

Luke 18:1-8, "The Unjust Judge and Persistent Widow", 7/11/21

Shannan and I just celebrated 16 years of marriage. We got engaged in March of 2004 and for a variety of reasons we decided to delay getting married until late June of 2005. Over 15 months... Now we always recommend to engaged couples to not be engaged any longer than the necessary amount of time to plan a wedding and get some counseling largely based on our experience...it's tough living somewhere in-between singleness and marriage, the now and not yet of marriage. We felt like we were one, but we were still 2, maybe like 1 ½. We made financial decisions together but still had separate bank accounts. We would spend a lot of time together, probably the hardest part was saying goodnight and driving back home at the end of the night. It's difficult to live in the in-between, in the waiting, in now and not yet.

If you are a Christ follower, you live in **the NOW and NOT YET** of the Kingdom of Jesus. All who believe in Christ have become part of life in the kingdom of Jesus, under His rule and reign, given the Holy Spirit as a seal that we are kingdom citizens. But still, we are not yet in the fullness of his kingdom which will come when the King Jesus returns to rule and reign on earth forever, making all things new. And while there are certainly great seasons of growth, excitement, awe and wonder with God...there are also seasons where life in the in-between is tough and exhausting. We are citizens of God's kingdom and this isn't our home, and yet we can get so distracted with the temporary things of this kingdom and forget. We've been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places, and yet sometimes we struggle to feel blessed when facing the trials of this life. We are new creatures awaiting our heavenly body where sin no longer dwells...and yet we still have to live with the challenges of this earthly body- this body that fails us and breaks down, our mind and emotions that can weigh us down, the temptations and sins we fight against. At times I find myself weary of life in now and not yet. When things are going the way I hope, after a year like the one we have had- ongoing division, it seems less and less people care about the things of God, some whom I have worshipped with and served with in ministry who have fallen away, I look at the increasingly post-Christian culture and at times it seems we are losing ground...and I get impatient with God. Come on God, I'm tired of the in-between- bring your Kingdom!

You know, Jesus isn't at all surprised at our struggle with life in the now and not yet. This is exactly what Jesus was preparing his followers for in this parable in Luke 18. So let's read this parable and find the encouragement and strength that Jesus wants to give us today.

Luke 18:2-6

² *In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought.*

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 what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!"*

Now at face value some may believe that what Jesus is saying is that we must badger and shake down God over and over again and then finally God will begrudgingly give us what we want. Or maybe you have heard a preacher in the Word of Faith movement use this passage to justify that when we just have enough faith and pray our prayers just right and repeat the words just enough times it's like a spiritual force that God cannot ignore and must act upon. Is that what this parable means? Well to unlock the meaning of this parable we must see "two Cs"- **Context and Contrast.**

Context:

Jesus is usually telling parables based on conversations he is having. In Luke 17, the Pharisees were trying to force Jesus to answer the question, "**When is the kingdom of God coming?**" They believed two errors about the Kingdom of God. 1) That the kingdom was coming through political might- the overthrow the Romans, the ushering of God's physical reign which would be described by peace and prosperity. 2) They thought they were automatically in because of their religious status, their ethnicity, law-keeping, morality. But Jesus says- you are already missing the kingdom, because I'm here in your midst and you don't see me. Chapter 17 is a sober warning that many will have a rude awakening when the king returns suddenly to bring in his full reign- which will bring judgment on those who have rejected the King and his gift of salvation by grace (hint, hint- people like the pharisees who think they didn't need him). They will be caught by surprise because they were not prepared. But for those who are in the kingdom of God, who are expecting and longing and praying for his return- they will receive the king with great joy. This is how chapter 17 ends. The "**And**" in 18:1 shows that connection. **V. 1 And Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.** And then look how this parable ends in v. **8 However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?**" This context is critical. Jesus is preparing his followers to be faithful in the in-between, to endure through the now and not yet kingdom until he returns.

Contrast:

This parable is tricky, because unlike the other parables we have studied, the meaning of this parable is not found in the looking for the similarities between the characters and God/us but rather in looking at the contrast between the characters and God/us. There are at least three contrasts.

God: Unjust Judge vs. Just Father:

Jesus tells us two things about this judge. **V.2 neither feared God nor cared what people thought.** He repeats these characteristics in v.4. People who have no fear of God act as if there are no consequences, they can live as selfishly, lazily, miserly, and meanly- treating people however they want because they have no concern of God's judgment. He also had no fear of man, he could care less about people. Unmoved by their pleas. Cold as Ice- Foreigner...Live, die, feast or starve, justice or oppression...I couldn't care less as long as it doesn't affect my life. This judge acted not on God's morality but the subjective whim of his own. This judge acted not on the people's best interest but on his own best interest. This is the kind of judge that would have accepted bribes, been swayed by political power influences, done whatever he needed to get ahead and get on the good side of those in power. **[Contrast slide]:** Is not God our Father the

opposite of this judge? Is he not eternally just and the very definition of morality? 1 John- He is light and in him is no darkness. Is he not ever concerned about acting on the best interest of his children who call on him? Psalm 84 withholds no good thing from us. God cannot be bribed nor cajoled as his judgments are always in accordance with his character- eternally just, good, compassionate.

Us: **Helpless Widow and Beloved Child**

In ancient near east- becoming a widow was a very undesirable and often defenseless status in life. A widow had few rights and privileges. Malachi 3:5 refers to them often being oppressed and taken advantage of. They were often legal victims, this is why God called his people to take up the cause of the widow so often in Scriptures like in Isaiah 1:17, 23. And this certainly was the case for this poor woman. The options for obtaining justice from a rogue judge like this were few. She didn't have financial or social power for a bribe or a threat, she clearly had no one to advocate for her because she came not with a lawyer but by herself...she was completely and utterly helpless, having no relationship with the judge.¹ Does that sound like us status with God? Not at all, what a contrast! We are not widows, we are beloved sons and daughters adopted by the Father through Jesus Christ. We have the status of co-heirs with Christ, members of his body, citizens of the kingdom. We have privileged and direct access to almighty God through Jesus Christ. We don't come along, we have the advocate, the Holy Spirit.

Contrast of Interaction

While this woman could not win her case through bribes or power...she thought maybe she could win through a war of attrition. And so this widow latches onto this judge like a dog on a bone. When he shows up at work, she's there. When he leaves to go home, she's there. She's like Bob from "What about Bob?" He goes out to dinner- she's there. He's on vacation she's there...She gets so under his skin he begins seeing this woman in his dreams or maybe better stated his nightmares. Finally, he taps out. Enough! ⁴ *But finally he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!"* (To beat black and blue)...Actually, there is some humor here by Jesus- here's this powerful judge, who's not afraid of men, not afraid of God...but terrified of this poor, helpless widow!²

Again we are meant to see the marked **contrast between the widow's interaction** with this judge vs. our interaction with God. The widow had no trust or assurance that this judge would deliver a just verdict, nor should she. Therefore she adapted her methods to the capricious character of the judge. Do we believe that by constant badgering that we would turn a hard-hearted God into a compassionate God? Of course not. We do not come to our father with a war of attrition designed to beat God into submission to our will. Why? One because we know that his character is not capricious. We can trust his unfailing and good character to deliver justice according to His will and timing and ways, not ours.

¹ Info from Kent Hughes, *Preach the Word Commentary*.

² Some ideas from Lon Solomon Sermon on Luke 18:1-8

But it is also a contrast between the judge's response and God's. The judge is annoyed and feels harassed by the widow so he begrudgingly gives her what she wants just to get her out of his life. How much different is our good Father? Does not Jesus tell us that he loves to give good gifts to his children who ask? Matthew 7:11, and he is pleased to give us the kingdom, Luke 12:32. 1 Peter 5 tells us to bring all our cares to him because He loves us...He not trying to get us out of his life. This should be a great encouragement and speak truth to some of the lies that you tell yourself that God is avoiding you, that you are bothering him, that you are annoying to him. We get that idea maybe because of experiences with earthly fathers, but that's not God. God as our good Father hears and cares about every groan and grief, every fear and concern, every anxiety and deep longing. This is why Jesus concludes the parable- 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.* Now our experience may be that God doesn't act quickly. A better translation is swiftly, that when God brings his justice (ultimately at the 2nd coming) it will be swift...But remember that God's timing is not ours in our prayers. Oswald Chambers, "Some prayers are followed by silence because they are wrong, others because they are bigger than we can understand. It will be a wonderful moment for some of us when we stand before God"

and find the prayers we clamored for in the early days and imagined were never answered, have been answered in the most amazing way, and that God's silence has been a sign of the answer."³ The point- God cares and even when you don't see it, he's working.

Now what is the only thing that the widow and us should have in common? Don't give up! So this is what this parable is all about: A challenge to endure. Living faithfully in the in-between, in the now and not yet of the kingdom as we await his return, exemplified in how we approach our faithful, loving and just Father in prayer, knowing he will give us what we need to make it. The challenge Jesus asks in the form of a question to us is at the end, v.8, "*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*" We don't know when he's going to return, it could be today or 5 years or 50 or 1000 years from now, but whenever it is, the challenge is lifelong, faithful endurance in the in-between.

Enduring in the **now and not yet of the kingdom** is difficult. Temptations abound, face disappointments that your life didn't turn out the way you wanted, persecution or the isolation of being the one who sometimes sticks out because you are trying to follow Jesus, comfortable and easy life, suffering and loss, doubts, increasingly post-Christian culture....sometimes you may feel that your faith is at the end of its rope and you are barely holding on (**ROPE ILLUSTRATION**). You are in good company. Turn to Hebrews 12...

Hebrews 12:1-3

¹*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,* (Who are these witnesses- reference to Chapter 11- all these others who struggled to endure, who were at the end of their rope of faith as well- tortured, beaten, stoned, exiled) *let us throw off everything*

³ *Daily Thoughts for Disciples*, Oswald Chambers

that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, (but where do I get the strength? Where did all the rest of these people at the end of their rope get the strength to endure?)

² *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.* (That's the secret. I'm not telling you to endure without the source of power. Because when we are at the end of our rope is when we are at the beginning of Jesus' rope **(CONNECT MY ROPE TO JESUS ROPE.)** *For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* ³ *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Hebrews tells us that Jesus is not only our greatest example to motivate us to endure. Certainly he was that, but that he's also our pioneer and perfecter- he's where we begin and he's the source for strength to endure in faith. When Jesus tells his disciples to pray and not lose heart in Luke 18, he is telling them that the source of power to endure in the now and not yet is through prayer. Prayer isn't magic, it's just connects us in dependence with Jesus. This is way prayer is a key barometer of our endurance in the faith. When we stop praying it's like we disconnect our rope from Jesus. In my life, this has been the case. When I start taking my eyes off Jesus and putting them on myself or my circumstances, on my effort, my ability to get things done, or my weaknesses and insecurities and failures- inevitably I start to disconnect from dependent prayer. Until I come to the end of my rope of self-effort, my self-pity, my self-doubts, my circumstances and reattach to the rope of Jesus through dependent prayer. This is the key to lifelong endurance in the in-between. Fix your eyes and fix your faith on Jesus in prayer.