



May I first express, on behalf of Isobel and myself, our sincere thanks and appreciation for all the support that you, our brothers and sisters in Christ, have given us in the sixteen months during which Isobel has been dealing with her illness. I am sorry that it has been necessary to shelve 'Question Box' for a time, but I feel sure that you will appreciate the pressures with which we have had to cope. We often thank our heavenly Father for the fellowship of the Family that has meant so much to us both.

The Parable

This month I would like us to consider a number of questions that have arisen from a study of one of the Lord's less familiar parables, found in Luke 18:1-8, and which, in the Authorised Version, is described as '*The Importunate Widow*' – a title which itself is almost certainly not understood by most readers and contributes nothing to an understanding of the parable. After all, how many of us have ever used the word 'importunate'? Indeed, how many know the meaning of the word!

However, we notice, firstly, that there are two people in this story; two *very different* characters. There is a Judge, who, somewhat arrogantly, declares that he fears neither God nor man; and there is a widow who is, apparently, the victim of an injustice and who has tried repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, to persuade the Judge to take an interest in her case. No doubt, because she is a Widow and therefore unable to offer him a bribe to act on her behalf, this judge is not interested in securing justice for her.

We can very easily imagine the intense frustration and growing sense of indignation that the widow experienced. She must have felt utterly helpless, since, in those days, a widow who apparently had no male relative to act on her behalf, was the most helpless and vulnerable person imaginable.

But the Lord Jesus tells us that, eventually, this '*unrighteous Judge*' decides that, for his personal comfort and well being, he had better do something about this poor woman's problem. He complains that her persistence '*bothers*' him. She is wearing him down! In fact, the expression he uses means, quite literally, that she is '*beating him black and blue*'.

An unfinished story

Now precisely what action the Judge took and what the outcome was, we are not told, and I suppose that in this sense the story is unfinished. We are simply left to surmise that it ended with the persistent widow obtaining the justice she had sought for so long! But this is not the point of the parable.

The problem is that sometimes, in sermons about Prayer, we are told that in this parable the Lord teaches us that the Judge, unjust and unworthy as he was, responded to the poor widow's petition, *because of her persistence*, and therefore, we also should pray – an keep on praying – until, like the widow, our perseverance moves God to respond.

Well I suppose that such an explanation may offer a measure of consolation to some poor soul who has prayed for a long time about a problem or a need without,

apparently, receiving an answer. But I suggest that, in fact, it is an interpretation that is difficult both to understand and accept, because it raises more questions than it answers. For example is the Lord Jesus:

- meaning that, like this widow, we should *lay siege* to God's throne with our own prayers?
- telling us that God is *like the unjust judge*?
- teaching us that it is *persistence* in prayer that achieves results?
- saying that God will react to *our* persistence in prayer, as the judge reacted to the widow's persistence?

Surely such notions cannot possibly represent the teaching of the parable. Firstly we cannot possibly be meant to suppose that God is in *any way whatsoever* like this Judge! Bear in mind, that Jesus tells us that the Judge has no respect for anyone – not even God – and that he is an '*unrighteous*' man. Secondly, nor can we be meant to think that God is *unwilling to act* on behalf of His children when they call to Him or that He is ever uncaring. Thirdly, as for the poor widow herself; the word '*importunate*', which some versions use to describe her, means, '*persistent, demanding, annoying, unrelenting*'. One translation 'The New American Translation' actually tells us that the judge decided to take up the widow's case, "**Lest she come and strike me!**"

Now perhaps, in the circumstances, her attitude is understandable because she is looking for justice – vindication – that does not appear to be forthcoming! But, are we to understand that this is the kind of attitude that we must adopt when we pray, and that it is to this attitude that God responds?

Not similarity but contrast

The truth is quite different. I suggest that what the Lord Jesus teaches us in this parable is that God is *not at all like the Judge*. Unlike the judge, He does not refuse to respond to our prayers until we weary Him and our persistence *compels* Him to act. Our heavenly Father stands in complete contrast to the unrighteous judge, because He is always ready to listen and to act on our behalf. His Word assures that His ear is *always* open to our cries, and He *always* hears and answers our prayers.

This is not to say that He always answers immediately, or in the way we expect or desire. And that, I suggest is the root of our problem. I am certain that we do not always understand why our sincere and earnest petitions seem to go unanswered, but we should at least understand that there **is** a reason, and our Father, who loves us, sometimes says, 'Wait! My child!' And sometimes says, 'No! My child!' The Lord tells us that we have a caring Father in Heaven, when He says, referring to God and His people who cry to Him, "**Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you He will quickly grant justice to them.**" (Luke 18:7)

Human justice is as fallible and uncertain as the men who make and administer the laws, but God's justice is both infallible – and inescapable.

*(We have a great facility, through Question Box, to achieve a more thorough understanding of God's revelation from Frank's years of study and application of God's Word. If something is troubling you or you just want further knowledge about a matter – ask! Questions please to: **Frank Worgan, 11 Stanier Road, Corby, Northants, NN17 1XP**)*