

## Will Christ Find Faith?

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"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"  
—*Luke 18:8*

Luke 18:1-8 contains the Parable of the Persistent Widow. Luke prefaces Jesus' narration of the story of the widow's pestering of the unjust judge with the comment that our Lord gave this parable specifically to encourage people "to pray and not lose heart." The basic subject of this passage of Scripture deals with the question: Will a person ultimately cave in, downcast and discouraged, because of the difficulties and trials he faces throughout his Christian life, forsaking all the truth and opportunities God has given him?

As we approach the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and the tough times ahead, this should be a focal point of our continued examination of ourselves (II Corinthians 13:5). The apostle Paul exhorts us to avail ourselves of this yearly exercise to verify "whether [we] are in the faith"! He goes on to say that it is good to re-prove to ourselves that Christ is indeed dwelling in us. We should come out of this examination encouraged and thankful, determined to press on despite the troubles before us.

Christ's parable teaches us that we are to continue to pray and not falter or become dejected if our prayers do not seem to be answered right away. We are to come to understand that if a request is not granted immediately, God may be testing us, teaching us patience, or working out a purpose we cannot see. We must understand that He works on *His* timetable—not ours—and that He always works out what is best for us and for our particular situation (Romans 8:28). Our job, then, is to persevere in our faith in God, always trusting Him in what we ask of Him.

In the parable, we see the widow coming before the unrighteous judge with her complaint, though Christ never informs us about its specifics. We do not need to know the details; it could be any grievance. The callous judge has no pity in him, but the widow is so persistent that the judge reasons within himself that he had better avenge her lest she wear him out with her incessant visits. The phrase "weary me" literally implies striking blows and giving the recipient a pair of black eyes! This was one persistent woman!

### God Will Act

If a reader of this parable is not careful, he could judge God as being comparable to the unjust judge, that is, that He will not answer our requests promptly unless we bother Him with constant pleas for help. Actually, Jesus is *contrasting* the faithfulness of our loving God to the cynical, self-serving, unrighteous judge. The latter is not in any way a good man, but a godless one who is just trying to shield himself from being annoyed.

Jesus is trying to get us to realize God's never-ending love and faithfulness to His children. We are to see that all that God is, the judge is not. God is always willing to hear us and to answer our prayers *if according to His will*. He always hears the cries of His own elect or chosen ones. Indeed, God will avenge or vindicate His people.

The point is that, if the unjust judge—who could not have cared less for the widow—at length responded to her cry merely to rid himself of her aggravating requests, then shall not God—who loves His chosen people and gave His Son for us—answer our prayers when we are under trial or in need?

Jesus ends verse 7 with the phrase "though He bears long with them." This seems to imply that God bears long with His people's cries for help. But this is not the sense. The pronoun "them" refers, not to God's elect, but to their oppressors, whom God endures far longer than we do. The *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: "[T]he meaning is, that although He tolerates these oppressions for a long time, He will at length interpose in behalf of His own elect."

Then, Jesus states emphatically in verse 8, "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily"! "Speedily" is probably another poor choice of words; it is better rendered "suddenly" or "unexpectedly." When God's tolerance of these oppressors has run its course, He will promptly act at the right time—"out of the blue," as it were—to deliver His people.

### **A Question of Faith**

Then at the end of verse 8 comes the question that pertains to each one of us now, today, in this season. Based on the above parable promising God's faithfulness, Jesus asks the question, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

The implication seems to be that very few will have the strength of faith that Jesus is talking about. As the God of the Old Testament, Jesus, having looked into man's heart from Creation and seeing humanity's trajectory to our day, had every reason to ask if there would be faith at the end time! Even the Jews of His lifetime, full of Messianic fervor, did not have the faith He is seeking! Would even His chosen people—Christians, the followers of Christ—have saving faith?

Do *we* have this faith? What, then, is the evidence Jesus is looking for that will establish that we have the faith He is looking for? Some might view this "faith" as a powerful individual faith to move mountains or to perform some other great miracle. Yet, what Jesus is looking for are those who completely trust Him as God, and based on that trust, are living by faith according to God's revealed truth despite all of the pulls and pressures from the world.

In Luke 4:4, Jesus tells the Devil, in response to the first of his temptations, "It is written: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" This is not some general statement that allows us to choose what we will and will not obey, but a *requirement* for each of us, to the best of our ability, to follow every word of God in living our lives before Him. To do this takes real faith.

As we examine ourselves during this season of the year, we tend to look at individual sins and flaws that we see in ourselves, and that of itself is not at all wrong. We should be recognizing all manner of sin in us and striving to overcome it. However, in asking this question in Luke 18:8, Jesus is giving us a much larger picture to consider in our examination. In short, God has given us "the way of righteousness," a revelation this world just cannot comprehend, and He is looking for evidence that we not only assent to it but are also living it.

This is the season when all of us should deeply consider the evidence that we present to God and to the world that shows that we belong to Him. For some, just coming to church weekly, keeping the holy days, and tithing would seem to be all that is needed. For others, their understanding of God's plan can make them feel secure that they are on the right track.

Though these things are important, it is the works of obedience that change us, that reflect that we are striving to live as God lives. This is what God counts as proper evidence of our faith. In James 2:17, 20, 26, the apostle informs us that, without works, our faith is dead, and these works are defined as putting into practice the instructions of God in our lives, just as Abraham did on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:2-12).

When God saw Abraham's obedience to His instructions, He said, "Now I know that you fear Me!" As hard as it is for us to measure up to what Abraham did in being willing to sacrifice his only son in obedience to God's command, God should be able to say this about each one of us. Do we have the faith to live by every word of God?

Humbling ourselves in obedience—especially when it hurts—makes a powerful statement to God.

### **Works and Fruit**

This leads to another question: What works, evidences, or proofs must we exhibit so that we will be pleasing to Jesus Christ at His return?

Even though everyone has the same commandments and teachings to obey, because of the variety of people God calls into His church, each of us will have our individual challenges. Not only that, we are all at different levels of understanding and ability. Nevertheless, God knows both our weaknesses and what we need to overcome them.

For some, overcoming a particular lust of the flesh will seem like climbing Mount Everest in a driving snowstorm. For others, truly forgiving another person will seem an impossible task, even though God warns us that, if we will not forgive another, He will not forgive us (Matthew 18:21-35; 6:12, 14-15). Keeping the Sabbath and holy days in the face of losing a job can be a real trial. Faithfully tithing to God when there does not seem to be enough to go around can test us right in the pocketbook.

Learning to be kind and patient with others when doing so does not come naturally. Trying to raise our children "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), striving to love each other as God commands over and over, watching what comes out of our mouths, learning to conduct ourselves in wisdom, etc.—all of these and many more can be high hurdles to cross. Yet, every one of us has our peculiar areas of difficulty to overcome; none of us is perfect.

The churches of this world generally teach that all a person has to do is to believe on Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, intellectual and even emotional beliefs on their own produce the static, idle faith that James speaks about—dead faith. However, in one who is truly called by God—an individual who has *living* faith—his belief galvanizes into a conviction that will produce righteous works. These works ultimately produce the "much fruit" that will glorify God the Father (John 15:8).

Just what *is* the faith that Jesus Christ is looking for? It is a faith far greater than we might imagine. It is faith, not just in individual truths or doctrines, but in an entire way of life—the righteous, holy way that God Himself lives. God wants us to accept and follow the whole package of Christian living that He reveals in His Word.

Granted, it is very hard to do. We live in one of the most sinful, evil, corrupt, self-centered societies of all times, and our patience and conversion are being severely tested. The world wants us to come out of the *narrow way* that protects us, teaches us, and prepares us for our future. It is pushing and enticing us to accept the broad way that will pull us down to failure and destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

But the life that God has called us to is truly awesome! In John 17:3, Jesus declares the kind of life we have been chosen to live by faith: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Living this eternal life gives us the ability to know God: how He thinks, makes decisions, shows His love, feels for others, extends mercy and forgives, etc. In other words, living God's way now allows us—as much as is humanly possible—to know the mind and ways of God. It is in God and His incredible way that we must have faith.

Because our calling and potential are so tremendous, God gives us a warning to consider in II Peter 2:20-21:

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Once we start down this road, we have committed ourselves to following it to the very end.

For this reason, Paul challenges us in II Corinthians 13:5 to examine ourselves as to whether we are in the faith. He tells us to test ourselves to prove that Christ lives in us. We will not fail the test if we draw close to Him and truly work to make the changes we need to make as individuals to take on the very nature and life of God.

Then, when the question arises, "When the Son of man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" the answer will be a resounding, "Yes!"