

Luke 18A

- As we go back into the Gospel of Luke, let's take a brief moment to remember what was happening at the end of Chapter 17
 - Jesus was addressing his disciples on the kingdom and specifically on His future return
 - And he mentioned to the disciples that in the day of His return that judgment will come for those who are not looking for His return
 - To those who are oblivious to the coming judgment and the Christ's return, the end will come suddenly and judgment will be the result
 - Those unbelievers who are on the earth at that moment will be gathered up by Christ's angels, we saw in Matthew's Gospel
 - And they will be brought before Christ to face the end of their earthly life as described in Rev 19
 - And when the disciples ask about where these people go, Jesus gives this haunting response at the very end of Chapter 17
 - He says where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered
 - Meaning literally that these people will experience death and decay
 - More importantly, we learned from Chapter 17 how the end days would be characterized by a rise in depravity and demonic activity upon earth
 - Similar to the days of Noah and Lot
 - Those days would see a world filled with violence and few believers
- And this week beginning in the opening verses of Chapter 18, we see Jesus building on this point right from the start

[Luke 18:1](#) ¶ Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

- Here again we find a parable recorded only in Luke's gospel
 - And Luke places directly after the discourse on His return
 - Though that doesn't necessarily mean it happened in the same moment
 - It just as likely that Luke felt it was appropriate to place it here because it had a bearing on the previous conversation
- This opening parable in Chapter 18 and the one that follows in verse 9 also share a somewhat unique characteristic among Luke's parables
 - They both begin with a statement about why Jesus told these particularly stories
 - In this case, we're told that Jesus wants the disciples to pray and not to lose heart
 - And the phrase translated lose heart (egkakeo) can also be translated to mean grow weary or faint
 - Meaning, Jesus wanted to give the disciples reason not to give up or be discouraged in their appointed work
 - And that they should continue to pray in their afflictions
- This was a natural issue to raise at this point in light of what Jesus had taught in Chapter 17.
 - Jesus Had given the disciples a grim report of what to expect in the days immediately before His return
 - A depraved world where the enemy seemed to be taking control
 - And even though the disciples had no idea how long it would be prior to Jesus' return
 - Every generation of believers since Christ has seen persecution of the church somewhere in the world

- So no matter how close any given generation may be to Christ's return, it could still identify with the thinking that underlies this verses
 - When persecution comes, don't lose heart, don't grow weary of keeping the faith and doing the master's will
- In the case of the disciples, it would be natural to grow weary and discouraged in light of what they faced in their lifetime
 - Virtually all the disciples experienced martyrdom, and they experienced many other trials along the way to their deaths
 - Considering how they must have all been assuming that the Messiah's coming to earth would usher in peace and justice
 - The thought that it wasn't going to happen for some time would be discouraging all by itself
 - So discouragement would have been an easy thing to experience
- But this discouragement is hardly limited to the disciples
 - The opening verse using language that makes clear Jesus is talking about a larger periscope of time
 - The term "at all times" (pantote – evermore) is a specific reference to the period between Jesus' departure and His return to judge the world
 - His discussing at the end of Chapter 17 gives us the proper context for coming to this conclusion
 - The time until the Day of the Son of Man is the period in view
 - This is the time period when all disciples are serving their Master in His physical absence
 - So every disciple should hear these words of Christ
 - Don't lose heart and keep praying, even though your circumstances may be bleak or the enemy
- And to prove this point, Jesus tells a parable about a widow and an unrighteous judge

[Luke 18:2](#) saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man.

[Luke 18:3](#) “There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’

[Luke 18:4](#) “For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,

[Luke 18:5](#) yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’”

[Luke 18:6](#) And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge *said;

[Luke 18:7](#) now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?

[Luke 18:8](#) “I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

- This parable and the one that follows are also somewhat unique in that they are both structured as contrasts rather than as a comparisons
 - Do you remember that from your high school English classes?
 - Your teacher tells you to compare and contrast two types of writing
 - To compare was to find similarities
 - To contrast was to look for differences
 - Most of Jesus’ parables are designed to draw a comparison
 - Kingdom and mustard seed
 - Slaves and masters
 - But this is one of the few parables where the main point is made by drawing a contrast
 - Though you can also find lessons comparisons being made as well
 - So lets sort this out
- In the parable we have a judge and a widow
 - These characters are interesting because they form a contrast of their own
 - A judge was one of the most powerful people in Jewish society

- Since the Romans had conquered the Jews, all the powerful governmental positions were held by Romans
 - So the only positions of power available to the Jewish society were the judges of the Jewish Law, the Torah
 - So this man was about as powerful as a Jew could have been in Jesus day
 - And on the other end of the social scale, you had the widow
 - She was by far the least powerful member of Jewish society
 - She had no inheritance, no income, no protector
 - This is why you see the scriptures give so much attention to the fate of widows
 - Acts 6, 1Tim 5, James 1
 - So immediately we're struck by the contrast between the least powerful of society making appeal to the most powerful of society
- We're told this judge is unrighteous
 - Specifically, he doesn't fear God nor respect man
 - This is pretty dramatic when you consider that his role is to judge according to God's law
 - Today you wouldn't be very surprised to find judges who don't fear God nor respect men
 - But in Jesus day it would have been a bit scandalous to hear of such a man
 - Then there was a widow who continues to approach this judge asking for protection from her opponent
 - It's important to note at this point that she's asking the judge to do his job
 - A judge is supposed to provide justice to those who deserve it
 - Jesus uses the word protection (**ekdikeo**) which means to vindicate

- So you could read this to give vindication from her enemies
 - The point is she is confident of her own innocence before God's Law and yet she is being accused of violating the Law
 - So she is asking the judge to vindicate her, to declare that she isn't in violation of the law
 - To show that she is righteous and her opponents are the guilty ones
 - And this is something the judge should certainly do
- We're told the judge is unwilling to give protection at first
 - But due to the woman's persistence the judge relents
 - And he gives her what she requests
 - Interestingly, the phrase in Greek that's translated wear me out is hypopiazē
 - Which is actually an idiom translated literally as to strike under the eye
 - Lest she give me a black eye
 - In other words, the man is saying I need to do what I should to protect this woman otherwise I she might give me a black eye – or she will ruin my reputation
 - So what motivates this unrighteous judge to finally do his job is his own concern for his reputation, as stained as it may be
- So then Jesus helps us by making the contrast
 - Remember, this isn't a comparison, so we're not suggesting that God is like an unrighteous judge
 - We're saying he's Unlike an unrighteous judge
 - Now there is a small comparison in the midst of the overall contrast
 - We are like the widow in that we have very little power and practically no standing in this world

- And like the judge in the parable, God is infinitely more powerful and he's the only one we can appeal to for justice and protection from our enemies
 - And since we know that God is a truly righteous judge, how much more should we expect Him to do what's right?
 - If the unrighteous man was finally willing to do what's right on the basis of protecting his reputation
 - Shouldn't we expect God to do what's right for the sake of His name and His reputation?
- But what do we learn from the parable?
 - It's not enough to simply say that the parable is teaching that God answers our prayers for protection and justice
 - That's true, but we didn't need this parable to teach us that and nor did the Disciples
 - They would have had little reason to doubt that God would do those things
 - The problem comes when you combine this parable with what Jesus taught in the earlier Chapter
 - The disciples are going to experience a lifetime of waiting
 - And more than their own lifetime, the waiting is going to continue long after the disciples are gone
 - The point of the parable is the wait for God to bring His justice is going to lead to doubt and losing heart
 - That's the one feature of the parable that's easy to overlook
 - The woman got what she had reason to expect from the judge, but it took time to get it
 - She had to wait a long time before she got justice
 - And in the meantime, she suffered under persecution
 - But in the end, her persistence was met with satisfaction

- And here the parable offers one last opportunity for comparison rather than contrast
 - Like the woman's situation, we can expect that our persistence for justice will result in satisfaction
 - But are you prepared to wait your entire lifetime and even longer?
 - Are you prepared to hear that our God will not bring the justice and protection we are asking until the Day of the Son of Man
 - Can you wait that long and still not lose heart? Not cease to pray for protection and justice, even knowing that it might not happen in your lifetime?
 - What true measure of persistence and faith...
 - Being willing to pray and maintain trust in God to act even if it doesn't happen in time to save you from your own perils
 - Remember the Disciples were all martyrs
 - They never saw God act in their day to remove persecution or bring ultimate justice
 - Now this doesn't preclude God from taking intermediate action on behalf of his children in the meantime, and He does this all the time
 - Missionaries saved from hostile tribes
 - Churches saved from financial ruin
 - Families and individuals saved from any number of hardships
 - But ultimate justice can only come upon Christ's return
- And just in case the disciples were tempted to measure their own success by what they see with their eyes, Jesus gives the sobering postscript in verse 8
 - He says when this time of waiting ends
 - When the judge finally returns and answers those persistent prayers for justice
 - What will He find?

- Will He find faith on the earth?
 - Will He find an earth full of those waiting to receive Him and welcome Him?
 - Will those who preach the Gospel have succeeded in persuading the world to the truth?
- To all these questions, the implied answer is clearly no
 - Therefore, don't lose heart
 - Don't cease praying
 - Don't let your eyes and ears deceive you
 - Don't begin to think that because your own efforts to carry the gospel forward haven't been met with a revival at every turn cause you to doubt the mission
 - Don't let the fact that the message brings criticism and persecution rather than acceptance and joy leave you feeling discouraged over the prospects for the future
 - Yes there is a bleak future for the earth as a whole, which is why you can't use the state of things on earth as an excuse to give up hope
 - The opposite is true
 - The hopelessness of the earth is your reason to persevere and press forward in bringing the news of God's love through Christ so that by our obedience and perseverance, God may save some
- Some might ask why persist in prayer for God's justice when the day of it's arrival is already determined and set
 - Remember, that prayer is a privilege God grants His children
 - And when we exercise that privilege we benefit from the opportunity to spend time in His presence regardless of the circumstances
 - We may never realized the benefits until we are glorified and all things are made known

- But secondly, our continued faithful prayers for Jesus' return and for the justice that He will bring form a faithful witness to the world
 - Who knows how many people might be positively influenced by our prayerful expectation of Jesus' Second Coming
- And then Jesus backs up this parable with a second one, another contrast

[Luke 18:9](#) ¶ And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

[Luke 18:10](#) “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

[Luke 18:11](#) “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

[Luke 18:12](#) ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’

[Luke 18:13](#) “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’

[Luke 18:14](#) “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

- Like the first parable tonight, Luke begins by explaining the purpose of the parable
 - The parable illustrates the two places people put their trust
 - Two men went up to the temple in Jerusalem to pray
 - As in the earlier parable, Jesus draws immediate contrasts
 - The Pharisee were a symbol of righteousness in the Jewish culture
 - Much like the world may have seen Mother Theresa as the symbol of righteousness
 - Then there was the tax collector, who easily had the lowest reputation within Jewish society
 - The parable plays effectively on these two extremes by reversing the roles of honor
- Consider the words and actions of the Pharisee
 - The Pharisee stands close in within the temple (standing was normal)

- He has no concerns over approaching God in His temple
- When the Pharisee prayed, Jesus says quite pointedly that he prays to himself
 - This isn't to say that he is praying silently
 - The word for himself literally means one's conscious
 - He's making an appeal to his own conscious, rather than making an appeal to God
- And then look at the content of his prayer
 - He comes before God to declare his own righteousness
 - He gives thanks to God, but really when you look at the overall purpose and content of the prayer, He is really praising himself
 - That's like me hosting a dinner to honor my parents, and then giving a speech before the crowd declaring how thankful I am for my parents giving me so much intelligence and good looks and some a humble personality
 - The only person receiving praise in that moment is me
 - Likewise, the only person receiving praise in the moment with the Pharisee is the Pharisee
- But there's something even more insidious about the supposed prayer he makes
 - He makes a comparison to others around him who would seem self-evidently to be less worthy of God's favor
 - He mentioned the various sinners of his day who the Pharisee felt certain would experience God's judgment because they hadn't escaped their sin the way he had
 - Pharisees led the most scrupulous and austere lifestyle
 - They typically fasted twice a week when the norm was once
 - They tithed on the smallest things
 - And it was in these actions that he felt justified before God

- But did you catch the judgmental nature of his prayer?
 - The inevitable consequence of those who would desire to stand before God on the basis of their own self-made righteousness is that they are forever making comparisons between themselves and others
 - And the comparisons are always for the purpose of finding fault with others so that they might see themselves as better by comparison
 - And in my experience one is always a sign of the other
 - A person who is self-righteous and relying on their own goodness to earn God's favor will naturally adopt a judgmental attitude toward others
 - Likewise, someone who exhibits a judgmental attitude toward others is resting – if even for a moment – in their own righteousness as an insurance before God
 - And Christians are often the most guilty of this
 - Even a person who has placed their trust in Christ for their salvation and who understands grace not works saves them
 - Nevertheless, they can fall back into a fleshly pattern of judging others so that they might feel better by comparison
 - And this is a hurtful and destructive patterns wherever it appears, especially within the church
- What's the solution to this problem? To both the Pharisee's trusting in self and to our own tendency to become judgemental?
 - The answer is found in the attitude of the other man in the temple
 - He is the epitome of a sinner
 - He is someone who can't escape his sin before the world

- He couldn't walk around as the Pharisee sis pretending to be without sin
- His very profession testified against him, much like prostitutes and drunks and thieves
 - He couldn't escape the obvious conclusion that he had offended God and was due judgment
- And when he is ready to come before God to seek forgiveness, his behavior and his words reflect a heart that recognizes his own unworthiness before God
 - He stands at a distance, to afraid to approach for fear of God's judgment
 - He is unwilling to lift his eyes, not willing to look upon God's holiness, sensing instinctively the offense that God's takes at his sin
 - His only statement to God is a plea for mercy while acknowledging his sin
- Jesus says, this man was justified in God's sight
 - Clearly he couldn't have been justified because of his works before God
 - He had no "good" work
 - He was justified on the basis of his genuine repentance and faith in God's mercy
- As Jesus concludes, to be exalted by God requires a willingness to recognize and acknowledge our unworthiness before Him
 - But for those who do not recognize they are unworthy, who instead exalt themselves before God, they will be humbled in the eternal sense
 - They will receive the judgment they assumed was reserved for those who they had made comparison with
- This man's heart condition is the solution to world's predicament

- Jesus is giving the disciples the solution to the problem He had just identified
 - The world will not receive Him and faith will not be present on the earth upon His return, though faith is the only way to be justified
 - While the world was busy devising all manner of ways to reach God, they all share one thing in common
 - They place their trust in themselves
 - No matter the system nor the set of rules that are followed, they all come down to a trust in self
 - A trust in what we can accomplish by ourselves
 - And these works hold absolutely no value to God
 - And unless accompanied by faith, they cannot please God
- So the solution is to abandon all trust in self and place all our trust in God for His mercy through His Son
- These parables and the verses that follow in 18 provide a culmination point in the teaching that Luke records during Jesus' trip from the Galilee up to Jerusalem
 - So it's only fitting that the entire Chapter tackles the issue of faith as the only means of salvation
 - These two parables introduce the basic issue of faith
 - Of faith being the key ingredient for a relationship with God,
 - Yet faith will not reign on earth in the day Jesus returns.