate on the innocent. Yet this woman not only gets a hearing, but has the case settled in her favor. Taken with this introduction the main thrust is clearly consistence in prayer. If this woman’s needs are met, how much more the needs of the pious who pray not to a harsh judge, but to a loving Father. However, discouraged and hopeless this seems to be, it isn’t as bad as this widow. They can rest assured that their petitions are heard and acted upon. When fear grips the heart the believer is challenged to pray and to pray continually in the face of all discouragement with full confidence that God will act in their best interests.

10. Verses 6-8 have been called the ‘crux interpretum.’ It is not our intent to review all the traditional debates and solutions each in turn (Marshall); the hope is that It may contribute to a solution of the problems involved. A literal translation of the text with its parallelisms displayed is;

1 *Shall* not God *make vindication* for his elect  
(future)

2 the ones crying to him day and night?  
(present)

3 Also he is slow to anger over them.  
(present)

4 I say to you that he *shall make vindication for them* speedily  
(future)

5 Yet when the Son of man comes will he find faith on the earth?

The 3<sup>rd</sup> line is traditionally read as a question and the key word making is translated a ‘patient or delay, (The RSV will he delay long over them?). The 5<sup>th</sup>

line is problematic and is thought by many to be a concluding reflection of the evangelist or his church, or a separate saying of Jesus attached by the author.

11. Granting any of these possibilities, the concluding phrase indicates and uneasiness about the quality of faith in the believing community.

Someone (either Jesus or the Church or Luke's source or Luke) is nervous because of the less than perfect specimens of faith around him who do not exhibit the will to endure that the woman in the p. exhibited (Marshall).

The author of this line is afraid that the unbelievers will fail to pray, thus lose heart and in the process, lose faith. Why then is this nervousness expressed here? We would suggest that the answer to this problem is in the four lines immediately preceding. Line 3 contains the focus of the discussion.

12. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> line we are faced with 2 problems. What is the meaning of the Word that the RSV translates as "delay?" And is it a statement or a question? First then the translation of this key word. The word itself 'makrothumia' is one of the great NT words for patience. But the above translation of 'delay' does not do it justice. The NT has three words for patience and they are all applied to God. The first is 'anoche' and it appears in Romans 2:4 and 3:26. God has a divine forbearance in passing over former sins. The 2<sup>nd</sup> type of patience is 'hupomone' which is the patience of the sufferer and it most clearly illustrated with Christ on the cross. Then in Romans 2:6 'anoche' is linked with our word, 'makrothumia' and is used in the context of judgment and mercy. Literally makrothumia' applies to the one who can and does "put his anger far away." It is the patience of the victor who refuses to take vengeance. Manson translated it as "removes his wrath to a distance." (Sayings). A classical example of this virtue can be seen in David as he stands over the sleeping body of Saul with a spear in his hand. Saul has come to kill David, David has penetrated Saul's camp and can easily kill him. David's body guard wants to take vengeance and David shows great 'makrothumia.' He puts his anger far away and refused the request (1 Samuel 26:6-7). Obviously, this is a quality God must exercise if He is going to deal with sinners. In Exodus 34:14 God tells Moses that He is both "slow to anger," and at the same time "gracious." Horst, in this article on 'makrothumia' describes this quality of God as it appears in His dealings with people. Horst writes that He is the God "who will restrain this wrath and cause His grace and loving-kindness to rule." The wrath and the grace of God are the two poles with

constitute the of His longsuffering. (Horst). This same willingness of God to restrain His wrath and thus be merciful appears in 'The book of Wisdom.' The reality is that God puts aside His wrath and shows mercy to the believer even though the believer has sinned. Again Horst is helpful were he describes this understanding and writes; "alongside this wrath there is a divine restraint which postpones its operation until something takes place in man which justifies its postponement."