

# Discontinuity—A Generalization from the Parable of the Persistent Widow

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The concept of discontinuity is a generalization from the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18.

## **The Parable of the Persistent Widow**

**1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'**

**4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 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!' "**

**6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 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? 8 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?"**

We can demonstrate this parable visually by means of a wavy horizontal line (indicating the present, a wedge-like triangle that “stops” the wavy line, followed by a flat horizontal line representing the future.



There are three personalities in the widow's story: the widow, the adversary, and the judge.

- The widow is weak, vulnerable, without resources, and has no direct ability to change her situation. She has only one advantage: she can emotionally affect the judge.
- The adversary is more powerful than she is personally. He has caused the "wavy line" situation and locked her into it, and the widow can do nothing about it directly.
- The judge is the only person who the widow can influence to bring about change, and he has the ability to make the "wavy line" of her *continuous* experience something different. He alone has the power to enact a *discontinuity*.

Jesus told this parable for two reasons:

- 1) To show His followers that they must pray and never give up and
- 2) to show a quality or characteristic of true faith.

He makes a distinction between God as the judge and the unjust earthly judge who doesn't care about God, men, or even the concept of justice he is supposed to embody. God does care, does respond, even more readily than the earthly judge.

But there are some very important principles in this story.

- 1) The future state of resolution of the problem (illustrated by the straight line) is not a function of the wavy line. In other words, the widow's

experience-- of day after day suffering under the unjust situation, and getting to the point of exasperation, and her frustration and inconvenience and humiliation of the daily trek to the judge's chambers and everything else that is part of her "present" – has nothing to do with the future. None of that—the injustice of the situation, the strength of her adversary, or even the repetition of events (the constant refusals) – will bring about the future she wants. THE JUDGE will change her future, she won't. She can't! So, again, the future is not a function of the present. The future is the function of the one who can change the future, which is a powerful judge with the ability to bring about discontinuity.

- 2) The future is also not a function of the adversary. He may have created her present distress, but he is powerless against a judge who can set things right.
- 3) *So the future is relative to the judge, not to the adversary, nor to the present as experienced by the widow.*
- 4) In terms of determining an ultimate outcome: Personal experience of failure is not a factor. Personal ability to solve a situation on our own is not a factor. Ability to get other people to help us solve a situation is not a factor. The longevity of the problem is not a factor. The adversary who created the situation is not a factor. Resources are not a factor.
- 5) Now let's put this in terms of unanswered prayers to God. Jesus told the story to GET people to keep praying. So that implies that people won't get what they ask for right away in many cases. "Keep praying and never give up" means a situation of repeated refusals.
- 6) Jesus wants us to understand that for our "wavy" present continuous situation of what we see as being unjust, for that to change, it will not be a function of the way things have always gone. In fact, Peter identifies people who operate on the principle of continuity—believing an ongoing situation where things never seem to change makes change increasingly unlikely with the passage of time—as *unfaithful*:

**3**First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. **4**They will say,

**"Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**

**8But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

**10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.**

**--2 Peter 3:1-10**

Remember as you read this passage in 2 Peter, the question Jesus asked at the end of the parable of the persistent widow: "When I return, will I find faith on the earth?"

Further, we saw that in the book of James, someone who predicts the future based on his present is called *prideful*:

**13Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."**

**14Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. --James 4:13-16.**

*Now, in these two examples, is the future a function of the present? No – it is a function of the Lord, who brings about the future.*

Another example of this is found in Deuteronomy chapters 8 and 28 – where God's people are plainly told that their future prosperity is based not on their own efforts or planning, but directly on their relationship with God. Their

well-being is based not on their relationship to the material world to interact with it; but with how they interact with the Lord. Notice how they are expected to do the *necessary* things (plant their fields, take care of their cattle, use their resources wisely) – but notice that these necessary actions were only “successful” if they were obedient to God. *Their participating actions were necessary, but they were not determinant of success.* When it comes to interacting with God, relationship with Him always trumps any relationship with our material surroundings. This is also plainly taught by Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34.

- 7) The kind of faith that Jesus calls for in the parable of the persistent widow is a faith that doesn't give up. It assumes that there will be repeated refusals –else why the need for persistence?
- 8) That kind of faith depends on the nature of the “judge” who is the wedge who disrupts time – from ongoing time of refusal, interrupting it, bringing about a different future. In the parable, the nature of the judge was one who could be worn down with persistence. His nature was self-preservation –he didn't care about justice or people. But with God, His nature is different. He is inclined to answer prayers, not inclined to deny them when His people ask for a situation that's “not right” to be made right.

**5Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, 6because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'**

**7"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.**

**9"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.**

**11"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

--Luke 11:5-13

- 9) Another important lesson from the parable of the widow is the fact that her character is never addressed. All we know is that she has been truly wronged by someone she has no ability to oppose, and that she is persistent. So the future is not a function of the overall character of the widow (nor of the adversary)—it is a function of the character of the judge who changes things. That gives all of us imperfect praying women hope!
- 10) Her pitiful widowhood, her need, and the unfairness of the situation didn't bring about change. Her only influence to bring about change was not to try to influence the future, but the future-changer. In the case of a Christian, it is persistent prayer to the Future-Changer God.
- 11) Constant denial of a prayer should never be seen as proof that God isn't listening or doesn't care. After all, Jesus told us the parable to GET us to pray, to show us that He's listening, that even horrific situations can be redeemed as that unmistakable opportunity to prove our faith.
- 12) Intercession, then, would also be an attempt to get God to disrupt the continuity of someone's situation, and bring about a better future. In this, too, their future is not a function of their present status. It is a function of the God who hears prayers and changes things. There is a definite cause-and-effect relationship between persistence in prayer, and God's responses.
- 13) This parable shows us something else that God likes in women: He likes interaction with them. He encourages someone who keeps coming at Him. And He likes to hear our faith-based reasons why we think He should do what we ask of Him:

**21Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.  
22A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out,**

**"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."**

**23** Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, *for she keeps crying out after us.*" **24** He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." **25** The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

**26** He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

**27** "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." **28** Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. —Matthew 15:21-28

14) Faithful people of the past depended upon discontinuities —not experience-- to change their present states:

- Abraham sure hoped things didn't go as they'd always gone during the stabbing-cutting-burning ritual of sacrifice when he led his son up to the mountain and put him on an altar—see Hebrews 11:17-19
- Peter found out that everyone's experience with Roman prisons – you didn't escape from the chains and the bars and the guards—was disrupted by the prayers of believers who asked that he be released –see Act 12:1-19.
- The Israelites in the desert who depended on their past experience when they mockingly asked, "Will God spread a table in the desert?" (Psalm 78:19) got a big dose of discontinuity when God dropped manna and quail on their heads!
- The Shunammite woman's experience and present told her she had a dead son – but she appealed to someone with wedge-like power to effect a discontinuity—and she got one! (1 Kings 4:18-37)

- Jehoshaphat and his people found that the only way to deal with an overwhelmingly strong enemy army was to appeal to a discontinuity from the Lord, and thus they could go out unarmed and singing to meet them (2 Chronicles 20)
- All the faithful people of the Bible learned that the most effective, powerful way to change an unpleasant or unfair present—a continuity-- into a better future was by relationship to the God of discontinuities; not relationship to their circumstances, trying to change them alone. Hebrews 11 says that every discontinuity that has ever happened on this earth – from creation right on down to victorious living and dying—are based on the very thing Jesus was trying to build up in us – faith in difficult and impossible situations.

People might say, well, that was okay for people who lived in the ages of miracles, but we can't expect to stake all our faith on discontinuities, should we. Quite to the contrary, if you do not believe in the greatest discontinuity of all time, you can't get to heaven.

Everybody knew the truth that once somebody has been dead for days and nights, all hope is lost. You could take that to the bank. "Where there's life, there's hope," experience would tell you, but once you've buried a certifiably dead person, you go on with your life and make the best of things:

**13Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16but they were kept from recognizing him. 17He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"**

**They stood still, their faces downcast. 18One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"**

**19"What things?" he asked.**

**"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified**



him; 21but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

25He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:13-24

Jesus called them “foolish and slow of heart” because they didn’t believe that the Scriptures taught discontinuity.

Again, you cannot be saved without a FAITH IN DISCONTINUITIES. If you do not believe in the death and burial of Jesus’ dead body, and His literal resurrection from the dead, -- and even more, in your own coming resurrection from the dead, you are lost:

12But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

*A belief in the power of God to create discontinuities is not an “accessory” to our faith, it is the bedrock foundation for faith. That’s the “big deal” about discontinuities. If you believe your experience of “how things work” here on earth is more valid and dependable than what God says changes the present and future, you do not have true faith.*

