

tion on their lips and His answer is found in the parable of our text. These words accordingly do not treat primarily or principally of prayer in general, in all our needs and necessities, but rather speak of the longings and prayers and hopes of the congregation of Jesus Christ, the church militant, for constancy and strength in this time of probation. The hard-pressed widow is a picture of the church of God during this period, and accordingly suggests the theme:

*The people of God in the church militant.* I. The oppression of the church; II. The struggle for deliverance; III. The sure success.

I. The widow in our Gospel lesson is a picture of the congregation of Jesus Christ in the manner in which she was oppressed. Our text, it is true, indicates only in a brief way as to what it was that caused her this trouble. She is in need of help from an adversary, and the persistency of her prayer before the judge shows that it was a powerful and hard-hearted adversary with whom she had to deal. We undoubtedly have to deal here with one of those men who took advantage of the fact that she was a lone widow, and under some false pretense or other had taken possession of her goods and property. At all times have cruel and wicked men of this kind been found, who abuse the weakness and helplessness of the poor for their own selfish purposes. But when such an abuse of power is exercised over against a helpless widow and orphan, this oppression is felt all the more bitterly and severely; it is a struggle between the unequal weapons of mere brute force and absolute helplessness. While the powerful adversary easily secures false witnesses and the appearance of right, there are none who will come to the help of the poor, forsaken widow. For such a service there is no reward or prospect of gain. She is compelled to carry on her struggle for her rights alone. And even in our day, when we have principles of right supreme in the

administration of justice, and as a rule justice is exercised in our courts over against all, no matter what their station and rank in life, it yet occurs even now that the helpless and hopeless suffer in their struggle against high-handed injustice. And that this was the case to an immeasurably greater degree in biblical times, is seen from the repeated threats of the sacred writers pronounced against the oppressors of the widows and the orphans.

If we would see in how far this widow is a mirror of the church militant in her oppression, we must recall another picture which the Lord has drawn for us descriptive of His congregation. When the disciples of John came to Him with the question, why they and the disciples of the Pharisees were accustomed to fast while His own disciples did not observe this custom, He told them that this could not be done as long as the bridegroom was with them, but that then they would fast when the bridegroom would be taken from them. And He was taken from them. They saw Him suffer and die; and altho they saw Him after the resurrection, he soon departed again as far as concerned His body, and the congregation of the Lord was denied the visible presence of its Founder. And even if they did long lovingly for the day when He should return, yet that day has not yet come and the probation period of the church still continues. He told them that they would then desire to see even a single day of the Lord; and how many thousand times since have the people of God been filled with this longing desire!

While their longing has not been fulfilled, there has never been a lack of adversaries of the church. They appeared by the thousands already in the first centuries of the church, and sought to crush out the Gospel and church of the cross. And when the church as an outward organization had been secured, enemies arose from within, false teachers, heresies, and sects, misleading the very elect by false doctrines and dog-