

THE CROOKED JUDGE AND THE DEMANDING WIDOW

Luke 18:1-8

We all love stories. Ever since we were young, we have enjoyed hearing about characters and the twists and turns their lives take. Story is the way we learn about who we are. It's how we learn our best life lessons. So it is not a surprise that Jesus uses stories to teach the greatest truths we all need.

We begin a series looking at the Parables of Jesus. Jesus came to tell us what God was like and to correct people's perceptions about Him. Using a series of stories, He tells us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. They knew what the Romans were like. They knew what Caesar was like, but He had come to tell them what His Father is like. They lived in a world where they had drawn the wrong conclusions about God. To help us understand the Father and His Kingdom, Jesus told stories often referred to as parables. Stories help us understand, stories help us relate, and stories help us apply the lessons.

Jesus was a master storyteller and used common subjects and everyday experiences to teach us about prayer, compassion, forgiveness, eternity, and the importance of getting a second chance. In this series, we'll take a closer look at several of our favorite stories and how they impact us today. Jesus' stories are so compelling that they are known throughout the world, and they challenge all of us to continuously adjust our view of life, our thinking, and our way of living. Throughout the parables of Jesus, we are invited into a bigger story. His story. Today we will look at Jesus' story about a persistent widow and an uncaring judge to teach us about the power of prayer.

Luke 18 contains one of the end time parables. Jesus is explaining some of the things that will occur near His coming. He uses a story to illustrate what living in the last days will be like. In the last days, the world will be filled with uncaring and cold people and desperate problems. They will be so desperate they will make you want to give up. They will likely be oppressed by people who live and act as if there is no judgment coming and no Kingdom of God.

Jesus fills His stories with a colorful cast of characters. Sometimes it is a shepherd and his friends. Other times it is a woman who is looking for a coin. Sometimes it is a father and his two sons. In this story, it is about a crooked judge and a demanding widow. Ancient society placed widows at the bottom of the social scale and judges near the top. The story is about a widow woman who has a problem. The only thing that this widow could control was her own persistence, and so she refuses to stop trying.

He tells us the reason for the parable from the beginning.

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." Luke 18:1

It is a story directed to people who are going to be living in the last days just before the Lord Jesus Christ comes. I believe we are living in those days. There will be things that make you want give up. To give up on life, to give up on yourself, to give up on God.

Jesus ends the story by asking a question. *"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"* Luke 18:8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' For some time he refused. But finally he said 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!' And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. 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? 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?'" Luke 18:1-8

Any writer who wants to portray some scheming rascal out to deprive someone of his livelihood usually depicts his victim as a widow. There were no more overlooked people or helpless people than widows. Because they had no husband to protect them, they were considered easy prey for crooks. In the Old Testament we are warned, "*Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan.*" Exodus 22:22

She has been done an injustice. She has an adversary. In those days, widows were very often poor, and many times they were exploited. The widow's situation is very bleak. As a widow, she would normally be one of the first cases to be heard, but this judge disregards God's law and her rights. She would have been one of the first people to be cared for, but the judge cares nothing about her. He is concerned more with his own sanity and welfare than he is with hers.

She had no family or friends in high places. She went to the court system and got permission to approach a judge. However, she was given a wicked and merciless judge. He was unwilling to grant her the protection she believed she was entitled to. She returned to him day after day, and in time she bothered him.

We are told some things about the judge in this story. We are told that he didn't care anything about God, didn't care anything about man. He had neither a conscience nor compassion. He was a crooked judge. He was utterly unmoved by her pleas, nothing could reach him. He was cold and heartless. So, the widow comes to this judge and says to him, "*Grant me justice against my adversary.*" I can almost hear him as he says to her, "I'm sorry ma'am but there's not a thing in the world I can do about your case. It's outside of my jurisdiction. Wish I could help you," and he escorts her to the door. The next morning the judge comes in to work and walks through the reception area and looks over and there's that widow woman again. He says to his secretary, "What's she doing here?" The receptionist answers, "Oh, she says she's going to stay here until she gets an answer. She's packed a lunch, she's going to sit right here, even through the lunch hour. She's not going to give up. She's going to stay here as long as it takes." He says, "Well, it's going to be a long time. I don't have time to deal with her."

In verse 5 he says, "*yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!*" Luke 18:5

The statement, "bothering me" literally means "to give me a black eye." It means if I don't do something about it, she is going to hurt my reputation. He does not act because he is just or because he cares anything about the widow, but simply because of her persistence. The widow's persistent crying had metaphorically beaten the judge down as a boxer would an opponent, and he is tired of taking so many blows to the head.

She discovered when life appears to us to be hopeless and useless, when we are victims of forces which are greater than we can manage (and who of us has not felt life to be this?), when no openings appear in the wall of pressure which rings us in, when there is no answer to the inescapable problems before us and there is no end in sight, but certain failure or loss, Jesus says there is one way out.

When life appears to us to be hopeless and greater than we can manage, there is a power available to us.

There is a way to the place of power. There is a way to a solution of our problems. There is an answer to the unbearable pressure. It is the answer of prayer, of simply crying out to a God we cannot see but whom we may rest upon, a Father with a heart and tender compassion and a willingness to act.

Prayer always stirs the heart of God, always moves God to act.

There is a contrast here. Jesus says that God is not like the unrighteous judge. He will not delay an answer to our prayers, that He does not require continual battering to get Him to move on our behalf.

1. A Lesson About Life's PROBLEMS

The widow has problems. It reminds us that God's children in the last days will have problems. Her times were difficult. She's having a hard time. There is not a more challenging time for God's people than it is in these last days. These is not a more difficult time in which to live for the Lord Jesus. These are difficult times. All kinds of pressures. There's tremendous stress placed upon those who are sincerely living for the Lord.

Why do Christians have so many problems?

We wish we didn't have them, but we do, and there are two answers to why we have problems. The first answer is because we live in a fallen world. We can't change that at the moment, so we need to focus on the second answer. We have problems so God can use them to change our lives into the image of His Son.

“We also glory in tribulation, knowing that problems produce perseverance, and perseverance produces character.” Romans 5:3

We all face challenges and things we're believing will turn around: a child that's off course, a sickness we're dealing with, or a dream that seems impossible. We prayed, we believed, but nothing is changing. Sometimes God won't allow you to solve your own problem, the secret is you have to help someone else solve their problem. You have to take the focus off yourself and be good to others in your time of need. As you sow that seed, that's what's going to bring the harvest that you're waiting for.

Problems produce a sense of dependency.

2. A Lesson About The Power of PRAYER

“Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” Luke 18:1

Prayer is the great resource of believers in the last days. Prayer is not to just be an option *“should always pray and not give up.”* Those two choices are placed in contrast to one another. We ought to pray; not give up. We have an option. The words “give up” mean “to cave in.”

We live in a world where people are caving in to financial pressure. They are caving in under relational pressure. There are pressures at work and you are just caving in.

There will be tremendous pressure on believers in the last day. The tendency and temptation and the danger is that Christians will cave in to the evil around them. There is a constant pounding that Christians experience by the society around them. If you don't watch out, you'll just cave in. You'll cave in morally. You'll cave in spiritually, but the Bible says don't cave in. The Bible says, “Don't take that option. The option that you ought to take is the option to pray.” Use the resource of prayer.

Do you pray every day? Are you in the Word of God every day? Are you making contact with God in prayer every day? As you read the Word, you learn about the times in which we live and you won't be fooled by them. As you pray, Prayer will draw strength into your life that will help you to meet the temptations, problems, and difficulties that you experience. Prayer is our option.

3. A Lesson About PERSISTENCE

The story is teaching us that, no matter what or who is against us, God is always for us.

The whole point of this story that Jesus tells is a challenge to us and a call that we persist in prayer—that we always pray and not give up. After his victory over Napoleon at Waterloo, The Duke of Wellington was asked to discuss the difference between their two armies. The Duke of Wellington said this, “My soldiers were not braver than the enemy. My soldiers were brave five minutes longer.”

Jesus teaches through comparison and contrast. He contrasted this crooked judge and our Heavenly Father. Jesus said God is not like this crooked judge. We can pester God, and He will finally give in if we will give Him enough trouble. In contrast, our Lord in Heaven is loving, gracious, and gentle. If a crooked judge will give this poor widow what she needs because of her persistence, how much more will our Heavenly Father answer us when we pray?

This widow woman provoked the judge. We don't provoke the Lord when we pray. This woman disturbed the judge. We don't disturb God, we delight God when we pray. This judge didn't care a thing in the world about her, he cared everything about himself. Our Heavenly Father cares everything about us. We aren't like this widow either. We aren't widows. The Bible says we are the Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. This widow didn't have any friend to represent her in court, but we have a friend, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our advocate in Heaven. Our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, has made us His own. We belong to Him. We are not some poor widow like this woman was.

If an unjust and evil judge will do what's right when pressured, how much more will a just Judge of the Universe do what's right when it is requested of Him?

*“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.
He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”* Isaiah 42:1-4

A bruised reed is a plant whose stem has been broken and hangs down but has not been snapped off.

A smoldering wick is a candle that has burned down but has not gone out completely. Both of these images stand for men and women who have been so oppressed by evil that they are almost gone, but instead of breaking off the reed or snuffing out the wick, Jesus comes beside them and restores them and brings true justice. He brings them life and righteousness and hope.

Does God answer prayer? Yes. Does God answer every prayer? Yes. Sometimes God's answers to prayer are direct. You pray, ask God for something and right out of glory God gives it. That's thrilling. Then there are sometimes that you pray and God answers your prayer, but He gives you something different than you asked.

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.” Romans 8:26-27

You ask God for one thing, and He gives you something else. You look back on the whole situation, and you are really glad He did. We don't always know what to ask for. He will do what is right. He will do you right. In a world that will do you wrong, He will do you right.

Sometimes you have trouble that you can only take to God.

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” Romans 8:31-32

There was a lot against them. You must hold on. You can't give up.

He was for them. He was not against them.

Jesus was saying, “When you feel like everything is against you, you can hold on because I am for you.”
