

THE WORD OF GOD: Choosing Discipleship

Lesson 19. The Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow

Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Reading of the day: Luke 17:20-18:14

Prepare Ahead: The background section is material for the instructor and is not meant to be used word for word. The answers to the Bible Study discussion questions are provided for informational purposes and can be read aloud and shared verbally.

References:

www.vemkar.us

Orthodox Study Bible

Memory Verse:

“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Luke 17:20-21

Bible Study Lesson

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՝ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos, ee paneets yev kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

For Students

The Unjust Judge (Luke 17:20-18:14)

17:²⁰ Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹ nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

²² Then He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³ And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them. ²⁴ For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. ²⁵ But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. ²⁶ And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷ They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

²⁸ Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; ²⁹ but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

³⁰ Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ “In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back.

³² Remember Lot’s wife. ³³ Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴ I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁵ Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. ³⁶ Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.” ³⁷ And they answered and said to Him, “Where, Lord?” So He said to them, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”

18:¹ Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, ² saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. ³ Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ ⁴ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, ⁵ yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’” ⁶ Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. ⁷ And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? ⁸ I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

⁹ Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

¹³ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Questions:

1. *What is the Kingdom of Heaven and where can it be found?*
2. *What do you think it means when Christ says, “For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day” in verse 24?*
3. *What can we learn about the Second coming of Christ from what Jesus is saying?*
4. *Who was Lot’s wife and what happened to her?*
5. *How are we to understand prayer from the example of the tenacious widow (18:1-8)?*
6. *What do you think Jesus means when He asks, “But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth” (v. 18:8)?*
7. *How can the tax collector is justified while the Pharisee (18:9-14) is not, if the Pharisee does everything he is supposed to and the tax collector is a sinner?*

For the Teacher

Background:

The ***Sunday of the Judge***, reminds us of the importance of prayer and of the virtues of humility, fear of God, justice and protection of the weak. The Parables of the Widow and the Judge, and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector illustrate the results of the proper practice and importance of persistent prayer with a humble heart. In the former parable, Christians, like the widow, should not give up praying to God even when facing indifference and powerful opposition. If a helpless widow wins her case by persistent pleading before a callous judge, how much will God's elect find quick justice before a loving and righteous Father?

After encouraging the disciples to be persistent in prayer, in the latter parable, Jesus teaches them how to pray. This parable sharply contrasts the prayer of a Pharisee with that of a tax collector. Jesus commended the tax collector for his humble, contrite and "justified" prayer to God and contrasted that with the hypocrisy of the Pharisee's sense of self-righteousness.

Questions:

1. What is the Kingdom of Heaven and where can it be found?

In this instance, the Pharisees ask when God's Kingdom would come, not knowing that it had already arrived. The Kingdom of God is not like an earthly kingdom (which they thought) with geographical boundaries. Instead, it begins with the work of God's Spirit in people lives and in relationships, namely, in the Church. The Kingdom of God is a spiritual reality present within the Christian believer and within the community of the Church. Christ says, "the Kingdom of God is within you" can also be translated as "among you" or "in the midst of you". This means that the Kingdom of God is where two or three come together in Christ's name and His will is done, specifically the Church. We can help establish and expand the Kingdom of God through growing the Church in our interactions with others and spreading the Gospel of Christ's salvific works and resurrection.

2. What do you think it means when Christ says, "For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day" in verse 24?

When Christ returns, He will not be hidden, ignored or not recognized. He will not come humbly or without notice like He did at His birth in Bethlehem. Rather, Christ will return triumphantly and with great majesty. He will be noticed and all will see Him, just as people see and recognize lightening in the night sky. Also, like lightening, you never know when it will strike and illuminate the sky, likewise, Christ's return will come without warning and quickly.

Keep in mind the discourse that precedes this parable: the coming of the Kingdom in the present and in its fulfillment. We must be in a constant state of readiness, which includes ceaseless and faithful prayer. To be ready is to be doing, praying – always. Our constant source of busy-ness, rather than what typically dominates our day, should be prayer and acts of mercy, large or small. That is the fulfillment of our existence as worshipping beings created for communion with God and with one another. Jesus is looking for a particular faith on earth, and through the persistent widow, which He mentions later, he gives us clues as to how it is characterized.

3. What can we learn about the Second coming of Christ from what Jesus is saying?

Christ's Second Coming will entail a sudden revelation of judgment. One will be taken to heaven and the other will be left for eternal condemnation. The separation of the saints from the wicked will occur on "the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (v. 30) and, not as some speculate today, at an event that occurs before His return, like the rapture.

Jesus warns that the days will come when the people will long for these present days when He taught and healed (17:22). Between these days and His return there will be many false prophets who will claim to have His power and authority. Luke's reference to the "days of the Son of Man" is reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets' prophecies of the "Day of the Lord" as a day of retribution (see Amos 5:18-20). Some of the same imagery used in this passage is also found in Matthew 24-25. In this passage Jesus is speaking of His sudden return after His Passion, Resurrection and Ascension; later in Luke 21:6-24 He will prophesy the judgment on His generation and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Again, we must not think, like certain Protestant brethren, that preceding Jesus' return there will be a rapture which takes all the faithful away. This is not what is being spoken of here. Rather, Christ's return will be quick, final, and without warning. We will not have any signs of His return until it is too late.

4. Who was Lot's wife and what happened to her?

Lot's wife and her fate is recorded in Genesis 19:1-29. Lot's wife missed out on her salvation because she did not heed the angel's warning not to look back at the doomed city of Sodom. In the same way those hearing Jesus' teaching should heed His warning and be prepared.

Christ says, *"Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will save it"* Luke 17:33. Lot's wife identified her life with her possessions and sinful ways in Sodom, and in her longing to preserve that "life" she looked back and lost her life. The disciples, and we too, must be prepared to give up all their material possessions to follow Jesus. We must commit our lives totally in service to Him, turning away from our sinful lives and worldly desires.

In verses 34-35 Jesus tells them at the time of the Judgment Day of the Son of Man, humanity will be divided into those destined for eternal life and those destined for eternal judgment (see Mt 25:31-44). Those "taken" refer to the "saved" since those "taken" in Noah's Ark were saved as were Lot and his daughters who were "taken" out of the doomed city.

5. How are we to understand prayer from the example of the tenacious widow (18:1-8)?

When we pray, we cannot expect to pray only once and if we do not receive it, we give up and abandon praying. Prayer is not something that is a quick fix for our problems either. Prayer is communication with God and listening to what He says. When we pray, we are to pray expecting to receive it, but that does not mean immediately.

Just as the widow continuously asked for justice from the judge, and he eventually got tired and answered her requests, similarly, God who loves each of us, will answer our prayers at the correct time.

Prayer, then, is to be persistent (v. 7) and faithful (v. 8), for this type of prayer is the remedy for the tribulation just described (17:22-37).

6. What do you think Jesus means when He asks, "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth" (v. 18:8)?

This is the question the Pharisees and the disciples should have been asking themselves in 17:20 and 36/37. This is the crux of the problem facing mankind concerning the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus ends His teaching on the perseverance of prayer with the warning to remain firm in one's faith. Faith and prayer are two sides of the same coin. If you have faith in God you will go to Him in prayer "if you pray, you strengthen your faith in God. The question Jesus asks is "will the professed children of God be patiently persistent in their faith, and will He find faith on earth when He returns?"

We can ask the same question to ourselves today. Will the Son of Man find faith in us if He returns now? Do we truly believe in His words and promises and if so, do we live our lives like that or do we put our faith in in other, worldly things?

7. How can the tax collector (tax collector) is justified while the Pharisee (18:9-14) is not, if the Pharisee does everything he is supposed to and the tax collector is a sinner?

The practices of the Pharisee are worthy examples to follow. His good deeds (fasting and giving tithes) are the primary weapons against the passions of lust and greed (adultery and extortion). However, without a humble and repentant heart, these outward practices are worthless and lead only to pride and judgement of others. Note that he prays with himself and not to God, for God is absent where there is boasting.

The tax collector shows by his posture an awareness of the state of his soul, standing far from the altar of sacrifice with eyes cast downward. His prayer, God, be merciful to me a sinner, is the foundation of the Jesus Prayer (Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner), as is the refrain "Lord have mercy" that permeates our worship and personal prayers.

The tax collector is justified means forgiven and set right with God, for inward humility is blessed while pride in outward deeds is condemned. Humility is one of the hallmarks of repentance and opens a channel to God's divine grace.

Remember, God judges hearts and not words. The Pharisee was not asking God's forgiveness for his sins "he was only boasting of his good works and despising the tax collector. He was blind to his sins and so his sins remained. The tax collector abandoned himself to both God's judgment and God's mercy and therefore, through his humble confession of his sins, was forgiven.

Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ճանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

At Home

Please complete the assignment by next class.

Memory Verse:

“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21)