

## HUMBLE FAITH

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### Luke 18:1-14

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?"

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 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. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 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!' 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." "

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These two back to back parables that are recorded in Luke 18 is an example of a method Jesus used in teaching. At first glance, as I did, I viewed these two parables as not really having much in common. Luke introduces the first parable saying that it is a message about persistence in prayer and not losing heart and the second was Jesus addressing the self-righteous folks in the crowd. Since Jesus was using the first parable as a message about persistence in prayer then and the second parable has two guys praying one can say ah, there is the common denominator, prayer! That is certainly one element that Jesus was addressing for sure. Sometimes, the key elements to Jesus' teachings in parables is not in the action part of the parables but in the subtle message He gives to go along with the parables' action. There are a subtleties that Jesus uses in both of these parables. A clue to what I am getting and links these two parables together is in the title of this message, "HUMBLE FAITH." The subtle message in the first parable comes in the very last sentence where Jesus asks, "when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" and in

the second parable Jesus ends it with, "he who humbles himself will be exalted." HUMBLE FAITH.

Our salvation, that is, the promise of God for eternal life hinges on two elements. God's grace and our faith. "For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (**Ephesians 2:8-9**) It is by God's grace, His unmerited or undeserved favor that we are saved through faith. It is usually presented in a gospel message that faith is all on us, that it comes from us. But when we look again at that passage of Scripture in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, the Apostle Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that **not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.**" That gift of God is not just in the believing on the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that Jesus died for our sins so that we may have eternal life, it is also the gift of faith that we have to take hold of and then live by. Just as the Apostle Paul explained in **Romans 12:3**, "For I say, through the **grace** given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one **a measure of faith.**" By God's grace He gives us the faith to believe. There's two examples, testifying to faith being a gift of God.

As Jesus quoted Jewish law by saying, "But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'" (**Matthew 18:16**), Paul also quoted the same saying, "This will be the third time I am coming to you. "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." (**2 Corinthians 13:1**), I have heard it preached before that although that law is directly speaking of testifying against another person, that it can also speak to God's Word as well. In other words, we can't just take something in the Word of God out of context to make it say what we want it to say. It has to agree with the whole Word of God. Here is a third example to testify to faith being a gift from God, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, **the evidence of things not seen.**" (**Hebrews 11:1**) What that can mean to us then, that if God's Word tells us our faith is dependent on His evidence, it would be the type of evidence that would hold up as solid evidence in a court of law. He after all, is our eternal judge, is He not? God then makes it known to us of what He calls us to believe in. Then in God's court of law, we are justified by His grace and in that faith that has been given to us that is a free gift from God. Not of yourselves, lest anyone should boast!

What does that mean though to what James said in **James 2:24**, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." Is he saying we are saved not by just faith alone, which is a gift from God, that we have to earn our salvation? If so, then the Word of God

would confirm that elsewhere, right? When we are studying God's Word, we have to study it and seek out what God is teaching us, to learn what God is telling us, not make it say what we want it to say. And God promises His children, that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all Truth. (**John 16:13**) Just prior to James saying "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only, he said this, "But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (**James 2:18**) Is James saying then that we are saved by faith and works? No, James elaborates by saying this, "Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives **grace to the humble.**" Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." (**James 4:5-8**) Right there James is referring to the Holy Spirit that works in us.

What we find from looking at what James was really saying is what the Apostle Paul was also saying. The Apostle Paul said you are either a slave to sin, which leads to death or a slave to righteousness which leads to life. (**Romans 6:16**) Later in **Romans 8:5** Paul says, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Jesus said as much saying that you can't serve two masters. (**Matthew 6:24**) Paul says to the Galatians as a conclusion on the matter of faith and works, "just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.""(**Galatians 3:6**) What did he mean by believing God? The writer of Hebrews elaborated on that saying, "By faith Abraham **obeyed** when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going." (**Hebrews 11:8**) James, as well as the writer of Hebrews used Rahab the harlot and Abraham as examples of those who lived by faith. Rahab hid the Israelite spies when they were scouting out the city of Jericho. She promised to work for the Israelites in return for her and her family's safety. Abraham was told by God that he would be a father of many nations and was told to go to the land of Canaan. With those examples (of course there's many, many more in the Bible) we see how faith is not just a concept of the mind that is benign and inactive. The faith that God gives us is meant to be alive and active (or powerful) just as His Word is living and powerful that lives in us and works in us. Faith begets works, guaranteed!

Jesus said when He addressed the topic of eternal salvation in **John 3:16-17**, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

Now let's look at that in context. Just prior to that Jesus told the Jewish leader, Nicodemus that one cannot enter the kingdom of God unless one is born-again, that is, to be born of the Spirit. Therefore, not only do we have to believe in Christ, we have to receive Him. We have to receive His gift of eternal salvation. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (**John 1:12**) That is what Jesus meant in saying that one must be born-again, by being born of the Spirit. Going back to the passage in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, "For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the **gift of God**, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Paul continues with, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." There it is! That is what James was getting at when he said, "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." When we believe on Christ through the grace of God, if we are repentant of our sins, and are willing to **obey God** (He gives His Holy Spirit to those who obey Him-**Acts 5:32**), He places His Holy Spirit in us "who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (**Ephesians 1:14**) We don't just believe and then that's the end of it. We are brought into a living and active faith in Christ Jesus!

So now with that foundation we can go back to our two parables of Jesus'. For the first parable, Jesus gives the example of the unjust judge and the pestering woman who is looking for justice. The analogy should not escape us, as it certainly wouldn't have been missed by the Pharisees, in the fact that this parable has a judge, which is a representation of God, or Christ, as our Judge, and then to us as the one with the problem. But God is anything but unjust though. He is also not calling us into a blind faith, just as the unknown author of Psalm 98 says, "The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. Sing to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm, with trumpets and the sound of a horn; Shout joyfully before the Lord, the King. Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it; Let the rivers clap their hands; Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity." (**Psalm 98:2-9**) Do we see that rejoicing in the Lord with the people in Jesus' parables?

God promises that He will judge the world with His perfect justice in His perfect equity or fairness, meaning God will right the wrong and He will bless the right. Right being the root of the word-righteousness and we ARE right or righteous in the eyes of God if we

are in Christ Jesus. "But of Him [God] **you are in Christ Jesus**, who became for us **Wisdom** from God—and **Righteousness** and **Sanctification** and Redemption— that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."" (1 **Corinthians 1:30-31**) So God is our just judge but in Jesus' parable He presents the judge as being unjust to make a point. If an unjust judge will answer the prayers of the persistent person how much more will your heavenly Father answer your prayers through persistence. But again, what does Jesus say at the end of that parable? "**Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?**" If the message that Jesus was trying to get across was really just about badgering God incessantly so that He will answer our prayers, then why did Jesus end it with that?

God has given us in His Word the perfect example of what not to do as one who is being led by God. The similarity of God leading the Israelites and how He leads us as His children, who have been given His Holy Spirit, is obviously not by coincidence. As the Apostle Paul said, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." (**Romans 8:14-16**) We have an even more personal way than the Israelites, as the Spirit of Christ leads us in our daily living, whereas the Israelites had the Spirit lead them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night and then God spoke to the Israelites through His prophet, Moses. What then was the most prominent issue that God had with the Israelites? First, when Moses had been up on the mountain for a long time, the Israelites ended up making a golden calf and worshipping it. Also they grumbled and complained about eating manna all the time, they complained about not having meat to eat. They also had a bunch of them commit harlotry with the Moabite women. (**Numbers 25:1**) God Almighty was leading His people, the Israelites, to the promised land of Canaan, of which it was "flowing with milk and honey" and God's people continued to show their lack of faith and trust in God by following their own lusts of the flesh and then grumbling and complaining to God. The final act of their rebellion that secured their fate to not being able to enter that promised land was after God had 12 spies scout out the land and bring back a report. 10 of the 12 spies that were sent gave a report saying that there was no way they could take that promised land because there were giants in the land with huge walled cities. Caleb and Joshua were the only ones of the 12 who said basically, "let's go, we got this." "If God is for us who can be against us." "With God all things are possible." Yet that evening everyone sat in their tents weeping and moaning. The Israelites just would not trust God.

In Jesus' discourse in His Sermon on the Mount He says "**Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek.**

For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Matthew 6:31-34) Jesus is not saying to not pray about those things, He is saying don't worry about them. That woman with the unjust judge sounds like she was doing a lot of worrying, at least doing more worrying than trusting. Complain, complain, complain-that is seemingly what she was doing before the unjust judge. Are we going to trust God that He is sovereign over all and nothing escapes His notice? God already promises us that in His perfect time He will right the wrong and that He will bless the right. The whole world strives and fights for justice but they aren't seeking the Just and Perfect Judge. If they were, we would see the promise come to pass, of what God spoke to Solomon of what to tell the Israelites, "if My people who are called by My name will **humble themselves**, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14) As the whole world around us is scrambling for their own justice, scrapping and fighting for their own selfish desires, where will we be? Will we join the moaners and complainers or will we humbly submit to God and trust Him that He is our Justice in His perfect time? When Jesus said to just ask and you'll receive, is God going to give us anything contrary to His will for us? As the Apostle James says, "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) God wants to give us His good and perfect gifts not have us consumed by the things of this world. As the Apostle John said, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but **he who does the will of God abides forever.**" (1 John 2:15-17)

This world is not our home. This is just the place that God is getting us ready and prepared for His eternal kingdom. Are the things that we are pestering God about in His perfect will? Are the things we are focusing on a part of God's plans for His eternal kingdom. In Jesus' sample prayer that He gave His disciples He said, "**Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" (Matthew 6:10) Are we moaning and complaining and pestering God to where we aren't trusting God as the Perfect and Almighty Judge or are we praying for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven?

So how about the second parable? We have one man who is obviously quite proud of Himself that He is a righteous man unlike the sinner nearby that is praying for God's mercy. As we know from Scripture and



really from just our experiences in life that, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (**Romans 3:23**) None of us have anything to boast about. Christ alone is our Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption, so that He who glories, that is, if there is any boasting, boast in the Lord! Our salvation is not of works, lest anyone should boast. But, "We are **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." "**For it is God who works in you both to will and to do** for His good pleasure." (**Philippians 2:13**) We are God's workmanship, He knows what we have need of, He knows where He is leading us, He already can see us in His finished product of what He is making us to be. God also promises us that He will never leave us nor forsake us. The writer of Hebrews adds to that, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (**Hebrews 13:5**) God knows what we have need of, He knows where He intends to lead us and He promises us that He will never leave nor forsake us. We just need to trust Him, for He is God Almighty and He is our God!

For the men in the second parable, James says that Jesus was addressing those who were a little full of themselves. But really, as we can see from Scripture, we have nothing to boast about in and of ourselves but we have much that we can boast about in the Lord. So the man who was self-righteous and thanking God that he wan't like the pathetic sinner clearly had an improper perspective as he sounded like the Pharisees who prided themselves in the keeping of the law. What about that other man who humbled himself and couldn't even look up to heaven and just asked God for His mercy. That's the subtle message for us that Jesus was getting at. God's Word promises us in **James 4:10**, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and **He will lift you up**" and also "God gives grace to the humble."

Jesus said, "'I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for **without Me you can do nothing**." Will we honor God and humble ourselves before Him so that He can lift us up? Will we trust God that He will get us to where He is leading us? Will we fix our hearts on praying, "May Your kingdom come and Your will be done, Heavenly Father"? Will we trust God to direct our all of our steps? There may be times where all we can do is cry to God saying "have mercy Lord, I need You. Help me Lord!" But we are being called to higher calling, to a heavenly place in Christ Jesus. "Let your gentleness be known to all men. (**he who humbles himself will be exalted**) The Lord is at near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (**Philippians 4:5-6**) "**When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?**"