

Will the Son of Man Find Faith?

November 17th, 2013

Luke 18:1-8

"¹And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart...⁶And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Luke gives us a big help in verse 1, because he tells us right up front what Jesus' aim is in telling this parable: "¹And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." This is what Jesus wants for us today.

This is something we all want, don't we? Did any of you come here today hoping, longing, aching that somebody would sing something or preach something that would make you totally lose heart? Did anyone come desiring to be discouraged? To have all your motivation for living stripped away? Nobody. Nowhere in the world will you find someone who is longing to lose heart. Does anyone say, "Help me be hopeless. Help me lose my motivation. Help me be so discouraged I can't go on"?

So Jesus is saying something here about an experience that everyone in the world wants, a way of life in which day by day you could be renewed in your soul with hope and strength and joy, and peace and stability and freedom. Don't you want that? Let's dig in, then, to what Jesus says, and make four observations about this experience.

1. There Will be Temptations to Lose Heart

Sometimes it's good to make sure we see the simple, basic, obvious realities that we all take for granted when we look for "the main point" of a passage. If Jesus tells a parable with the aim that we will *not* lose heart (that's what this passage is mainly about), let's start with the simple observation that His saying this indicates that there will in fact be circumstantial factors that would lead us in the direction of

“heartlessness.” He’s envisioning a life that is at times going to feel hopeless, depressing, maddening, crushing, so that we need to be instructed on how to walk through those experiences and not lose heart.

We all know this intellectually and experientially, but we’re very naïve, with unrealistic expectations of what our experience in this world is going to be like. It’s cursed; it’s broken. It’s been “subjected to futility” as God’s judgment for human rebellion. Nature is fallen, and humans are fallen, so pain and injustice and discouragement abound. But when it comes, we’re often shocked: “Why me?”

This first point is simply to say, “Wake up to who you are, and where you are! Don’t be surprised that things happen that show you that your life, and this world, are broken!” This is the first step to not losing heart: being ready for the things that might cause you to lose heart to come. Jesus says, ³⁴“Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” He’s telling you clearly, “Expect trouble today!” If not, you’re going to find yourself in the very depressing predicament of trying to suck out of this life things that are only promised to you in the next. Is that not where a lot of your daily angst, despair and frustration comes from?

2. The Ultimate Answer to “Heartlessness” is Jesus’ Coming

Now that brings us to the second observation, which comes from verse 8, the upshot of the parable: ⁸“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” The object for which we cry out day and night is the Son of Man coming. That connects us back to what we saw last week from 17:20-37 on being prepared for the appearing of Jesus Christ in all His glory as the Son of Man. This parable is giving instruction on how to be prepared for Jesus coming. That’s what the human heart aches for.

Most people do not understand this, and live with (as Paul Tripp would say) an “If only...” complex. “If only I would get that job, find that

spouse, get this marriage straightened out, get things financially stabilized, resolve that health issue, get a bigger house, reach retirement...”, then I’d finally be happy. No you wouldn’t! This week’s cultural example of that is Lady Gaga. She has over 40 million followers on Twitter, has sold approximately 23 million albums worldwide, and at 27 years old, has a net worth of \$190 million. She has the sort of life that a lot of Americans fanaticize about.

And so I was struck when I heard that last week in an interview she shared openly about an addiction to marijuana and other drugs, saying that at over the past seven years she has struggled with addiction to various substances, at one point smoking 15-20 marijuana cigarettes per day. In the interview she said that over the years, she has experimented with various drugs to “numb herself completely” as a way of avoiding difficult emotions (anxiety and depression) – particularly challenges that arise from being in the public eye:

"The truth is that it is very hard to be famous," she added. "It's wonderful to be famous because I have amazing fans. But it is very, very hard to go out into the world when you are not feeling happy and act like you are because I am a human being too and I break, and I think there is an assumption . . . that I cannot break because I am [an alien woman](#) and I am unstoppable."

She’s not at peace and is trying to numb herself because only Jesus and His Kingdom will satisfy the deep longings of the human soul, because you were made for eternity, and so no amount of temporal stuff can fill the hole deep in your soul. God made us for Himself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Him. And that full, final, forever rest won’t come until *He* comes, and brings the Kingdom: a perfected relationship with God, enjoyed in perfect community, on a perfected and glorified New Earth in which His rule and reign fill the earth as the waters cover the sea, so that even the trees of the forest sing out for joy. This is God’s ¹⁰plan for the fullness of time, *to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*"

*This is my Father's world. O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
This is my Father's world: the battle is not done:
Jesus Who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and Heav'n be one.*

God's plan for the universe is to unite the whole cosmos in the celebration of His Son. That's what the coming of the Son of Man will bring: God will unite heaven and earth, renewing the cosmos into a brilliant, unified symphony, which pours forth the praises of King Jesus for all eternity. And your heartaches are lovingly, wisely, being measured out by this glorious King to tailor a uniquely particular glory just for you (2 Corinthians 4:16ff). Don't rest the weight of your soul's hopes on anything less than this! I talk on this so much because we think of it so little (in both our pleasures and our pains)!

3. The Future Glory that Delivers us from Losing Heart is Sure Because of Past Grace

This brings us to the heart of the text, which is the parable on prayer. And the basic argument of the parable is a "how much more" argument. Here is a widow in a miserable plight, she's being taken advantage of in some way, and she's pleading with a judge who doesn't fear God or care about people. But she's so persistent that she wears him down, and finally he relents and gives her the justice she longs for. Jesus concludes: "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?"

The point is *not*, "Well, God is like that unjust judge, so if you pray long enough you'll wear him down, and even though He doesn't really want to bless you, He will." No, the point is: if even an unjust judge will, even for selfish purposes, do what is right, *how much more* will God, the righteous, loving, wise King of all do what is right for His beloved elect! The word "elect" is the reminder in this passage of the past grace that is meant to ensure our steadfast hope in the future

glory that is yet to come. It's the little reminder of who we are in God's eyes, and how deeply and eternally we are loved.

Before we dig into it, catch this: Jesus, in speaking to lift our hearts and guard us from discouragement and despair, speaks of our election. The deepest, weightiest theology is meant to serve very practical, hope-giving purposes in your life. How much loss of heart might be alleviated if we took the time to dig in and mine the depths of the ocean of glory that is found in the little word "elect" (cf. Romans 8:28-30)!

To embrace being elect means to embrace that, before the ages began, from eternity past, God set His love upon you and chose to save you, not because He saw something good or virtuous in you (there isn't anything), but simply because He loved you (cf. Deut. 7:6-8). Even your repentance from sin and your turning to Christ in faith was enabled by Him and a result of His eternal choice of you. You didn't make yourself lovable to Him because of your choice to receive Him, but He freely and graciously chose you to be an object of His mercy before the world existed. He loved you particularly -- sinner though you are -- with an everlasting love, **from** all eternity, **to** all eternity:

"⁴He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1; cf. 1Tim1:9)

Jesus is bringing that reality to mind when He says: "⁷And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily." If He has so loved you in the past, with an eternal, unthwartable, love, if He's that committed to your everlasting good and joy, will He fail to follow through and bring you through the slight, momentary afflictions of this world to bring you to glory? Your election has brought you into a chain of salvation that cannot be broken (Romans 8:29-30), so your vindication is as sure as His eternal love for you.

I know: it doesn't seem speedy. But it will be seen to have been speedy, in the same way the afflictions don't seem slight and momentary now, but will be in light of the eternal weight of glory. In light of the eternal experience of the righteous and loving rule of Jesus in the New Heavens and New Earth, your wait now will be seen to have been like waiting in your car for the gas tank to be filled up. So great is the coming glory!

4. Our Experience of Past Grace Assuring our Confidence in Future Glory is Expressed through Fervent, Continual Prayer

"¹And he told them a parable to the effect *that they ought always to pray* and not lose heart." And after telling the parable, the conclusion is: "⁷And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. *Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*" The coming of the Son of Man is not in question. The question is, "Will you and I be found faithful when He does come, without losing heart?"

And our fervent, continual prayer (crying out day and night) is the evidence in this passage of our faith. Notice the posture of these elect who are vindicated when Jesus comes back: "⁷And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?" Jesus is coming back for a people who are eagerly longing for Him, and prayer is the way that this eager longing is expressed. That's what prayer is, isn't it? An expression of the deep desire of your soul. The kids' continual pleading for this gift or that gift for Christmas shows the heart's ache for that thing. Your prayer life is a window into the deep desires of your soul.

And the deep desire of the early Church was for the coming of Jesus:

"⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." 2Timothy 4

"²⁸so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." Hebrews 9

"¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ," Titus 2

"¹³Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." 1Peter1

"²⁰But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life." Jude 20

"²²Our Lord, come!" 1 Corinthians 16

Does your soul ache for that day? Or is the absence of this kind of prayer indicative of your comfort with the way things are, without Him? You pray out of a sense of dissatisfaction; things are not the way you want them to be. And the absence of prayer for Jesus' return is the measure of our contentment with the absence of Christ. Applying this parable isn't mainly about practical strategies for the discipline of praying. It's asking the basic question, "Do you want Him?"

The way to not lose heart in this world is to continually have in your mind the end for which you were made and redeemed, and that end is the coming of the Son of Man. As CS Lewis writes at the end of the Narnia Chronicles:

All their life in this world and all their adventures... had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning chapter 1 of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

O beloved church, Jesus wills for you to not lose heart! As sure as Jesus' tomb is empty, He **will** come again. "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" Will you continue to look where Lady Gaga is looking, sedate yourself with the things of

this world and, like Lot's wife, show yourself to be unprepared for His coming? Or will you look to the coming of the One who loved you and gave Himself up for you, crying out for Him day and night, until He comes to bring you to glory?

As a musical expression of what that kind of prayer might sound like, let's listen to this song from Shane and Shane:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9xsUmo_zRA