

A. D. 29.

May 23.

LESSON VIII.—PARABLES ON PRAYER; or, Ask, Seek, Knock.

GENERAL STATEMENT.

At some time while Jesus was in Perea, and slowly journeying toward the Jordan and Judea, he gave to his disciples two parables on prayer. The first parable has received two very different expositions—one individual, the other general. To one class of interpreters, as Arnot and Lyman Abbott, it simply teaches earnest persistent prayer, no special emphasis being placed on the "unjust judge," who in their view, is introduced merely in order to make its application stronger. Another class of writers, as Trench, Aford and Wheldon, see in the parable a picture of the Church during the long ages of Christ's abiding in heaven—a widow, oppressed by her adversary, Satan, and calling for deliverance to One who seems like an unjust judge, heeding not her cry; but will, in his own good time, long to us on earth, yet speedy to him with whom a thousand years are as one day, reveal himself as her Redeemer, and the avenger of her wrongs; yet when he appears will find the faith of his people sorely tried, and scarcely able to endure the delay. Verses 7, 8. The other parable was addressed to some of the disciples who, despite their Lord's teachings, were manifesting the spirit of self-righteousness and contempt for others less favoured. He rebukes them by the picture of the Pharisees and the publican, the one boasting of his superior godliness, the other confessing his sins and pleading for mercy; the one going home unconscious that he has but added to the weight of his condemnation, the other with light heart in the assurance of God's grace.

Luke 18, 1-14.

[Memory Verses, 11-14.]

1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

Luke 21, 36: Watch ye...and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy...to stand before the Son of Man. Rom. 12, 12: Continuing instant in prayer.

2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man.

2 Chron. 19, 6, 7: [Jehoshaphat] said to the judges, Take heed what ye do...let the fear of the Lord be upon you...for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;

Explanatory and Practical.

Verse 1. A parable. (1) Let us learn from the Master and teach by illustrations. **To this end.** These words are not in the original. Literally, "A parable unto them as to the need always to pray," Matthew Henry quaintly remarks, "This parable has its key hanging at the door." **Ought always to pray.** "At all times," at no time neglecting as of no consequence: at no time ceasing as of no avail. (2) Prayer should be the one thread woven into the entire texture of the life. **Not to faint.** (3) In the spiritual as well as the worldly life, success is won by persevering, all-conquering endeavour.

2, 3. A judge. A judge in the East exercises both executive and judicial functions, is not responsible to a higher court, settles cases without a jury, and is governed by his own will as the only law. Hence judges are often corrupt, receive bribes from both parties, and rule in an arbitrary and unjust manner. **Fearing not...neither regarded.** Without principle, without a sense of honour, without respect for public opinion: a character utterly despicable. Yet the force of the parable is intensified by the comparison of such a man with God, or rather, by the contrast, since if even so base a nature may be influenced by persistent supplication, how much more a just and loving Father! And is it not true that to many the divine government seems to be that of an unjust, careless ruler, grinding out destiny regardless of the cry of humanity? One aim of this parable is to show that God is neither a blind, stony fate, nor a wooden figurehead over the universe, but has a heart moved by prayer, as well as a hand to execute his will. **A widow.** Representing in the parable Christ's earthly Church during the period of his absence, from the ascension to the second advent, exposed to the insults of the world, and ardently awaiting her Lord's return. In the East, widows are peculiarly helpless and unfortunate, being dependent upon the family of the husband, and compelled to suffer many wrongs. **Avenge me.** "Do me justice." The cry is not for revenge, but for protection and just penalty upon the wrong doer. **Mine adversary.** Here representing Satan, the power of this world, and the oppressor of God's people, who is ever striving against God's kingdom, and from whom the Church of Christ expects deliverance in the coming of its Saviour. (4) Let us never forget that we have a wicked, mighty, and invisible foe who is endeavouring to compass our destruction.

4, 5. He would not. The unjust judge would not answer the petition because of indifference; the divine hearer of prayer does not, because his wisdom and love perceive that the hour has not yet come. **For a while.** In the application to the general Church, the "while" is the period of time between the first and