

School of the Word 2018

God has visited his people (Luke 7:16)
 Taking another look at Luke's Jesus
 Kieran J. O'Mahony, OSA
www.tarsus.ie

(3) Teaching in Parables: Luke 18:1-8

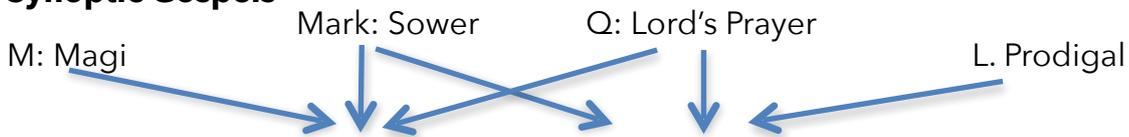
Programme

1. Luke: a (re-)introduction
2. Setting the scene: Luke 4:14-30
3. Teaching in parables: Luke 18:1-8
4. Prayer in Luke's Gospel
5. The death of the Prophet Messiah Luke 23:1-56
6. On the road to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-35
7. *Getting ready for Christmas (Luke 1-2)*
8. *Getting ready for Christmas (Luke 1-2)*

Sequence

- Synoptic Gospels
- Parables
- Luke 18:1-8
- Background
- Foreground
- Commentary
- Evolution
- Comparison
- And so...

Synoptic Gospels



- 94% of Mark is in Matthew (= 55% of Matthew)
- 79% of Mark is in Luke (= 42% of Luke)
- Matthew and Luke share 252 vv. (Q) of sayings
- 35% of Luke is unique to him

Parables

- Can you recall name many parables?
- How many are there, would you guess?
- What is a parable?
- Parables: used to illustrate the Kingdom and to engage the hearers of Jesus

	Mark	Matthew	Luke
In each			
In all three			
In two			
In only one			
total		John: No parables	

- Luke has no fewer than 26 parables (20 special to him)
- Found mostly in the journey narrative (Luke 9:51-19:27)
- Among the most powerful parables are:
- The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:8-31)
- The Insistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8)
- The Good Samaritan (10:25-36)

Luke 18:1-8

Luke 18:1 *Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. 2* He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. **3** In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' **4** For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, **5** yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" **6** *And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. **7** And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? **8** I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*

Questions...

Reactions...

Observations...

Background

Widows and orphans were regarded as especially vulnerable.

You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. (Exodus 22:22)

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. (Deuteronomy 10:17-20)

Foreground

(i) There is a considerable background to the parable in Luke's teaching on prayer. **Jesus** praying: 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:29; 11:1; 22:41, 44-45; 23:46.

In particular, he prays before his Baptism, the choosing of the Twelve, asking who do people say he is, the Transfiguration, the Lord's Supper, Gethsemane and several times on cross.

Likewise, Luke shows many people at prayer in this Gospel: **Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary**, the **angels** and the **shepherds, Simeon** and **Anna**, the **disciples** and finally Jesus himself.

(ii) Luke also gives women a high profile in this Gospel:

Elizabeth, Mary and **Anna** (chs. 1-2); a **widow** whose son had died (ch. 7); a **woman** in the house of the Pharisee (ch. 7); **Mary Magdalene, Johanna, Suzanna** and "**others**" (ch. 8); the **woman** with the haemorrhage (ch. 8); Jairus' **daughter** (ch. 8); a **woman** in the crowd (11 ch.); the **woman** bent over for 18 years (ch. 13); the **widow** at the Temple (ch. 21); the "**daughters** of Jerusalem" (ch. 23); **Women** at the cross and burial (ch. 23); **Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James**, and the **other women** on Easter Sunday (ch. 24)

(iii) A good parallel is found in this parable and the comments which follow:
 And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:5-13)

Commentary

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

- Luke often puts a heading over a parable, so that the meaning would be clear.
- To pray always: Luke 21:36 and Romans 12:12.
- The risk of losing heart has a strong resonance today.

Luke 18:2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.

- Judges were supposed to be even-handed and fair.
- Fear God: Lev 19:14, 23; Deut 4:10, 6:13, 17:13 etc.
- This judge is three times described as unjust, once by the narrator, once by himself (!) and finally by the Lord.

God as the ideal judge from the book of Sirach 35

35:12 Give to the Most High as he has given to you,
 and as generously as you can afford.
 13 For the Lord is the one who repays,
 and he will repay you sevenfold.
 14 Do not offer him a bribe, for he will not accept it;
 15 and do not rely on a dishonest sacrifice;
 for the Lord is the judge,
 and with him there is no partiality.
 16 He will not show partiality to the poor;
 but he will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged.
 17 He will not ignore the supplication of the orphan,
 or the widow when she pours out her complaint.
 18 Do not the tears of the widow run down her cheek
 19 as she cries out against the one who causes them to fall?
 20 The one whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted,
 and his prayer will reach to the clouds.
 21 The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds,
 and it will not rest until it reaches its goal;
 it will not desist until the Most High responds
 22 and does justice for the righteous, and executes judgment.
 Indeed, the Lord will not delay,
 and like a warrior will not be patient
 until he crushes the loins of the unmerciful
 23 and repays vengeance on the nations;
 until he destroys the multitude of the insolent,

24 and breaks the sceptres of the unrighteous;
 until he repays mortals according to their deeds,
 and the works of all according to their thoughts;
 25 until he judges the case of his people
 and makes them rejoice in his mercy.

Luke 18:3 In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'

- The widow is very, very persistent, rather like the friend in Luke 11:5-13.
- God protects widows (Deut 10:17-18; Ps 68:5; 146:9)
- Widows are not to be afflicted (Ex 22:22)
- Widows are not to be mistreated (Isaiah 10:2 and many places).

Luke 18:3 In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'

- What might the issue have been?
- Quite possibly against the heirs of her husband's estate. She would have the right to be maintained and the right stay in the marital home as long as she did not remarry.

Luke 18:4 For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone,

- The change in attitude is marked by a shift to internal monologue, as in the case of the prodigal son ("he said to himself").
- Other examples in Luke: 12:16-21, 42-46; 15:11-32; 16:1-8; 20:9-19.

Luke 18:5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out (completely) by continually coming."

- Her persistence bears fruits and he's afraid of being worn down and exhausted.
- The word for "wear out" has potentially a shocking force. The basic meaning is to blacken the eye, by striking in the face.
- It could also have a more simply metaphorical meaning of to bring into submission in constant annoyance.
- Either way, the woman shows considerable spirit.

Luke 18:6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.

- The comment by the Lord (= Jesus) in 6-7b is really an a fortiori argument, along the lines, "all the more so will God...".
- The shock of comparing God's role to that of judge who requires badgering is defused by this comment.
- Argument: If bad people eventually give in under pressure, how much more will God give to his beloved.

Luke 18:7 And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?

- It is often thought that lines 7cd were not original but were added in the course of transmission to give an end-time urgency to the parable.
- This urgency is in some tension with Luke's theology of time because he foresees a (long?) period of the church before the end.

Luke 18:8 I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

- To bring the teaching into his own worldview, Luke added this last verse.
- Faith = faithfulness in the context.

- It is, of course, a verse that resonates with us today.

Luke 18:1 *Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.* 2 **He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.** 3 **In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'** 4 **For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone,** 5 **yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"** 6 **And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.** 7 **And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?** 8 **I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"**

Evolution

- Probably the original story is found in vv. 2-5. It is a story illustrating persistence, "hanging on in there," steadfastness in general.
- The application in vv. 6-8 is in tension with the content. If the woman represents any faithful Christian, the unjust judge is in the place of God – which would make most believers uncomfortable.
- Vv. 6-8 "apply" the teaching on persistence to the patience required as the Second Coming is delayed. People were losing heart and needed encouragement. This application "works" only in the setting of the later Christian community and the "delay" in the Second Coming.
- V. 1 "applies" the teaching to the theme of prayer, found frequently in this Gospel.
- It seems clear from misfit between the parable and the various applications that the parable pre-dates Luke. The version we have in vv. 2-5 is certainly incomplete on its own. It would require at least v. 6 to make some point.
- Such an evolution of reception invites us to make our own interpretation and application for today.

Comparison

Luke 11:5 And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7 And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

- A person in need goes to another for assistance
- The person in need is really insistent (cheeky)
- The other person becomes annoyed...
- ...but finally, gives in and answers the request
- "Bother" is in both parables
- Luke presents both parables as teaching on prayer

And so...

There's a bit of "history" behind the parable;

The parable is still open today

Big topics for Luke:

Justice
Prayer
Patience
Endurance
Faithfulness