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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“STANDING FIRM IN HOPE”
Luke 18:1-8**

- ☑ {C. Miller} **“The world is coming to... a *beginning*.”**
- {1 Th 4:16-17} **“The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command...and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive... will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord.”**
- {Eph 6:12; 1 Co 7:31; Rev 11:15} **“This dark world” “is [already] passing away,”** and when Christ returns

“The kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.”

- {Rev 21:3-4; 1 Co 15:52-53} **“God [himself] will dwell with” “the people.” “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,”** for **“the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”**

“The world is coming to... a *beginning*.” Our confession of hope is great Good News, indeed! Amen!
{Ro 8:24-25} **“In this hope we [are] saved”** – and, in it we struggle and are tested. After all, hope is expectation that has not yet been fulfilled. **“Who hopes for what they already have? Hope that is seen is no hope at all.”**

To be sure, our hope is not speculative. It is substantiated by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

{Heb 4:15; Ro 6:11, 14, 18} Sin has already met its end in him since he was **“tempted in every way, just as we are – yet did not [ever] sin.”** Therefore, we who find life in Jesus are **“dead to sin”!** It is **“no longer [our] master”** and we **“have been set free from sin.”**

{Ro 7:18-19} Still, I don’t always live in freedom. **“I desire to do... good, but ...cannot carry it out”** perfectly. **“I keep doing” “the evil I do not want to do”** – (less frequently than before, yet) too often, (less compulsively than before, yet) too slavishly. My hope for total freedom from sin remains a *hope*.

{Ro 6:4-5, 9, 23} Death has already met its end in Christ, since he **“was raised from the dead”** and **“cannot die again.”** And since **“The gift of God is eternal life in [the Messiah]”** we who follow Jesus **“will be united with him in a resurrection like his.”**

{1 Co 15:26; Ro 6:22-23} Still, I continue to look both ways when crossing the street, for **“Death”** will be **“the *last* enemy to be destroyed.”** The moment of death often comes as a relief, but only because the process of dying is hideous. My hope for eternal life in a glorified body remains a *hope*.

{Gen 3:15; Mt 25:41} Satan has already met his end in Christ, since the Savior **“[crushed] his head”** by his death and resurrection. In the end God Almighty will cast our Adversary into **“the eternal fire prepared”** for him, and we will **“crush [him] under [our] feet”** (Ro 16:20).

{1 Pe 5:8; Jas 4:7} Still, though Satan has not yet surrendered. **“The devil prowls around like a**

roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” He “**will flee from**” us – only if and when we “**Submit** [ourselves] **to God**” and actively “**Resist**” him. My hope for the end of evil remains a *hope*.

{Jn 10:10} In short, while “**the old order of**” is on its way out it is not going quietly. As a rabid beast is most dangerous when cornered so sin, death and the devil “**steal and kill and destroy**” with horrific ferocity and devastating results.

{Mt 24:10-12} The Day of the Lord might be a thousand years in the future, but Christ’s prophecy seems to fit the world of 2014: “**Many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.**”

In the midst of that Christ also gives us good news: “**whoever stands firm to the end will be saved**”! But in order to stand firm, we need hope.

? {Heb 10:23} *How can we “[stand] firm” in hope? How can we “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess”? How can we grow more hopeful as we contend with sin, death, and the devil?*

□ Please turn with me to the Parable of the Persistent Widow in Luke 18:1-8.

■ In verse 2 we meet “**a judge who neither [fears] God nor [cares] what people [think].**”

📖 “**Fear,**” as it is used here, does not mean terror; it signifies *reverence*. This judge does not honor God, and it follows that he makes no effort to discern and obey God’s will.

Nor does he “**care what people** [think].” First century judges are not elected to the bench, they are appointed. Public opinion means nothing to him.

■ In verse 3 we meet the “**widow.**” That title reveals more than her marital status: in her world it is short-hand for poor, powerless victim. Most widows teeter on the edge of starvation. Some are forced into slavery.

In verse 3 she comes before the judge, pleading, “**Grant me justice against my adversary.**” Has her “**adversary**” seized the family property without paying for it? Is he threatening her with slavery if she does not repay her husband’s debt in one lump sum? We are not told. Regardless, the judge’s obligation is clear:

● Isaiah 1:17: “**Learn to do right! Seek justice, encouraged the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.**”

● Zechariah 7:9-10: “**Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion... Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor.**”

● Deuteronomy 27:19: “**Cursed [are all] who [withhold] justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.**”

● Malachi 3:5: “**‘I will come...put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress... widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,’ says the LORD Almighty.**”

■ Our widow pleads her case and yet, verse 4a, **“For some time he [refuses]”** to **“grant [her] justice.”** In all likelihood the woman’s **“adversary”** is paying him off to ignore her plight.

This judge is the widow’s only recourse – and he refuses to give her justice! What is left to her: destitution, slavery, death by starvation?

Talk about a hopeless case! If anyone has cause to despair, this woman does.

■ Instead, she stands firm in courage and perseverance. According to verse 3 she **“[keeps] coming to the judge with [her] plea,”** not once or twice, but again and again and again!

■ **“Finally,”** in verses 4b-5, the judge says to himself, **“Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!”**

The language here is a bit tricky. This judge is not concerned that the woman is going to beat him up; he is worried that she will never stop pestering him in the court, in the marketplace, at his home, thereby annoying him to death.

■ The Lord continues in verses 6-8a: **“Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.”**

Jesus is not comparing his Father to this man; he is *contrasting* the two. If a corrupt and uncaring judge can be

nagged into administering justice, how much better will our just and compassionate God do right at the perfect time!

? *What does this have to do with the end of the old earth and the beginning of the new one?* Plenty!

★ Look at the context. The teaching before this, Luke 17:20-37, is about how the old earth will end at Christ’s Second Coming.

★ Look at the introduction. Luke 18:1 explains that **“Jesus told his disciples [this] parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”** This is a call to pray specifically for Christ’s Return and for our perseverance as we wait.

★ Look at the conclusion. In verse 8b Jesus asks, **“However, when the Son of Man comes”** (that’s one of his titles) **“will he find faith on the earth?”** ***Will he find disciples who are faithful?***

By the grace of God, the answer will be ‘Yes’! We can **“[stand] firm”** – if we **“hold unswervingly to the hope we profess”!**

We can **“hold unswervingly to [our] hope”** for total freedom from sin, eternal life in a glorified body, and the end of evil, even as we contend with sin, death, and the devil!

✍ We “stand firm” in hope, first, by trusting God.
{Ro 8:35; 5:3-4} Trusting in God’s compassion, mercy, knowledge, wisdom, authority and power enables us to persevere through **“trouble... hardship ... [deprivation] ... danger”** and **“persecution.”**

“Perseverance,” in turn, **“produces ... character; and character, hope.”**

We cultivate trust in God by remembering the events of salvation history, recalling his mercy and kindness and generosity to us personally, and learning his promises regarding the future.

✎ We “stand firm” in hope, second, by praying.

Let us pray for **“The kingdom of the world [to] become the kingdom of [God].”** Let us pray for righteousness to defeat sin in the world *and in us*, for life to defeat death in the world *and in us*, for good to defeat evil in the world *and in us*.

Let us pray to receive God’s gifts of faith, hope, and love. Not once or twice, but again and again. Not to change God, but that we might be changed by God.

“In this hope we [are] saved,” that **“the world is coming to a beginning.”** **“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith”** in us? He will, if we **“hold unswervingly to [our hope]”!**