

Having a Faith That Doesn't Give Up, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 20041017
2 Tim. 3:14-4:5, Luke 18:1-8
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How would you like to run up against the judge in Jesus' parable? He sounded like a crook! He had no fear of God and no respect for any person. In this election season, I am reminded of some who run for political office! I would like to vote for candidates who do fear God and do respect other people. By fearing God, I do not mean that they are going to impose their religious beliefs on citizens— I am for religious freedom— but that they know that they, like everyone else, will one day be called to account for their actions. That fact alone will incline them towards being just and honest.

I would like to vote for candidates who respect other people: they care about the well-being of others, not just American citizens, but the citizens of the world. They know they could be in the shoes of those who come before them seeking justice, both as plaintiff and as defendant. They will make laws knowing that those laws must serve to make this society a more equal one and this world a more peaceful one. They will not amass power and wield it over others.

Let's look at the location of this parable of unjust judge within the Gospel of Luke. Last week we heard the story of Jesus and the ten lepers¹ Then, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming. Jesus responded by teaching about the last day, “the day of the Lord.” (We speak of this as the Apocalypse.) Jesus answered their question by saying, “the kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed.”² In today's scripture lesson, Jesus urges his listeners to be persistent in prayer, or else, when the Son of man comes, will he find anybody with any faith left on that last day?

The parable of the unjust judge is an interesting one. We do not know who the widow's opponent was or what the opponent had done. Probably, it was someone who was taking advantage of her as a widow. Whatever the issue was, she kept after the judge tenaciously. In those days there were not court bailiffs and one could not be held in contempt of court.

Through this parable we learn that God will grant justice. Justice will come. Faith means acting as if the apocalypse, the day of the Lord, were at hand. The woman is an example to us of faith. She had a faith that doesn't give up.

What is faith that doesn't give up? Driving to church one day, I noticed by the presence of a truck and roller, that someone was having a driveway repaved. I saw the sign on the truck. It read, “Ron's Christian Asphalt Paving.” This made me wonder about faith in general and the Christian faith in particular. What makes Ron's Asphalt Paving different than a non-Christian's? or than a non-advertizing Christian's asphalt paving? Is it less expensive? Is it more cautious? Is it done with wisdom? Does Ron pave Jewish driveways? If he does, do they become Christian driveways before he completes job?

Faith is not something by which we advertize our business. Paul, when he lived in Corinth, had a tent-making shop. He did not advertize it as a Christian business. Paul's business stood or fell on his integrity, on the way he made tents. On the side, Paul

¹Luke 17:11-19

²Luke 17:20

preached about his faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith is something that should affect the way we do our business. A Christian will be honest and fair, loving both customers and creation the way God does.

What is faith that doesn't give up? Bill Quick was a friend of mine, a Methodist minister in Detroit. He was opposed to casino gambling and the sale of Ford Auditorium to private interests. This opposition made him fair game for the Mayor at the time who had lot of influence. He had thugs to do his bidding. Quick feared for his life, but did not give up because he believed his causes were right for the best interests of city of Detroit.

Faith that doesn't give up means persistence in prayer. That is the point of Jesus' parable. He taught his disciples about their need to pray without losing heart.

What does it mean to be persistent in prayer? Does it mean God will give me anything I want if I pray enough? Perhaps. We might try it sometime! But Prayer is conversation and communication with God. Be persistent with that. Jesus said, "I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"³

Faith is following the example of some Biblical characters. Job had a persistent faith: he would not let God get away with what Job perceived to be divine injustice. He kept in contact with God. He argued with God about what was just and what wasn't. He told God how he would run things if he were in God's place. His honesty took him to a new level of faith.

Jacob wrestled with a man and would not give up until the man blessed him. The man is taken to be God. Jacob's struggle is an example to us of persistence in faith. At the end of the wrestling match, God blessed Jacob and changed his name to Israel, which means "struggles with God."

That is what persistence in faith means: struggling with God. "What would God want me to do concerning this business decision?" "How would God have me deal with this problem person?" What would Jesus Do?

I said the parable of the unjust judge followed Jesus' teaching about the last days. The letter to Timothy (our first scripture lesson) was written during dark days when it was dangerous to be a Christian. The letter served to boost the faith of the reader (i.e. early church leaders) during times of persecution. The writer talked about end times, the last days. He said, "For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy"⁴ Does it sound like we're there yet?

Second Timothy is a warning about times when people will not want to listen to the teaching of the faith. "For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires"⁵

During this election season, we really need to watch out for that. Are we voting for people who suit our own personal desires? Do we have candidates who will lead by following polls indicating people's wishes or are we going to have leaders who have a vision of what the world can be like when there is universal justice and peace— leaders

³Luke 18:8

⁴2Timothy 3:2

⁵2Timothy 4:3

who know that God loves every person as a son or daughter, whether they call themselves Christian or not.

People hear what they want to hear. They will go to the church that makes them feel good. That is not what we are to do as faithful followers of Jesus Christ. God's word often gives us discomfort. Know that God is with you at all times and in all places. God is your constant audience. If you are persistent, it will be as though God were looking over your shoulder. Faith is believing that God loves us and cares for us no matter what happens to us. It is knowing that in the end we will be held accountable for the way we treated others, but also that our belief in Jesus Christ will make our lives, even with our sins, worthwhile.