**WESTMINSTER BIBLE SCHOOL; THE PARABLES AND METAPHORS OF OUR LORD - THE TEACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**42. THE UNRIGHTEOUS JUDGE**

*"He also spoke a parable to them that they must always pray, and not give up, saying, "There was a judge in a certain city who didn't fear God, and didn't respect man. A widow was in that city, and she often came to him, saying, 'Defend me from my adversary!' He wouldn't for a while, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God, nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will defend her, or else she will wear me out by her continual coming.' " The Lord said, "Listen to what the unrighteous judge says. Won't God avenge his chosen ones who are crying out to him day and night, and yet he exercises patience with them? I tell you that he will avenge them quickly. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"*

*Luke 18:1-8*

IT IS an interesting fact, perhaps of no great value or importance, that this parable and the next, that of the Pharisee and the publican, are the only two recorded parables of our Lord in which the reason for giving them is first stated, before the parable was spoken. "He spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint." Again at the ninth verse, "He spake also this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at naught." Those are the statements of the reasons for these parables.

Both parables had to do with prayer, The first is a revelation of the attitude of God towards human prayer. The second, that of the Pharisee and publican, is a revelation of the attitude of man in prayer. Taking our usual method in these studies, we consider first the subject illustrated; secondly, the figure which our Lord employed, deducing from that twofold consideration the essential teaching of the parable then, and for all time.

What was the subject illustrated? "He spake a parable unto them that they ought always to pray and not to faint." Notice the slight alteration, which is an important one, from the Old Version, which read, "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." We now read, "He spake a parable unto them, that they ought always to pray." Apparently a slight difference, but it was not a general statement for humanity at large, but a particular application for His own people. He was talking to His disciples. A little more of the context therefore is important.

What had He been saying just before? The record is in the end of the seventeenth chapter. At the twenty-second verse we read, "And He said unto His disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, Lo, there! Lo, here! go not away, nor follow after them; for as the lightning, when it lighteneth out of the one part of heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in His day." He described to them the conditions which would obtain; as in the time of Noah, men went on with the usual habits of life, they ate and drank, and married; as in the time of Sodom, in the days of Lot, they ate and drank, bought and sold, planted and built. The ordinary life in the times of Noah and Lot, godless lives. Suddenly the Divine interference; so shall it be in the days of the Son of man. He had been giving His disciples instructions on that great subject, and had told them in that day, of two men in one bed, one would be taken and the other left. The one taken is for judgment. The one left is the one not judged. He ended by saying to them, "Where the body is, thither will the eagles also be gathered together. And He spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint." That is the setting. There are no time notes. It is not certain that what our Lord said in this parable was spoken immediately at the time of the teaching in the previous chapter, but Luke does record these parables closely upon His teaching concerning that consummation of judgment ; when the Son of man comes in that way. Evidently underlying is the consciousness, because of the conditions obtaining, and continuing to obtain, so that even in the hour of coming judgment, life will be as it has been, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, the whole godless activity going on ; because of that, life for His people must always be strenuous and severe.

If as Christians we are having an easy time, and enjoying life, we are poor Christians. The Christian life has always been lived in the presence of gigantic forces opposed to it, and to Christ, and to God. Life goes on, and so it will. To go back and use the word of the ancient prophet, God is governing. He will "overturn, overturn, overturn, until He shall come Whose right it is"; and in that interval there can be nothing but severe and strenuous life. Because of that, His disciples ought always to pray and not to faint. That is the subject illustrated by this parable.

Granted the severity and strain of life in the midst of unparalleled and rampant godlessness, how are we to go on ? How shall we carry on? We ought always to pray and not to faint. In the use of those two expressions our Lord sharply but clearly defined two possibilities for life under such conditions ; prayer is one, fainting is the other.

Look at them a little more particularly. To take these two ideas and put them thus, if we pray we do not faint ; if we faint, it is because we do not pray. The two ideas are mutually exclusive, and in the midst of such conditions we shall either faint or pray. Then we get the force of His command. We ought to pray, and not to faint. To put it in the other way, for the sake of emphasis, we ought not to faint. How can we help fainting? We ought to pray. That is a great word, "they *ought*." "He spake this parable to the end that men *ought*." When we read "ought " we mean something we owe, we are in debt; something that is due, and we can pay at. These disciples of His in the midst of these conditions, which will continue until He comes, they owe it to God, and to the world, they owe it to themselves never to break down, never to faint, always to pray.

We might stay there and say a good deal about it ; but see how our Lord emphasized the teaching, by the use of this parable. Look therefore at the figure in all simplicity, quite apart from the teaching. What is the picture our Lord drew? "There was in a city a judge." Probably here we have again some actual happening, perhaps many such. Do not forget the time in which our Lord uttered it. Then all that region was largely under the jurisdiction of Herod. That meant it was a reign of injustice and wrong, terror and oppression ; and undoubtedly this is the picture of one of the inferior judges under Herod's jurisdiction, one supposed to preside over a court before whom disputes should come, and he was to judge. The word here of the woman, "avenge me," is an unfortunate translation. What she said to the judge was, Do justice for me; avenge, in that sense. She was not asking for wrath to be poured out, but for justice. She was appealing for justice to a judge who was supposed to be there to administer it.

Our Lord gave us the character of this man in these words, he "feared not God, nor regarded man." Attempting to interpret the thought, he was a man submitted to no high sanctions. He was not religious, and he was not humanitarian. Again, to put that in another way, he flaunted both the tables of the ten commandments, the first that revealed relationship with God, and the second that revealed relationship with our fellow-beings. He did not care for one or the other. To state it in the terms Jesus employed when asked which was the great commandment ; here was a man who cared neither for God, nor his neighbour. He did not love, fear, or care about God. And man? No, he was not interested in man either. That is the picture of the judge as Jesus sketched it.

Then there is the picture, again a commonplace one, of a widow seeking justice. We are not told what lay behind this story, or what the cause was. She had been wronged somewhere in the matter of justice and equity. She had an adversary. The word is a legal one. She wanted simple justice. Legally she wanted redress. That is the picture of the woman. She went to the judge. We are told "she came oft unto him." She came again and again with the same simple request for justice. Do me justice in the matter of mine adversary. She was pleading with the one who dispensed justice, for justice, and for nothing else.

Look now at the judge. "He would not for a while," that is, a good space, an indefinite period. But she came again, and kept on coming. Then there came action, in which the judge did what she wanted, did justice, avenged her of her adversary. Why did he do it? What a revealing story it is. First of all "he said within himself." It is wonderful how a phrase sometimes circumscribes things, and shows tremendous facts. Mark the daring, "He said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man." He affirmed his position. Christ had said that of him at the beginning. Here he said it himself. He said within himself, he was not going to be compelled to do anything, because he did not fear God, nor care anything about this woman. He was not thinking about God, nor of her.

What then was the reason for his action? Look at him, "Because this widow troubleth *me*, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming." Quite literally, "lest she give me black eyes," "lest she bruise me." He cared nothing about God nor man. All he cared for was just himself. He did not want to be troubled. If this woman keeps on coming I shall get bruised. Poor man! What an appalling revelation ; no fear of God, no fear of man, but fear for himself. He did justice because of a woman's importunity, and his fear that if she kept this up, he would suffer still further personal inconvenience.

What was our Lord intending to teach these listening disciples by that picture? The common answer to that question is that our Lord intended to teach the importance of being importunate in prayer. He intended to teach exactly the opposite. That may be challenged by those who quote and love the idea of knocking and knocking, and asking and asking, and praying. That may have its value, but that is not what our Lord was teaching here, but exactly the opposite. The whole teaching of the parable is intended to be one of contrast between the judge and God, and therefore contrast between the actions of the judge and the actions of God.

Everyone agrees that the contrast is suggested between the judge and God. They are not so sure of the contrast between the actions of the judge and the actions of God. All the judge was, God is not. All that God is, the judge was not. The judge had no sense of high sanctions. Life is always on a low level when self is the inspiration. Self is always animal and beastly when lived alone. No, he had no care for God; no care for man. He had no sense of God, and made no response to high sanctions. With profound reverence, God is exactly the opposite, God is bound by these very sanctions.

"God nothing does nor suffers to be done,

But you yourself would do,

Could you but see the end of all events

As well as He."

He is bound by the very sanctions this man ignored, by Himself and by man and man's necessity. He is bound by the sanctions of His own Being. There are things He cannot do because they would deny the truth concerning Himself, His righteousness, His holiness, His justice, His compassion; and God cannot be unrighteous, God cannot be other than holy. God cannot be unjust, and God cannot fail in mercy. He is bound by the sanctions of what He is in Himself. We see the contrast between that judge and Himself.

He is bound by the sanctions of human necessity. That needs no argument.

"He hath loved me, He hath loved me,

I cannot tell why,"

says the old hymn. I know why! He could not do any other, and be the God He is; and in all human history, His law, and everything else has been conditioned by His bending and bowing over humanity, and seeking to serve it. He cares for man, and He is bound by the sanctions of human necessity and human interest.

But now mark the difference. There is just as great a contrast, necessarily, between the actions of the judge and God as between the character of the judge and God. Mark the judge; indifferent delay for a while; but when he acted, his action was in order to escape personal suffering and annoyance. Now look at God, and mark the declaration that the Lord made here about Him. God shall do justice to His erect, which cry to Him day and night. That does not mean a perpetual wailing on the part of man, but it means the continuity of necessity through the ages. He is long-suffering over them, and He will avenge them speedily. The judge delayed, was indifferent, and did not give at all until he was forced by the necessity created by his own desire not to be worried. If we go to God, He will act, and act speedily. Behind that we have a revelation of God. That revelation is made in Old and New Testaments, and specially in Christ Himself; that God's action is at cost to Himself to secure justice for those who need it. The man's action was to escape annoyance. God's action is motivated by His willingness to suffer all things for humanity, for "God was in Christ, reconciling."

So Christ is saying, We ought always to pray, and when we pray, there is no need for us to keep on as though God were unwilling to listen. He is always listening. We have no need to keep on as though God were reluctant. He is never reluctant. There is no need for us to persuade Him.

Finally, lay the emphasis on the word "always," "always to pray." Not words necessarily, not words at all; but an attitude of life, "always to pray." The life characterized and mastered by the forward, onward looking. That is the meaning of this word "pray." The forward wish, the life that is content with the will of God, and discontented with everything that contradicts that will, that is praying. We ought always to pray. If we live and pray so, there will be no fainting. The Lord fainteth not, neither is weary; and those who put their trust in Him are borne up above all the turmoil and the strife, and they do not faint.

Notice how He finished. "Howbeit when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" That last sentence swung back to all He had been telling the disciples at the end of the previous chapter. It is the return to the subject of the coming of the Son of man. He had told them when He comes, things will be going on as they had been, that He would break in on all the godlessness, when He comes in judgment. Now He reverted to it. "Howbeit when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" It does not mean that He will not find faith, but He will not find the faith established, victorious. That is in harmony with the teaching that this age is not to be consummated with a perfect victory of faith upon all the earth; but it will be broken in upon by the advent of the Son of man; and until then, men ought always to pray, and not to faint; and they can do that because God is what He is.