

Living In Hope

Wayne Waibel – 10/16/2022

What are we to make of these eight verses from Luke? We have two characters – a judge with no conscience and a widow with the tenacity of a Pit Bull. These two polar opposites are engaged beneath the backdrop of Jesus instructing His disciples at the beginning to pray and not lose heart, and wondering - out loud - at the end of the parable whether He will even find faith on the earth.

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Some of the disillusion with contemporary organized religion is born from trying to find a relevance in Scripture, and passages like these don't make it any easier to understand. So we struggle with meaning and purpose and can easily disregard what the Scriptures have to offer because we see them as outdated and impossible to truly comprehend.

These are the same struggles that plagued the early church. Many people were being seduced by fake prophets who espoused rhetoric that was seemingly more worthy of attention than either the Torah or the newly forming Canon. Hence the letter to young Timothy imploring him to be watchful in all things – to endure afflictions and to do the work of an evangelist, fulfilling his ministry.

The poor guy was up against a host of charlatans who were pandering to the “itching ears” of first century Palestinians who were anxious to follow a doctrine that lined up with their own self-interests. Much like the prosperity gospel holding sway over vast audiences today.

That this fledgling Christianity even made it out of that period in history is miraculous, to say nothing of its current prominence. Granted – membership is dwindling, and mega churches are on the rise, but this too shall pass.

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God’s instruction is an ongoing function of life as a child of God. The law, and obedience to it, are actually means of grace by which we draw closer to God.

Law is identified with the inner force of conscience in a person persistently in touch with the Scriptures. God breathes life into humankind; so too God breathes life into His Word. When we read the Bible, the Bible reads us. But, we must remember – we are saved only by God’s grace in Christ, not by our ability to follow the law.

Jeremiah's oracle promising a return to Israel's former greatness while they still suffered under the oppression of the Babylonian empire, stands as a testament to the greatness of God and the absolute love He holds for His people.

A love so great that He will put His law in their minds and write it on their hearts. This new covenant is a relationship we live into, not a standard we live up to. It is behavioral change that God seeks.

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This irreverent and unrepentant judge even in his failure to consider either God or man, still has the sense to know that the widow who comes to him for justice will be relentless. The Greek in this passage interpreted literally can be translated to say, "will blacken my eye," as opposed to the less violent "weary me."

And this serves the point Jesus is trying to impress upon the disciples (and us) to be persistent in prayer and not to lose heart. He knows the time is rapidly approaching that will find all of them in dire circumstances. They will quite literally be twelve against the world. And that is precisely why perseverance and courage are not abstract qualities, but eschatological necessities.

From Jeremiah's harsh predictions of bondage followed by the promise of a new hope and a new covenant – through Timothy's ministerial challenges within the early church - to the grace of Christ Jesus through the love of God Almighty, lie the continuity of faith that transcends all generations. This includes the generations that felt God had not only abandoned them - but had been defeated by their oppressors.

What God knows we need and what we think we want are not at all the same things. That is what will be the undoing of the current trend toward the prosperity gospel. It will ultimately fail the people it so fervently seeks to exploit. You can appeal to the basest desires of folks for a time, but that time will pass, and an understanding will be born. The understanding that religion's role is to decenter the ego, not pander to its desires.

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I've been to a number of these mega churches as an invitee over the course of my life, and while I was impressed with the spectacle – because I love a good show – I was left spiritually bereft of any legitimate substance. I was entertained and occasionally even amused, but not once did I leave inspired.

The first time I set foot in this church, I was a week early for my interview. You were preparing for a funeral, so there was plenty of activity. I didn't belong here, but I did not feel out of place. I felt embraced, and when I left – was I ever inspired!

I was inspired because I was to become the pastor of a community of faith that is living in hope. By praying continually, and not giving up hope, we live in the surety that God has not abandoned this world. We work, in whatever way we can, for the justice and peace that is coming. Coming – a second time – in Christ Jesus, so that when He arrives – at least in this place – He will most assuredly find faith. Amen.