

I know that there has always been evil in our world—corrupt, evil people victimizing different kinds of people in all manner of heinous ways. But I'm not sure we have lived in a time where the corruption and wickedness and evil has been as blatant or brazen as it has become in these recent years.

Part of the reason we're hearing more is likely due to technology which has allowed what was always done in the dark to be brought out into the light for all to see.

But if I read my Bible right, wickedness and evil will continue to increase until the day and the hour of God's choosing when Jesus will once again return to this world and let his justice roll down like a flood, vindicating all his people in all the ways they have been wronged.

He began this restoration and justice campaign at the cross and with the empty tomb, but on day of God's choosing he will finalize his campaign to bring justice to our world.

Certainly he brings justice to our lives in small ways from time to time, through law enforcement, the court system, the pressure of accountability of others, or through the supernatural conviction of his Spirit.

But, in the end, it will be *his day*. The Bible calls it The Great Day of the Lord. And he will execute his justice with precision and thoroughness. No wrong will go unaddressed. No injustice will escape his authority. And no victim will be left unvindicated.

**[Transition]** - But, until then...what? Until then what are we supposed to do? Here are a few options. Maybe you've tried a few of these at different seasons of your life.

- Grin and bear it?
- White knuckle it?
- Whine? Sniffle?
- Wring our hands? Fret? Chicken Little it.
- Get more angry and demanding and passionate in your prayers?
- Complain to God more?
- Try to get more people to pray for what you want?
- Question whether God is real?
- Wonder if he's forgotten about us?
- Lose our grip on hope in the power of prayer and drift into skepticism and cynicism?

We've probably all felt or done some of these, but our parable today helps understand *the best things we are to do as we wait* for God's justice to come.

**[Transition]** - The weariness and fatigue over relentless and growing evil and injustice in our world is common, especially for Jesus followers. In fact, immediately before our parable today, Jesus is talking to his disciples about a day when they *will long to see* the Son of Man return. This longing for the return of Jesus is what we're feeling. And Jesus gives us this parable to encourage us. Look at the opening verses of the story 18:1-3

Jesus tells a story using characters and a circumstance that the disciples would quickly understand in their cultural context. In this story we see two main characters introduced: a judge and a widow. Let's start with the Judge.

### **The Judge**

Who is this man? He is deeply unjust, uncaring, and unmovable. We see in verse two that he does not fear God, meaning he has no moral authority he respects or answers to. Neither does he care about what

men think about him. The phrase in the text can also be translated as, "he is not ashamed before people."

In the honor/shame society of that day, this is one of the sharpest criticism to be said about a person is to say they "do not feel shame." He is hurting a widow and should feel shame but does not. Sounds a little like a sociopath.

In verse four he himself affirms he doesn't care about God or about men. However, even though he has zero conscience about any of this, he eventually grants her justice basically to stop her annoying him to death with her persistence. It's a convenience thing for him.

**[Transition]**- Let's talk about this widow for a minute.

### **The Widow**

Listeners would have understood immediately when Jesus said "widow," he was speaking of someone who symbolizes powerlessness and oppression. Someone who is at risk and vulnerable. You should know ordinarily, women in that culture did not go to court, or press their case.

This widow has all the odds stacked against her. She is oppressed, she has zero status, she has an adversary, and she's dealing with a corrupt judge.

Yet we see that the judge gives her justice because, down in verse five, the unjust judge says, "because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice"—today's translation "She's giving me a headache."

**[Illustration]** - I have to admit, when I think about how much this widow had to pester the judge, I think about road trips when my kids were little, "Dad, are we there yet?" "Dad, are we there yet?" "Dad, I gotta go potty." "Dad, are we there yet?" I think about that animated little kid, "Mom, Mom, Mom, Momma, Mommy, Mom."

[Transition] - So let's talk about who these two characters represent.

### **Who do these two characters represent?**

The widow in this parable basically represents you and me as God's children; those who are desperately dependent upon God for our wellbeing. Acts 17 says we are dependent upon God for *life, breath, and everything else. In him we live, move, and have our being.* He's all powerful, we are weak and frail. So, the widow represents God followers.

But now, who does the judge represent? Does the judge represent God? Is this passage suggesting that God is also stingy with compassion on those who are hurting? That's an emphatic no! The judge does not represent God. His character is the exact opposite of God.

In fact, God is not like this judge at all.

- **God is not** unmoved by your cries.
- **God is not** withholding goodness from you.
- **God is not** heartless and without compassion.
- **God is not tracking** how many days you've been to church and judging you.

In stark contrast to this judge, here's how our God is described in the Bible multiple times:

Psalm 108 says, "The Lord is compassionate and merciful,  
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

For his unfailing love toward those who fear him  
is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.

The Lord is like a father to his children,  
tender and compassionate to those who fear him.

For he knows how weak we are;

he remembers we are only dust. -Psalm 103:8,11,13-14

**[Transition]**- So, with the characters identified and understood, what is Jesus trying to teach us through this story?

## **The key lessons from the Parable**

At first reading of this parable, many people suggest this passage means, "We too must ask God many, many times...to get our prayers answered. We are to declare it, decree it, and speak it with confidence... then maybe God will give us what we want."

But, while her consistency, courage, and confidence are certainly admirable, there is something more for us here. This style of parable is called a "**how much more**" story. Jesus is using an example that is a stark contrast to our spiritual reality as children of God.

The punch of the parable is this: If this oppressed, all odds stacked against her widow received justice from this crusty, hardened, heartless judge, **HOW MUCH MORE** are you, a child of God going to be heard and responded to by your loving heavenly Father. I want you to think about that truth for a moment.

Sometimes it's tough to remember this truth. Sometimes we pray for God to bring justice and vindication to the unfair, unjust things that happen to us or our loved ones. But we pray and pray and pray, and God doesn't seem to move.

We look around and we continue to see the injustices, corruption, and evil grow and grow in our world. And we know in our heads that Jesus promised he's coming back to right all the wrongs of our world and roll justice out in an unstoppable wave.

But our world is bad and getting worse. We plead for his return. Why is he waiting? When is he going to come. In the Bible, he said he was coming soon. It's been a while. So, what are we supposed to think? What are we supposed to do?

The Apostle Peter reminds us of something important when we're wrestling with God's timing. **"8** *But you must not forget this one thing, dear*

*friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day.” -2 Peter 3:8*

In our story today, I think it’s helpful to keep in mind Jesus is talking to his disciples, his friends. If you look back over Chapter 17, they are in the middle of a conversation about the coming of the Kingdom of God. And Jesus tells them there is a day coming when you are *going to long for* the coming of the Messiah.

They have lived under the crushing hand of Rome for generations. They are deeply desperate for justice and deliverance from their adversaries. So, Jesus begins to describe a few of the signs of that coming deliverance and what it’s going to be like.

What he knows, but they don’t yet, is that this teaching will be one of his last teachings before he dies. I believe knowing this context is essential to understanding the deeper heart behind this parable.

**[Transition]** - What is it he wants them and us to know as we await the justice, vindication, and deliverance we long for?

1. He wants to remind us **God is compassionate and caring**. He is not like the uncaring, unrighteous judge. Instead, he is merciful, patient, and eager to help his people. God does hear and he is moved by the cries of his people for justice and vindication...both in the big and small matters of life.

Each of us might have specific traumas that we’ve been subject to, and we’ve prayed for things to be set right, we’ve prayed for justice, we’ve prayed for truth to prevail, and for evil to be exposed and judged for what it is.

Sometimes God sets things right really quickly. But other times the justice we crave and cry out for doesn’t come immediately. We are forced to wait, and to be patient and trust it will come in God’s time.

But the reality is, it's easy to get frustrated at the number of unfair realities many people and dear loved ones are currently battling. It's a warm thought to think we are children of God and that we pray to a caring and just God, but what about all the times it doesn't feel like he's listening or that he cares?

- When you get the phone from the doctor
- When you don't get the job
- When your significant relationship is tainted by betrayal.
- When the college you dream of doesn't accept you
- When the anxiety and depression seem to never subside.
- When the emotional gut punches keep coming and your weariness grows.

How do we reconcile this chasm of brokenness that saturates our world and every life here while also confidently saying God is caring and just—worthy of praying to and journeying through life with?

In the grand scheme, we long for Jesus to come quickly, to eradicate evil, and bring salvation fully and completely to our body, mind, and soul. Ultimately, God will hear and answer the crises of his people against injustice by again sending the Son of Man to earth, although we cannot know the timing of this event.

Yet, the challenge many of us will face as we continue to choose to follow Jesus is clinging with all our might to the unchanging, unconditional truth that our Father in heaven we pray to deeply cares for us. While I cannot explain the why or why nots of this life, and of God's timing, I know it is not because God isn't compassionate or doesn't care about us.

[Transition] – As we await his timing, we must remember he is compassionate, and he cares deeply for us. He’s the exact opposite of this judge in our story. Second, we are to stay alert and be ready.

**2. He wants to remind us to **stay alert and be ready for God’s vindication and judgment.****

His plan to right every wrong, and judge evil, the evil one, and all who follow him:

- That plan began in the Garden of Eden when he promised to crush the serpent’s head.
- It became even more visible with the incarnation of Jesus, his victorious work on the cross, and his triumphant resurrection.
- But, it awaits God’s future and final actions at the end of the age, at a time only the Father knows.

Over and over in the Gospels Jesus calls his followers to be ready, to be prepared, to be alert, and watchful– lanterns filled with oil, wicks trimmed and set. He calls us to live with hopeful expectation for the day when he will return–not as a meek humble lamb, but like a powerful, roaring lion, full of vengeance and justice.

In Luke 17 just prior to this parable, Jesus says his coming is going to come on the world:

- Like a *flood* destroying evil and bringing justice.
- It’s going to come on the world like *fire and sulfur* raining down from heaven onto Sodom and Gomorrah.
- He said it’s going to be a powerful, personal, and visible coming *like the lightning* that flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.



**[Transition]** – This is going to be an unmatched event, friends. And we are to be watchful, alert, and ready for his incredible coming. And as we await his glorious return, we are to remain faithful in prayer.

Remembering our God is compassionate and caring, one of the most powerful ways we can remain watchful and ready is by *remaining faithful in prayer*.

3. He wants to remind us **to remain faithful in prayer**.

It can be so easy to grow weary and skeptical when it comes to prayer. It can be easy to give up. Jesus knows this. His followers couldn't even remain faithful in prayer through the night when he faced persecution.

Shortly after this teaching we see Jesus, live out these words to pray and never give up. We see this when he goes to pray to his Father asking if there is another way besides dying on the Cross may it be so—he is burdened to the point of sweating blood.

In deep agony he is able to bring his whole self to the Father. How did Christ muster up the strength to accept the gut-wrenching reality of God's will in that moment? How did he persevere in prayer when the data points pointed to God seeming more like a harsh, unmoving judge?

Jesus acted on a foundational and key truth. He knew that his prayers were being received not by a cruel judge, but by a deeply compassionate and caring Father. Despite the events that were to follow, he pressed on with a deep assurance about who he was praying to.

- He knew he was speaking to a Father who was listening.
- He knew he was speaking to a Father who was not ignoring him.
- He knew he was speaking to a good, good God who would not let his Son's prayers go unheard and ignored.

So, as we await his coming, Jesus wants us to stay engaged with God as we deal with the challenges and injustices of our world. We are called to wait. We are called to persevere. We are called to be persistent and faithful in our prayers and in our trust, and in our confidence that one day Jesus will return and make all things right again

**[Illustration]** - Dallas Willard captures the heart of what it means to pray and never give up with his simple yet true definition of prayer as: "Talking to God about what we are doing together."

I love this definition because it captures the relational, ongoing heart of prayer. Prayer is not limited to a quiet time in the morning, but instead is our continual thought prayers with God, our ongoing conversation with him as we go throughout our day.

### **I want you to notice....**

Jesus concludes this parable with a question: When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth. The sense of the question is this; will he find faith like this on the earth.

Faith that believes God is good and caring, that he hears our prayers, and will decisively act on our behalf in his perfect time.

Friends...Vindication Cometh!!