

## The Hallowed Halls Of Justice

Luke 18:1-8

I sat at the plaintiff's table with two very capable attorneys from the American Center for Law and Justice in the courtroom of the Honorable Chief U.S. District Judge, John E. Conway. The atmosphere was intimidating. This was Federal Court. Legal counsel representing the City of Albuquerque, sat stiffly on the other side of the room awaiting the judge's entry. Curious onlookers, made up of senior citizens, several church separatist groups including the ACLU, some local pastors and various media types were sprinkled throughout the spectator section.

We had been in the courtroom all morning presenting legal arguments, taken an hour break and were waiting for the judge's ruling that could make history of sorts by setting a legal precedent. Did the City of Albuquerque have the right to deny access to Christian groups wanting to teach the Bible in their Senior Centers, or were they in violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech to all citizens, including churches?

This was not my first encounter with Judge Conway, although the first one in a court setting. Only six months before this hearing, my church and I had bombarded Judge Conway's office with several hundred Christmas cards, in protest of unfavorable rulings he had made in cancelling a Christmas play in an Alamogordo elementary school and a Christmas concert in an Albuquerque High School. The judge had proved himself to be antagonistic toward Christianity.

In 1994, I had sued the City of Albuquerque for the right to show the *Jesus* film on the life of Christ and to give out free Bibles at one of their taxpayer supported Senior Centers. The city had refused to allow us that privilege, citing separation of church and state. In my view, justice dictated that Christian groups be given the same rights as any other group to present their worldview.

Judge Conway entered the room at the well known, "All

rise," announcement from the bailiff. I was nervous. Would we win? Would justice prevail? Well, not on that day. The judge ruled for my adversaries and a black cloud of disappointment permeated our side of the room. We had lost.

The gloating city attorneys patted each other on the back as I silently left the courtroom. God, where are you in all of this? Isn't our cause a just one? Haven't we been praying? What do we do now? Are you going to let an inimical judge prevent others, from elementary kids to senior citizens, from hearing about the saving grace of your son? As I drove home, feeling sorry for myself, one thought kept continually entering my mind — just keep praying. I felt like God was saying to me, "it's not over yet!"

Jesus taught us how to pray (Mt. 6:5-13; Lk. 11:2-13), but in this parable from Luke on prayer, he tells us why we should continue to pray and not give up — even when it appears that we may have lost our case. I would learn this lesson well over the next year.

***'Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.***

The NAS Bible says that we "at all times ought to pray and not to lose heart." The KJV uses the phrase, "that men ought always to pray and not faint." Literally, the word means not to give in to evil, to turn coward, to lose heart or to behave badly. It's the ultimate expression for a quitter.

***<sup>2</sup>He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men."***

Jews who had complaints with one another, took them to the village elders who made rulings and resolved conflicts according to the Scriptures. This judge in Jesus' parable was apparently not a Jew but a magistrate appointed by the Roman government. These judges were notorious for their corruption and true justice was nonexistent. Favorable judgments were purchased through bribery and extortion. Their

position was one of political power and influence.

***<sup>3</sup>And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'***

We don't know what her complaint was or with whom. We do know that she expected that this judge could do something about it because of his office. Widows have a special place of protection throughout the Scriptures because of their vulnerability. Most were very poor, with little means of support outside of what care they would receive from their families. Widows are often linked with orphans because of their dependence on others for caregiving (Isa. 1:17; Jere. 22:3). James puts it very strong terms in the New Testament, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (Jas. 1:27).

***<sup>4</sup>For sometime he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'***

This widow probably didn't have any money to pay the judge for a favorable ruling — but she did have persistence. She didn't give up. I imagine she showed up every time this arrogant judge held court. She probably stood in the background and wailed — something Jewish ladies were good at (Est. 4:1-3; Mk. 5:38). It worked and the judge gave in. The fear of the judge was that she would "eventually wear me out." Literally, the word here means, "give me a black eye." Whether this is to be understood literally or figuratively, it worked — and the judge vindicated her.

We must remember at this point, that this story is an illustration that our Lord uses to enhance a spiritual truth. This is a parable of contrast. The judge here is not intended to portray God in any way, in fact he is at the farthest end of the spectrum from God. He is unjust, unrighteous and ungodly. He does represent, however, a judiciary who do not honor God in their decisions and position of authority. It shows the lack of integrity and subrogation of the powerful toward the less fortunate in society who have no money or influence — and who may have no advocate in their behalf. Unfortunately, we see this in our society all the time. Now for the other end of the spectrum.

***<sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup>And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?"***

If an unjust, selfish judge will see that justice is done in response to persistent requests, how much more will the our righteous and holy God bring justice to his own beloved people who pray constantly for relief.

***<sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?***

The word "justice" is used four times in this parable. Other translations use the words, "avenge" and "vindicate." It means to bring out our rights so that the accusation of our adversary may not stand against us. It's a cry to God to defend our cause because we can't defend it for ourselves. God promises to do so as a result of our continual prayers and to do so "quickly." Does that mean today or tomorrow? Or next year? In ten years? That's up to God, but when his justice comes — and it will come — it will be sudden and unexpected but right on time.

As Christians, we must remember that our adversary, or accuser is ultimately the devil and not people. Revelation tells us that he is one who accuses God's people day and night — because he knows his time is short and he is "filled with fury" against our Lord (Rev. 12:10-12). The challenge that Jesus issues each of us at the end of this parable is, will we continue to be trusting in Christ's redeeming work and justice when he comes to take us home?

The day of my apparent defeat before a judge "who neither feared God nor cared about men," shook my faith because I thought our cause was so just. But God impressed on me to keep praying and I and my church and other concerned Christians did. Two weeks after Judge Conway's ruling an appeal was filed with the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver. In May of 1996, almost two full years after my original complaint, the Appeals Court overturned the judge's decision by a unanimous vote of 4-0.

Even an emergency appeal by the city to the United States Supreme Court was to no avail. In a landmark decision on October 16, 1996, a ruling was handed down that every Senior Center in Albuquerque and in all seven states covered by the 10th Circuit must open their doors to the gospel message of Jesus Christ without hindrance from that day forward. In addition, the case set a favorable precedent for the rest of our nation in similar cases.

Do you have just causes that you have laid before the throne of Christ? Are you still praying for them? Do you still believe that he will bring justice in a way that will bring glory and honor to him? God's hallowed halls of justice are lined with the faithful prayers of his people. Are you one of them? *Maranatha.*

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