

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Persistent Widow

Part 4 - May 27, 2007

[VIDEO: M.V. COURTHOUSE]

Q: Do you have faith in our system of justice? If you came to court with a case that was absolutely vital to your welfare - life or death - could you imagine just giving up in the middle of the hearing? I mean, if you're desperate, and the judge is your only hope, wouldn't you use every appeal available?

In the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus talks about the *statute of limitations* on prayer. And He poses a simple question: Do you have faith in the justice of God?

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 about men. 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 about men, 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!' " 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 NIV*



Okay, right off the bat, let's talk about what's up with Jesus comparing God, not to a *good* judge, but to a *rotten* judge! What's the lesson here? God isn't fair? He has to be pestered? The force and encouragement of this parable comes not from a *comparison* between God and this judge, but from the contrast.

- Everything this judge is, God isn't. Everything this judge isn't, God is.

Listen to how Jesus describes the judge:

He neither feared God nor cared about men. - *Luke 18:2b NIV*

The judge *himself* says:

Even though I don't fear God or care about men ... - *Luke 18:4b NIV*

In other words, if he *did* fear God (or care about people) he would have helped the widow. So, logic dictates that the God he doesn't fear must be quite un-approving and unlike the judge!

This is a classic Jewish "How much more" argument/analogy. And there's a specific lesson we're expected to assimilate:

Q: *If a heartless, power-driven judge will answer the plea of a powerless widow, who he doesn't even care about, HOW MUCH MORE will the Righteous Judge, whom Psalm 68:5 calls "A defender of widows", dispense justice for His chosen ones?*



Q: *If this mistreated widow could persist with her plea, knowing full well the calloused heart of her judge, HOW MUCH MORE should we persist in prayer, knowing the tender, merciful heart of our Father?*

Luke even explains Jesus' purpose in telling this parable:

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

END-TIMES CONTEXT

What does Luke mean by: "and not give up"? Does he mean to not give up on the *prayer* you're praying? Or, does he mean to not give up on *God* as your authority?

The key to unlocking this parable is found in the last verse:

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? - *Luke 18:8 NIV*

Q: Why does Jesus throw in a reference to His second coming?

For the answer, we'll back up 18 verses before our passage; because this parable is the *climax* of an "end-times" teaching. In Luke 17:20 the Pharisees ask Jesus when the Kingdom of God will come. What they meant was: When will the Messiah bring justice to the Jews, and overthrow their adversary, Rome. Jesus gives them a seemingly bizarre answer; He says:

The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation ... the kingdom of God is within you. - *Luke 17:20-21 NIV*

In other words: "You're watching and praying for God to defeat an *external*, earthly enemy; and yet, God is using all of this to defeat a far deadlier *internal* adversary: sin." You're looking at the physical instead of the spiritual.

He takes His disciples aside, tells them that He must suffer and be rejected, and then describes to them His second coming.

The Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. - *Luke 17:24 NIV*

And He gives them two examples of what it'll be like just prior to that day. First, He compares it to the day of the flood:

People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. - *Luke 17:27 NIV*

Then He compares it to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah:

People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down ... and destroyed them all. - *Luke 17:28 NIV*

It is in *this* context (and after a warning not to be like Lot's wife, who looked back with longing on Sodom), that Luke says: *Then* Jesus told His disciples a parable ... - *Luke 18:1a NIV*

Jesus tells them about the *persistence* of the widow, and reminds them that God's chosen ones *cry out to Him day and night* (which means they seek Him at all times and in all circumstances). And then He ends with the challenging question:

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? - *Luke 18:8 NIV*



Prayer and faith will stand and fall together. Prayer *flows* from faith. That's why: A lack of prayer indicates a lack of faith. Faith moves us to persist in prayer, not desperately, but with confidence by helping us to see beyond our circumstances, and fixing our eyes on the tender heart of a caring Father.

There's a line in the parable that, on its own, doesn't seem to make any sense at all:

He will see that they get justice, and quickly. - *Luke 18:8a NIV*

Why did Jesus say justice comes "quickly", when the whole point of the parable is that so much delay is often involved that even His chosen may give up? It's because it'll be like in the days of Noah's flood and Sodom's destruction. God delayed out of wisdom and compassion; but when justice did come, it came suddenly, without warning.



And whether it's His coming or *your* going, It may not be soon, but it will be swift! And when it happens, will he find *you* faithful? Or, will the struggles and the busyness of life (eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building), desensitize you to the Kingdom and swallow up your attention?

THE WIDOW'S EXAMPLE

So, in order to keep from getting caught up in this world, like Lot's wife, let's learn a lesson from what the widow knew.

1. She knew she was desperate and helpless.

Widows starved to death in Jesus' day! Creditors took land in payment of debts, and crooked neighbors "adjusted" property boundary markers. Either way, less land meant less food, and less food meant starvation. Have you noticed that your prayer life is best when you're desperate and broken? Authentic, passionate prayer will thrive when we're aware of how poor and powerless we really are.

We need a sense of *our* helplessness and *His* helpfulness.

2. She knew she was too poor to bribe the judge.

Corruption was common in the legal system Jesus' listeners knew.

At the same time [Felix, the governor] was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. - Acts 24:26 NIV



Do you ever try to "bribe" God when you pray; promising to do something He wants to entice Him to give you what you want? To bribe God is to treat Him as an unjust judge



There are *huge* contrasts between our situation and the widow's: The Judge is our Father. His Son is our advocate. We get to sit in His lap. And He's already promised to answer our prayers! The way we view God will greatly affect the way we pray, how often we pray, and the confidence we have in His hearing.

3. She knew that the judge was her only hope.

There was no one else to turn to; she couldn't appeal. To remain faithful, we must realize our utter dependence on the Lord.

Okay, let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this parable, we've learned that:

1. Given enough time, we can wear God down.
2. His Kingdom is currently being established *internally*.
3. Sometimes God answers prayer just to get us off His back.
4. My prayer life indicates the true condition of my faith.