

The persistent widow.

Perseverance

Patience

Peter Michell

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Introduction

Here is a parable of Jesus which is largely misunderstood – yet it has vital understanding for our everyday lives.

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Chapter 1

A word about parables to set the scene.

After the Pharisees and Scribes had declared that Jesus did His miracles by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of demons in Matthew 12:24 Jesus spoke to them in parables. His reason - *'Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.'* Matthew 13:13 So parables were used not to bring clarity but to bring the need for some understanding and discernment to be able to understand the meaning.

Then we need to look to see how Jesus used parables -

The parable of the wheat and the tares found in Matthew chapter 13: 24-30 has the account of the devil sowing bad seed into the field of the earth.

'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?" He said to them. "An enemy has done this." The servants said to him, "Do you want us to go and gather them up?" But he said, "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let them grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'

Jesus gives the explanation is found in verses 37 to 43. He makes it clear that in the parable -

The man, the owner, represents the Son of Man.

The field is the world.

Good seed is the sons of the kingdom

Tares the sons of the wicked one.

The enemy is the devil

The harvest is the end of the age

The reapers are the angels.

Every part of the parable is, as it were, laid alongside and parallel to the truth. (He didn't explain the servants of the Owner – as the meaning is obvious, these are the servants of the Son of Man.)

Regretfully sometimes commentators and teachers who do not fully identify the parts of parables just dismiss what they don't understand with statements like – 'you can't expect a parable to stand on all four legs.' Meaning not every part is relevant. What they really mean is either 'I don't understand it' or 'it doesn't fit with my theology.'

So when we come to the parable of the persistent widow we seek to identify each part (as we should with all parables) so that we can understand what Jesus was teaching.

Chapter 2

A word about the scriptures to lay a foundation

Our attitude to scripture will determine the weight we give to what it says and that will also be instrumental in determining what we do in life. So it is very important!

All scripture is given by inspiration of God.

The scripture itself tells us -

'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.' 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Is there evidence to support this assertion?

Yes. The deeper one looks the more one will find. For example – what we call the Old Testament, written through many authors over a very long time, contains hundreds of **prophecies** about Jesus as the coming Messiah.

There are over 30 just about His death and various aspects of it. Some of these He could have chosen to fulfil but many He could have had no control over whatsoever.

Apart from prophecies about the coming Messiah the Old Testament is full of other prophecies. Anyone wanting to find out more can read 'Every prophecy of the bible,' by John Walvoord, published by Charoit Victor Publishing. There are

other publications. CCF Tapes has a series of studies by Roger Price entitled 'Fulfilled Prophecy.' Highly recommended. (CCF Tapes 30, Crescent Road, Bognor Regis, West Sussex.)

Numbers - every Hebrew and Greek letter represents a number. So the scripture could be read as a series of numbers. The number 7, in particular, is a mark of God's hand in writing the scriptures. It is rather like a signature, or watermark, found throughout the scripture.

Beneath the immediate surface of scripture is found an amazing pattern of sevens. 'Ivan Panin, who devoted much of his life to investigating and publishing about it, publicly invited the finest brains, by means of a challenge through the press, to prove that his facts were not true facts. No one was able to refute the facts.'

[Ivan Panin was born in Russia in 1855. He was converted to Christianity when he discovered that the scriptures had extensive numerical features. He became known as 'the father of bible numerics.']

Some patterns are found in other writings but nothing on anything like the scale of scripture, where pattern and design running through Hebrew and Greek texts are consistent and uniform over many writers and many years.'

The Nobel Research Foundation of Los Angeles investigated Panin's assertion that the Bible could not possibly have been written except by inspiration of God Himself. Their conclusion after investigating, we find the evidence overwhelmingly in favour of the assertion.'

(Reference – The seal of God by F.C.Payne)

Archaeology continues to find evidence of things written in the scripture. A list of archaeological finds relevant to the study of the bible, and confirming scriptural accuracy, can be found in The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Artefacts

such as the Cyrus Cylinder and the Rosetta stone can be viewed in the British Museum in London.

Chronology – a detailed study of biblical chronology will confirm the accuracy of the scripture measured against the movement of the sun and moon as recorded by NASA. See Ostrich Christianity in this series of studies.

Enough said!

After many years of study I am left in no doubt about the scripture, its accuracy and its relevance.

However, many people, whether Christian or not, want to dismiss the bible. For unbelievers it threatens their love of darkness. For believers – well many have predetermined views on what the scripture says and means - often fostered by one denomination or another. Sadly many do not consider or do not want to consider that the scripture is the God breathed word from heaven and therefore applicable to their lives.

For those who accept the scripture as defined in the quotation from 2 Timothy, quoted at the start of the chapter, the bible will provide an immense understanding of truth, a great amount of security and certainty and enormous help in facing life's challenges.

Not the least of these things is the parable of the persistent widow -

Chapter 3

The parable - from the New King James Bible.

'Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.

"Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'

"And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 'yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'"

Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said.

"And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?"

"I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18:1-8

The characters –

The unjust judge - who has no regard for God or man. So that only leaves him representing the devil or a principality or power, or ruler in darkness, or one of the hosts of wickedness described in Ephesians 6:12. He is in a position of power to affect the situation of the widow. Cannot possibly represent the Lord God as He is fundamentally just.

The widow. She has no husband present with her to support her case. She represents us, the believers of today. We are betrothed to Christ but He is seated at the right hand of the Father right now.

God and the Son of man are mentioned also.

Reading the parable we can establish that the widow does two things –

- 1) She demands her rights from the unjust judge – verse 3
- 2) She also cries out to the Lord God – verse 7

Chapter 4

Translations - Greek, Greek and more Greek.

We know that the original text was written in Greek – so we read a translation. Generally that is fine but here and there, when we look at the underlying text, we can find things we might want to express with closer reference to the meaning of the Greek words.

This is especially the case with this parable as we will now discover.

The very purpose of the parable is more strongly expressed in the Greek - *'Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.'*

The Greek word for 'pray' here is *proseuchomai*. The literal meaning is simply to speak out loud towards. Here the widow is speaking out loud towards the unjust judge.

The Greek word 'lose heart' is *ekkakeo* which literally means to turn coward, to lose one's courage.

So we could express Jesus words like this, *'Then He spoke a parable to them that they should always speak out loud and not become cowardly or not to lose courage.'*

Now the purpose of the parable is clearer – don't be faint hearted.

Let's look at another verse – ‘yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’

Again we will look at the Greek –

troubles - *kopos* - means a beating.

weary – *hupopiazo* – means to give a blow under the eyes, to beat the face black and blue.

So now we can see that the effect the widow was having on the unjust judge was much stronger than indicated by the translation.

There is more about bible translations in the booklet ‘The teacher’ in this series.

Chapter 5

The parable more literally

'Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to speak out loud and not be faint hearted, saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.

"Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'

"And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 'yet because this widow beats me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she beat me black and blue.'"

Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said.

*** 'and God in no way will execute the avenging of the elect of Him, those crying to Him day and night, and being patient over them.*

"I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18:1-8

*** [Note: the phrase used by the unjust judge is here rendered word for word literally from the Greek –which clarifies the meaning – the unjust judge is saying God won't help! But Jesus responds that He will indeed do it.]*

Now the meaning of the parable is becoming much clearer.

Chapter 6

The meaning of the parable

Now we can extract the full meaning of the parable.

The widow was being robbed of something that was rightly hers. She does two things - she demands justice from the ruling power and she cries out to the Lord.

Her demanding of justice from the evil ruling power results in that power giving way.

As he gives way the unjust judge throws out an accusation – *‘and God in no way will execute the avenging of the elect of Him, those crying to Him day and night , and being patient over them.*

But now Jesus speaks - *‘I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’*

The meaning for us

We are likened to the widow. We shouldn't just sit back and take what the enemy throws at us. We should come against him, speaking out loud, demanding that he gives up – keeping on until he does. (Bear in mind verse 4 – *‘he would not for a while.’*)

But do we?

This is a question for us all. Do we just accept every bad thing that comes our way - 'well that's just life!' Or do we take note of Jesus warning – the thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. (John 10:10)

When things come against us, we should be considering whether the event is just natural, or the work of another human being, or is our enemy behind it. When we discern that the enemy is there stirring the pot, creating problems - then it is time to apply the truth we have learned from this parable.

We have the power and the authority. He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

Chapter 7

We are overcomers.

'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.' 1 John 5:4-5

'Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of antichrist, which you have heard was coming and is now already in the world. You are of God little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.'

1 John 4:4

This is our identity - we are by definition overcomers. Do we act like overcomers in day to day life?

How to overcome.

In everything with thanksgiving make your requests known to God. Then.....

Pre-emptive –

Going to something important - new job interview, important meeting, outreach event and the like, any situation. It is my practice to take authority over the works of the enemy and, by speaking out loud toward him, forbidding him from interfering in any way at all. That includes the devil giving me things I am not

supposed to have. For example, in business, opportunities often abound and it can be difficult to see what is from the Lord and what is not from Him. So I would speak out loud against the devil forbidding him from giving me any contract or opportunity or client that was not from the Lord. The Lords knows best and sometimes business opportunities can result in very negative results - a bad contract could even result in bankruptcy. Best to avoid them! Look to the inner witness of the Spirit – often felt as discomfort in the gut – not nervousness but a negative witness, a feeling within as a warning against the proposed action.

Recovery –

Something has gone wrong. Immediately I would take authority over the works of the enemy forbidding any further development. Then, by seeking for discernment and knowledge from the Lord, look for any specific matter to deal with.

Perhaps an example would be appropriate:

Kerry, our youngest daughter, was in her last year at university and just a few weeks away from her finals. She developed severe migraine headaches. She came home.

Action 1: Marion received a word of knowledge - ‘Give her garlic capsules.’ With the congestion dispersed the headaches cease and she returns to university. A few days later - headaches are back and worse.

Action 2: Marion and I seek the Lord and receive information that we could not have known. In the house 70 miles away where Kerry stayed she had the ground floor room. Next door in the adjoining house the family used the equivalent room for prayer to Mecca 5 times a day. We were led to take authority over that situation demanding from our enemy* that those prayers were to have no effect on Kerry from that moment on. (*By speaking out loud against the enemy)

Result: Problem immediately ceased and Kerry went on to graduate.

Lesson learned - we need to be aware that the enemy will try to rob our families and take appropriate action as the Lord reveals His strategy. And to be aware that 'problems' can often require both a practical or natural response as well as a spiritual response.

Don't be afraid

The very purpose of the parable of the persistent widow is this - *'Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to speak out loud and not be faint hearted.'*

Fulfilling one of the purposes of the church.

In Ephesians chapter 3 verses 8-12 Paul speaks to the people of that city –

'To me who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.'

Paul goes on in the letter to instruct further –

'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.' (Chapter 6 verse 12)

In the very beginning man was intended to have dominion over the earth. Through Adam's sin that dominion was prejudiced and our enemy, satan, took on the role of ruler and prince of this world. However, the gift and calling of God are irrevocable, it is still God's intention that we exercise dominion over all the works of the enemy. Jesus has given back to us authority over all the works of the enemy.

'Behold I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.' Luke 10:19

Chapter 8

Perseverance

The parable of the persistent widow encourages us to be bold against the principalities and powers of evil, and to keep on speaking out against any affliction or pressure coming from that source.

Paul, writing to the Ephesians, explains that it is part of the role of the body of Christ to make known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God. (3:10) It was given to Paul to bring a new revelation – that revelation being the very essence of the New Covenant – summed up to the Colossians as, *‘Christ in you the hope of glory.’* (1:27)

So to Paul we are going to look for guidance in perseverance. Back to the letter to the Ephesians and chapter 6 where Paul is urging perseverance – *‘Finally my brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.’* (Verses 10-11)

We dismiss the wiles, the schemings of the devil at our own cost. We are warned that the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour. (Jesus, the gospel writers, Paul, Peter, James and John all warn and advise us about this one way or another.) Whilst it is now fashionable, in the world, to dismiss the very concept of there being a devil, the scripture is adamant

that the devil exists, that he has cohorts of followers and he is very much our enemy.

So we have need to understand how to stand against his wiles and to persevere under pressure.

Paul has laid a foundation of truth before urging us to stand –

Foundational:

Know the mighty power of Christ making Him head above all names.

Understand it is by grace, out of His deep love, that God has raised us up to sit with Christ in heavenly places – i.e. above every other name.

Get hold of the mystery now revealed - Christ in you the hope of glory, enabling us to demonstrate God's manifold wisdom.

Appreciate the immense love of Christ that passes knowledge.

Walk in unity

Put on the new man

Do not grieve the Spirit

Walk in love

Walk in light

Honour marriage, your parents and your earthly masters.

Now you are ready:

Be strong in the power of His might.

Put on the armour of God:

Gird your waist with truth – truth is the first vital element of armour. Pray very frequently, 'Holy Spirit lead me into all the truth, more and more.'

Put on the breastplate of righteousness – you have received the gift of righteousness - don't fall for any lies about being unworthy, that is the devil's trick.

Shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace - its about the way we walk. Our sandals (shoes) firmly in place as we walk the way of the gospel as illuminated by Paul in chapters 4 and 5.

Above all taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. This is faith in the sense of complete trust – complete trust in Jesus and what He has accomplished for us. With complete trust in Jesus we can rebut all the lies and accusations the enemy throws at us.

Take the helmet of salvation – protect your mind – achieved by choosing what you allow yourself to think. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.* (Colossians 3:16 part)

Definition - wisdom is that which God thinks is right.

And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (*rhema*) of God. This is the specific word God quickens to us in a time of need.

So now, fully equipped, *‘therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.’* Ephesians 6:13 because *‘we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.’*

Remembering always that we are in Christ, and Christ is in us and His name is far above all other names. The Lord’s promise to Israel was that they would be the head and not the tail if they diligently obeyed the voice of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 28:13) How much more we can be the head and not the tail – we are those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us!

Let us avoid the trap of truncating Ephesians 6 verse 12 to ‘for we do not wrestle’ by denying the existence of our enemies. Much more, take up the whole armour of God and stand, stand, stand.

Chapter 9

Patience (endurance)

'Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises of God.' Hebrews 6:12

'Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run, with patience (endurance) the race that is set before us.' Hebrews 12:1

Patience is one of the very important principles of successful living as a Christian. Jesus said - *'By your patience possess your souls.'* Luke 21:19

The soul is made up of mind, will and emotions – the things which display our character. The Christian is in the process of refinement of his or her character for all their time on earth as the Spirit changes each one from one degree of glory to another.

We learn patience through all the pressures and tribulations that the world and the enemy throws us. James expresses it like this: *'Count it all joy when you fall into various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect (or mature) and complete lacking nothing.'* James 1:2-4

James goes on to explain that the trials, the temptations and the testing of our faith are not sent by God, rather they spring from our own desires when we are enticed away from the righteous path.

'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.' James 1:17

Refusing to blame God

As we go through life with all its ups and downs, pressures and trials, it is extremely wise not to blame the Lord. When we blame the Lord for our troubles we cut off the ability to stand; we cut off the very source of our deliverance.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

James has just urged us not to befriend the world – friendship with the world is enmity with God. In this respect we are to be like Abraham – he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. When called to leave Haran he did not know where he was going and saw himself as a stranger and pilgrim on the earth.

We do know our eternal destination - Jesus has prepared a place for us and will come and take us to that place, then we will always be with Him. (John 14: 1-6) We know we are passing through so far as earth is concerned.

Meanwhile, on earth, we can take James advice, *'draw near to God and He will draw near to you.'* (James 4:8)

Jesus put it like this, *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'* Mark 12:30 (and Matthew 22:37)

So we can conclude that our walk through life will be greatly enhanced when my favourite prayer is fully answered, *'Holy Spirit fill me with more and more love for Jesus.'*

Conclusions

There is great value in deeper study of the scripture.

The parables were taught by Jesus to give us, insight into what has happened in the world, and into how to live.

We are given authority over all the power of the enemy.

We are expected to demonstrate the manifold wisdom of God to all the enemy forces around us.

The power in us is greater than that in the world.

Time for the church to wake up now, and to exercise the power given to us, as we discern enemy actions and events, and as we are led by the Spirit of God. Time now to demonstrate to the principalities and powers the manifest wisdom of God.

Persevere and be patient and above all love the Lord your God with all your heart.

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