

Studies show that most new programs take about three to five years before they get off the ground. I recall a study done recently that concluded that most of our favorite television programs of yesterday would not make it in today's world. If a show does not do well in one or two weeks, gone! A Facebook post this week asked, "What new shows will be canceled first?" We no longer have the patience to wait and give things a chance. We quickly move on to something or someone else. Jeremiah promises that "...the time is coming declares the Lord." The key to Jeremiah is in the words, "is coming". The day is not here yet - but...

Jesus was nearing the end of his earthly ministry. He was re-enforcing the need of constant prayer to his followers and he did what was and is the best teaching method, he tells a story, a parable. (I want to thank Kenneth Bailey and his work on seeing the parables through the eyes of its first audience, the Middle Eastern people. It often helps to see things through different eyes.) The story has a corrupt judge and a helpless widow. The judge has forgotten the requirements for being a judge: "*He told them, 'Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Judge carefully for with the Lord there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.'*" II Chronicles 19:6-7. Amos cried out against corrupt judges and officials in Amos 2:6-7; 5:10-13. Judges were considered representatives of God and should not be influenced by bribes, etc.

We are told the judge in the parable has no fear of God or man. Bailey notes that for the Middle Eastern audience the judge has no shame. He cannot be shamed and is not afraid of the Lord. Bailey notes that we would say, "that is wrong" while in the Middle East they would say "that is shameful." Shame carried much weight in their society. Yet, this judge has no shame. He does not care if the whole world knows he is not giving justice to this poor woman. "There is no sense of honor left in his soul to which one can appeal" (Bailey, p.132). And, he has no fear of God. Atheist? Maybe! Not even an appeal in the name of God will influence him. The audience would know that he is only concerned with who bribes him the most.

The widow's cry is not one of vengeance but one of justice. She is right. She has a case. The audience would understand that her case was a legitimate one. She was being taken advantage of because she was a widow. She has no resources to bribe the judge with.

Bailey also points out that in that society a woman would never go to court. The court was a male dominated place. She was there because she had no male to stand in her place. She was alone. He also notes that in Middle Eastern society women cannot be mistreated in public. She can say things to the judge that he would put a man in jail for saying (or even worse). There was no way he could stop her from being at the court daily and shouting out his corruption to all who hear. This was her only hope-her determination and persistence for justice.

Her vindication comes because of her determination. The judge grows tired of her coming daily to his court and calling him names. He knows that he will only get peace and quiet when she stops coming and shouting at him and the only way to do that is to grant her request.

Now, how are we to understand this parable? Bailey notes, "If this woman's needs are met how much more the needs of the pious who pray not to a harsh judge but to a loving Father (God)" (p.137). He also notes that the audience would understand that God was putting aside anger for forgiveness and grace. Matthew 26:53 has Jesus saying to the mob in the garden, "*Do you think I cannot appeal to the Father and he will send legions of angels?*" In that moment God turns aside and allows the gift to be given. This was not what most of us would do, but in

love God stands aside. God's love is demonstrated not in judgment but in forgiveness and grace. How great is God's love for us?

As we noted at the beginning, this parable was told as Jesus was ending his ministry. Luke tells us that Jesus told the parable so that his followers, "*would not lose heart.*" Soon he will face Jerusalem and the cross. The world that they knew will be turned upside down. The future will look grim at best. What are they to do? Pray.

Jesus prayed in the garden. His followers are not far from him but asleep. It was through prayer that he was strengthened for the hours that were ahead. Alone and in prayer he finds the strength to continue and an angel comes and ministers to him. Jesus says, "*Pray and do not lose heart.*"

I imagine that these are basically the same words Jeremiah is giving to the exiles. They had a promise that the exile would come to an end. God had promised but the years pass. They would wonder when the promise will be fulfilled. They pray and they wait assured of God's faithfulness.

Jesus' words to his followers, to us, are that we should keep praying. Look at this corrupt judge who finally gave in to the determined widow. Will not our God be more gracious than the judge? Yet, we need to remember the words of Jesus in the garden, "*not my will but yours be done*" (Matthew 26:39). Often we seek "our will". The widow was not seeking "her will" she was seeking the justice she deserved - God's will. Faith comes when we accept God's will as difficult as it may be. When we find the strength to endure the harsh and difficult days of living. We live trusting that God knows - it is never easy especially when things don't seem to go our way.

Jesus' final question: "*When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?*"

Molly Marshall, the president of Central Seminary, wrote in the baptistnews.com (10/11/16): "I fear many of us are tempted to lose heart in the present political chaos, but pray we must. As we cry out to God, we share life with God and participate in God's redemptive mission. Persevering prayer grants both patience and resolve, and people of good will can help mend the world."

Will Jesus find us praying?

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988
Bailey, Kenneth, Through Peasant Eyes,
William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 (1980).