

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us

Matthew 10:40-42

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Analysis by Matthew DeLoera

40 Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; 42 and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.



Water is Life – Boamaeric1

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The power and grace of God has a track record of bubbling up wherever and whenever we least expect, and in the most unexpected and unorthodox apostles who nonetheless pronounce Jesus' forgiveness to us and to others whether we ask for it or not. Jesus is persistent in his promise that we will not "lose our reward."

Author's Note: Verse 40 seems to establish the underlying principle of this lection, that the one who is sent represents the full presence (or power) of the sender. However, verse 41 doesn't seem to have a Synoptic parallel and it is unclear as to exactly who such "prophets" and "righteous persons" are. So, I take a "prophet's reward" or "reward of the righteous" to signify what one might receive from the sender's own self. Therefore, Jesus would need to imbue the disciples with his same powers, for example to heal or to forgive sins, to then send them out in his own name. So then, who are the "little ones" in verse 42? If the verse is an adaptation of Mark 9:41, then we might consider "little one" to highlight the degree to which an emissary might even pale in comparison to their sender. Hence, I suggest that Jesus' ending phrase "none of these will lose their reward" might be better translated as something more like, "fail to gain what they expect or anticipate" (as my lexicon suggests). In other words, we may not think someone could or should pronounce absolution in Jesus' name (i.e., they don't deserve to do so), yet it remains efficacious. As Jesus advises, "Whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40).

DIAGNOSIS: Expecting the Worst

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Unqualified Ministry

Grounding: Prior to this conclusion of Matthew's "Missionary Discourse," Jesus has been instructing his disciples to send them out to do the same ministry that he himself has been doing. As he tells his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matt. 9:37). So, he gives them "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness" (Matt. 10:1). However, Jesus also introduces an interesting twist by instructing them, "Take no gold, or silver or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff" (Matt. 10:9-10). On the one hand, this shouldn't be surprising if everything ultimately depends upon God. Yet, they will also be dependent upon the kindness of strangers, and hence might face some questions as to how they could possibly render care if they go about so unprepared. We also know that the disciples look and act in unconventional ways like eating with unclean hands (Mark 7:2), which raises questions about the veracity of their discipleship. So, perhaps it's not so surprising that Jesus warns them, "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next" (Matt. 10:23).

Tracking: We likewise question and evaluate those who minister in Jesus' name. We judge their appearance, perhaps the wardrobe of an ordained woman or a minister's uncovered tattoos or piercings. We judge them by their behavior, their sexuality, their language, their politics, or any number of other criteria. Of course, everyone seems to have their own opinions as to what makes one qualified to lead, and preconceptions as to what constitutes "holy."

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Guarded Hearts

Grounding: The disciples will certainly encounter expectations from those whom they meet. Of course, the disciples are only human. They will face failure, like failing to cast the demon

out of a boy (Matt. 17:14-20), whose father then reaches out to Jesus to fix what the disciples couldn't. Though they have successfully cast out many other demons with Jesus' authority (Mark 6:7-13), here they may be fully discredited and dismissed—perhaps because they have no second chance to make a first impression. Jesus himself knows how this feels by failing to live up to Messianic expectations, as when John's disciples ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (Luke 7:20). No wonder he asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27).

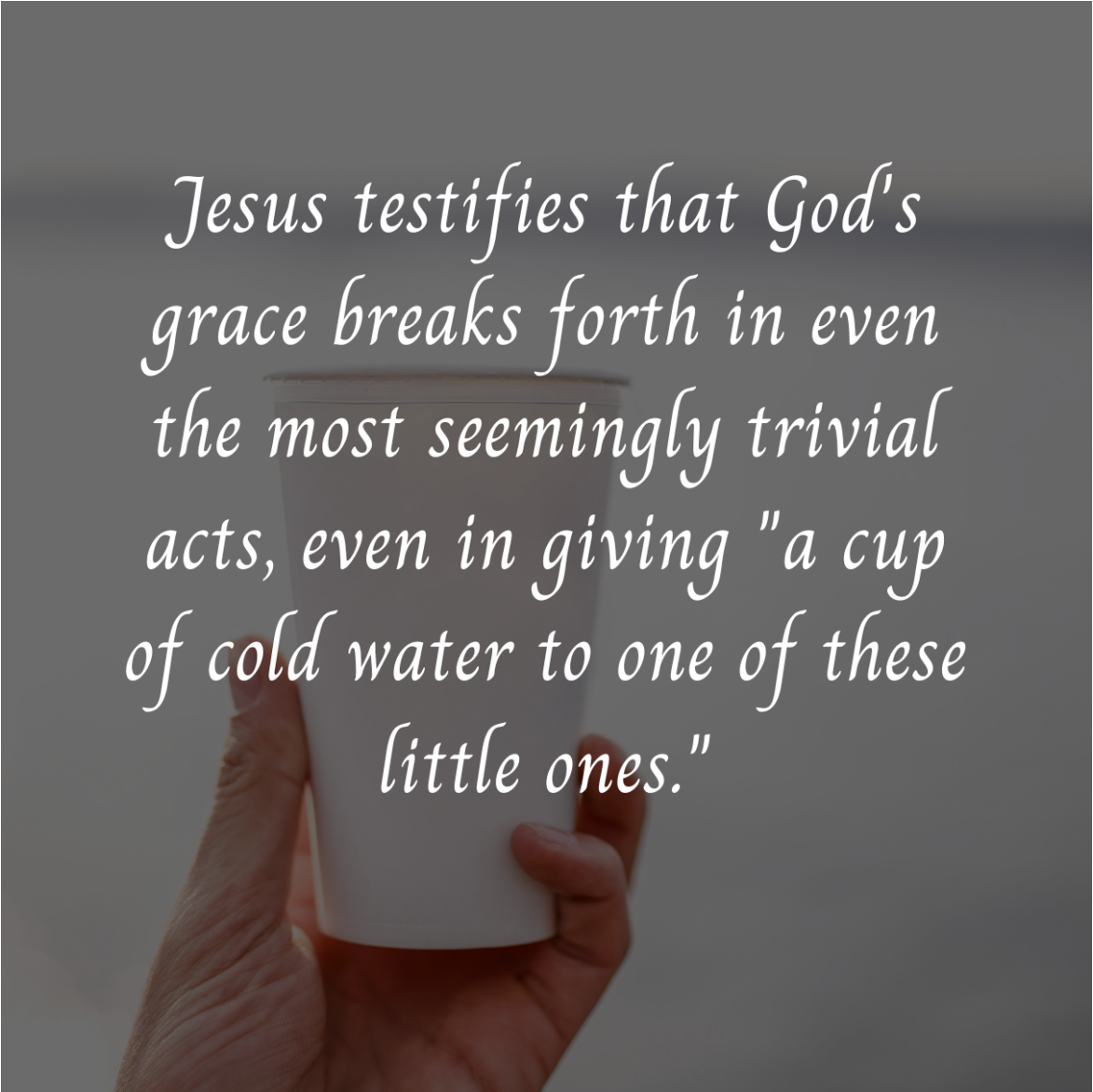
Tracking: We're exacting. When our expectations aren't met, we're unwilling to extend grace or a second chance. Perhaps we've been disappointed and burned so much that we're desperate to guard our hearts and not take risks; we convince ourselves that such action is wise or discerning. "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." If we judge the book by its cover that's just proactive. Why even risk disappointment at all? Why not avoid change and stick with tradition as much as possible?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Lost Rewards

Grounding: In Mark's synoptic account, long after the apostles "cast out many demons" with Jesus' authority (Mark 6:7-13), they witness a stranger casting out demons in Jesus' name, become alarmed, and try to stop it because the person was "not following us" (Mark 9:38). Surely, they know the overwhelming need they and Jesus face. Are they alarmed because they think the action is just theatrics unless it comes from a "real" disciple (i.e., Jesus' name not being enough in itself)? Do they feel outshined by an "untrained" outsider, and so do whatever they can to shut it down?

Tracking: Ultimately, we don't trust that Jesus' name has power,

because we don't trust the absolution that lies behind it. It surely can't be purely unconditional or freely given, either for us or for others. Certainly not for ourselves, hence all our hard-fought and determined efforts to atone or compensate. We set ourselves up as arbiters of God's grace, restricting its means and channels in the name of "good order." It's irresponsible to give credence to unorthodox, good acts—as if anyone can pronounce healing or forgiveness (i.e., "mutual confession and consolation"), lest it become "cheap." Instead, we judge these actions despite the risk we may just "lose our reward."

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a white, disposable cup. The hand is positioned at the bottom of the frame, with fingers wrapped around the cup. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. Overlaid on the image is a quote in a white, cursive script font.

*Jesus testifies that God's
grace breaks forth in even
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acts, even in giving "a cup
of cold water to one of these
little ones."*

PROGNOSIS: Receiving the Harvest

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Persistent Promises

Grounding: Yet Jesus will not be restricted or arbitrated by any of us. He makes the most unorthodox move of all, by letting himself be crucified and killed in the name of “good order.” Defying all logic and reason, he is raised after three days, fully unbound from anything that could possibly inhibit his determination to forgive or liberate us or others. This, despite our tenacious efforts to oppose him.

Crossing: The power and grace of God has a track record of bubbling up wherever and whenever we least expect, and in the most unexpected and unorthodox apostles who nonetheless pronounce Jesus’ forgiveness to us and to others whether we ask for it or not. Jesus is persistent in his promise that we will not “lose our reward.”

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Surprising Grace

Grounding: Jesus further testifies that God’s grace breaks forth in even the most seemingly trivial acts, even in giving “a cup of cold water to one of these little ones.”

Crossing: Jesus’ unrestrained grace and forgiveness purposely catches us in unguarded moments. In turn, we find ourselves transformed by a faith that is determined to give us a taste of the same grace by whatever means available. So, in hope, we give the benefit of the doubt and extend the same graciousness to others than Jesus shows to us. We’re no longer hounded by fear of mistakes, the burden of responsibility, or a nagging sense that we need to strive for extraordinary acts of holiness or

devotion. We finally recognize a true gift for what it really is.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Unearthed Hospitality

Grounding: As Jesus equips his disciples to go out in his name, he tells them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37-38). This mission can never depend on their labor alone; God will call others into untold vineyards and fields.

Crossing: We get to witness the new reality brought about by Jesus’ words: of laborers venturing into some of the most seemingly inhospitable or unorthodox fields and being surprised by a hospitality that we otherwise never could see or imagine.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus Does Faith for Us

Luke 18:1-8

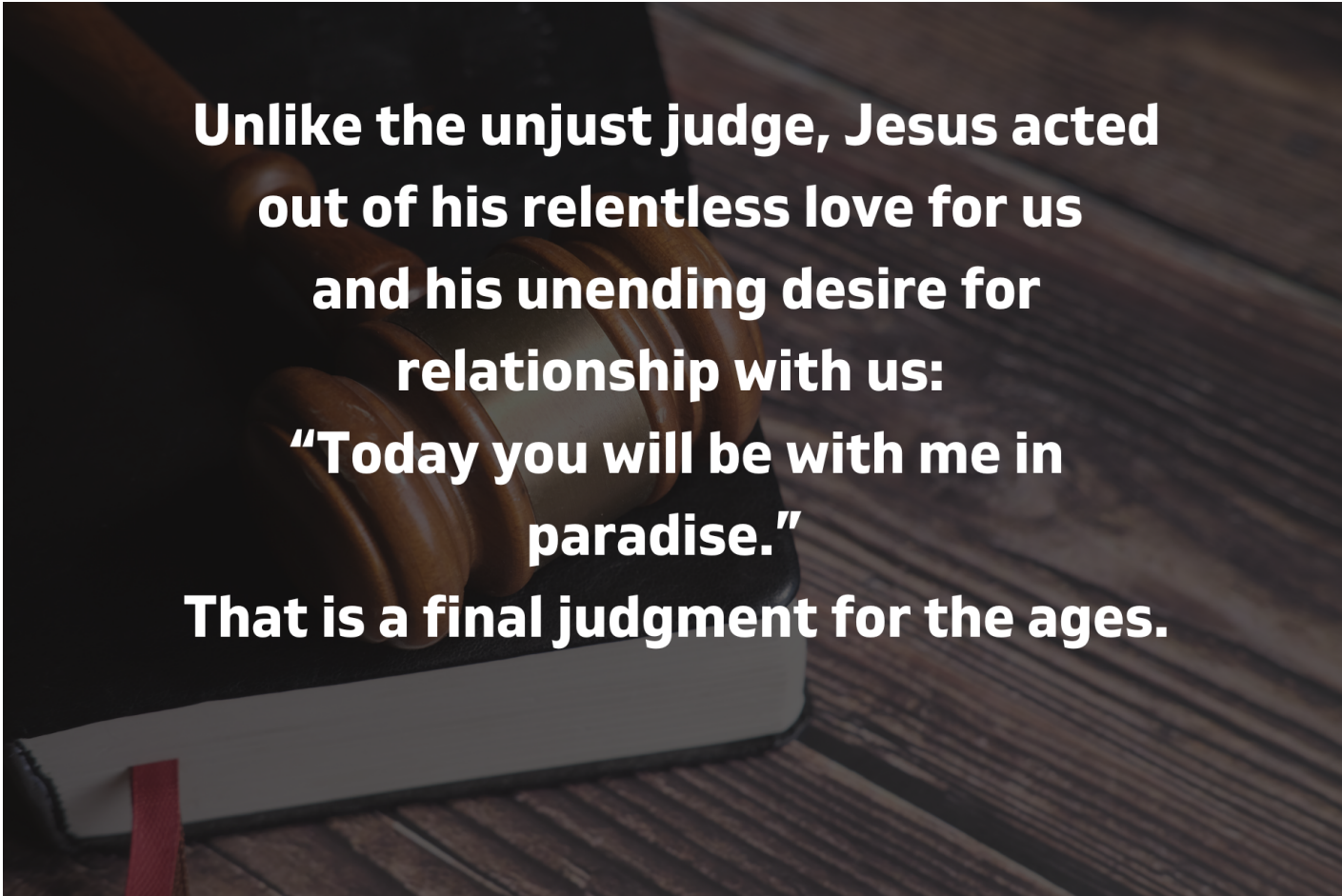
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by James Squire

1Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. 2He said, ‘In a certain city there was a

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

Author's Note: The disciples had been losing heart in the previous chapter, and they knew it: "Please, Jesus, increase our faith." To our ears, it sounds like they think that faith is a substance that can be measured, rather than a relationship that either exists or does not.



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“Unlike the unjust judge, Jesus acted out of his relentless love for us and his unending desire for relationship with us: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” That is a final judgment for the ages.”

DIAGNOSIS: Faith as a Commodity

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Tough to Keep up

You're a disciple, and your head is spinning. Jesus is out there healing lepers (17:11-19) and expecting his followers to do awesome things like seven-fold forgiveness (17:3-4) in the face of apocalyptic visions (17:20-31). On the one hand, you want what he has: “Increase our faith!” On the other hand, you want to stop and rest and assess whether this joy ride is for you.

And then Jesus holds up the example of the persistent widow harassing the unjust judge. And all you hear is an impossible standard: "See? Why can't you be more like her?" You begin to wonder whether following Jesus is worth it, especially when you feel scolded for expecting a modicum of praise for meeting expectations (17:7-10). "Jesus, you better increase our faith if you expect this much out of us!"

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Using Jesus Like a Gas Pump

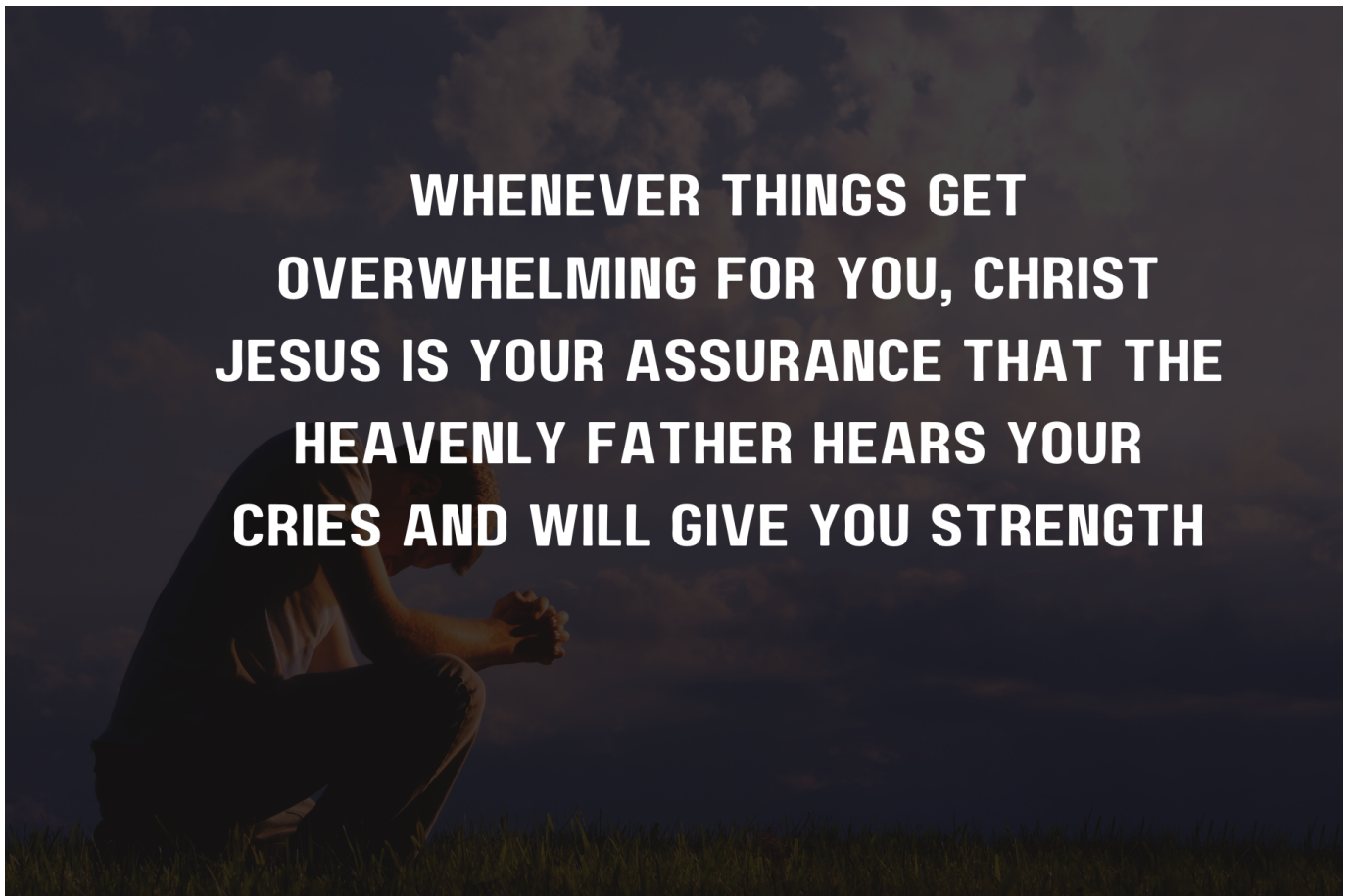
When you treat faith like fuel—that you need to fill up on regularly, like the gas tank in your car, it becomes a negotiation by which we retain control of the steering wheel of our lives. We see Jesus as a recruiter, and we are savvy enough to ask, "What's in it for me?" "If I'm going to do all this for you, Jesus, I need what you have to keep me going."

This isn't a relationship, it's a lifetime of transactions. What gets pumped up here is our sense of self-worth, as if Jesus should find us to be attractive candidates. "Hire me, Jesus, and pay me well. Provide a good working environment with plentiful resources, and I'll do the job for you. 9-5, right? I mean, I'm allowed to live my own life otherwise, right?"

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Relation-less Self-destruction

"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Jesus is not looking for day laborers or superhumans. He is looking for relationships. He is looking to win our hearts over. He offers himself as the one to be grasped and held onto, and yet he can sense that it is not natural for us to be open to that from the Son of Man. The unjust judge is the kind of authority we are used to dealing with. Such authority is annoying and exhausting, but we figure that's how the world works. Meanwhile,

Jesus is trying desperately to get through to us. But we're too busy banging our heads against brick walls trying to meet impossible standards and licking our wounds in the corner with a "leave me alone" vibe when we don't. Clearly, the Son of Man will not find faith on earth considering this repeated routine. He will instead find people destroying each other; not turning away from evil (17:27-37).



Jesus is your Assurance (from Canva)

PROGNOSIS: Faith as relationship with Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus the Just, Merciful Judge

Jesus came into our world to live among us. He learned our ways and our customs. He lived his life among us to bring good news

to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free (4:18-19). But he was viewed by some as an unfit judge, and by others as an unjust judge. Instead of appealing to him, those “somebodies” pushed back against him, ultimately ushering him to a punishing death on the cross.

Like the unjust judge, Jesus gave them what they needed: forgiveness (a new kind of justice), even the penitent thief who was crucified next to him. Unlike the unjust judge, Jesus acted out of his relentless love for us and his unending desire for relationship with us: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” That is a final judgment for the ages. Today, you sinners will be with me in paradise because that is what you need. In death, he gave us his life. Much more than the unjust judge, who begrudgingly gave the woman worldly justice (18:7)!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Grabbing Hold of Jesus in Relationship

“Will the Son of Man find faith on earth?” He will now! Jesus, the one who died for us ungrateful wretches, reaches out his hands to us in the resurrection to say, “Do not lose heart. Pray always. I and my heavenly father will be there for you.” Faith is not a substance to measure in a beaker. It is not an elixir that you have to drink regularly to pump you up. Faith is participating in an enduring relationship with Christ Jesus. It is Jesus saying to us, “Today you will be with me in paradise,” followed by our response, “Yes Lord, I believe you are with me.” Jesus says, take hold of me and never let go, and even with your tiny faith the size of a mustard seed, you will move mountains (17:6). You have me with you always. You have no need to increase your faith. I am your faith and I am enough.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Plentiful

Forgiveness to Give

Your head is no longer spinning. You still have plenty of opportunities before you to forgive, but you are in an enduring relationship with the prime forgiver. What overwhelms you is not all the burdensome requests for forgiveness that come your way, but the joyous overflowing of forgiveness that has been bestowed on you. Your experience of forgiveness is so abundant that you find it difficult to keep it to yourself. Unlike the unjust judge, you forgive because you love rather than simply to get rid of the penitent one who is pleading with you.

And whenever things get overwhelming for you, Christ Jesus is your assurance that the heavenly Father hears your cries and will give you strength. You have an eternal relationship with him that you can lean on whenever you need to, and he will always be there for you.