

The Story - The Widow's Kind of Faith

Turn with me to Luke 18 as we continue our look at the parables of Jesus as part of our year long series. I shared some thoughts from this passage and this parable last Sunday night as part of our Sunday night life group. For those of you who were present don't worry, this isn't a repeat of the message. We are taking a different approach. Luke gives us the reason for the parable. **"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." Luke 18:1** The King James Version reads, **"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint." Luke 18:1**

Jesus warns us if we don't pray we are likely to faint or give up. You already know there is enough stuff that happens along the journey that makes you want to throw up your hands and quit. Jesus says prayer will keep you from giving up or fainting. Then he tells this story about a widow and an unjust judge. Let's read this together: **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 18:2-8

I want us to think about the context of this parable for a moment. Warren Weirsbe wrote, "As you study this parable, try to see it in its Eastern setting. The courtroom was not a fine building but a tent that was moved from place to place as the judge covered his circuit. The judge, not the law, set the agenda; and he sat regally in the tent, surrounded by his assistants. Anybody could watch the proceeding from the outside, but only those who were approved and accepted could have their cases tried. This usually meant bribing one of the assistants so that he would call the judge's attention to the case."

Now consider the situation of the widow. Quoting from Weirsbe again. "The widow had three obstacles to overcome. First being a woman, she therefore had little standing before the law. In the Palestinian society of our Lord's day, women did not go to court. Since she was a

widow, she had no husband to stand with her in court. Finally, she was poor and could not pay a bribe even if she wanted to. No wonder poor widows did not always get the protection the law was supposed to afford them.”

This widow is a representative of the unfairness and injustice of life. This wasn't how life was supposed to turn out. She didn't want to be a widow. She didn't deserve to have her husband taken from her. Since she is going to the judge alone that implies in addition to being a widow she also has no near male relative (father, brother, uncle). She is alone in the world. It's possible someone was trying to take advantage of her and perhaps take her home and property. Life was unfair, the circumstances were unfair and justice seemed out of her reach.

Maybe you know what that feels like. You've faced injustice. Life hasn't been fair. The legal system is against you and you lack the power or resources to change your circumstances. You pray and nothing happens. What do you do? Give up? Faint? Stop trusting? Stop trying? Stop living? You have to admire this widow lady. She refused to give up!

She could have just resigned from life and given up. Some widows and widowers do. She could have surrendered to self pity or grown bitter and angry over the unfairness of life. She could have resented everyone around her because when life is unfair you start to think everyone else has it better and easier than you and you resent the blessings you see in their lives. But this widow decided not to give up. She decided to pursue justice for herself and perhaps for other widows like herself. She had a crooked judge to deal with, but she refused to give up.

The bible says this judge didn't fear God or care about men. Those are two motivating factors in showing justice to anyone. Two things needed in a good judge: First of all, you should fear God because you know one day you'll stand before the God of all the universe and have to give an account for your decisions, your judgements. You want to make sure you've been honest and judged rightly.

The second thing: a judge should care about people and respect their value as human beings. A judge shouldn't care what you think about his ruling, he should decide based on the law, but he should care that each person has equal value and protection under the law. However, Jesus said he was unjust so apparently this judge didn't care about either of these things.

But look at this. The judge said, “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.” That phrase, “wear me out” is translated in King

James as “weary me”. The word literally means “under the eye”. The judge is saying, “I’m afraid this woman is going to give me a black eye.” Perhaps he was afraid she would eventually just jump over the railing and wallop him in the eye, or perhaps he was afraid she would give his reputation a black eye in the community by standing outside the tent everyday crying about justice! Fearing that black eye, the judge granted her request.

Jesus is talking to us about praying in the face of injustice. Understand what Jesus is not saying! He is not saying, “God is like this judge and you’ve got to just keep on praying and eventually you will wear God down and he will give you whatever you are asking for.” I said last Sunday night, this might work with an unjust judge, and it might work with a parent in the checkout line at the grocery with a child whining about a candy bar, but this isn’t how it works with God. Jesus isn’t suggesting we wear God out. He is telling us the story to show us the contrast, the difference between this widow appealing to an unjust and uncaring judge and us bringing our needs to a loving and faithful Heavenly Father. Jesus says if this widow can get justice from an unjust judge, how much more will God’s chosen ones receive justice and help from a good and righteous God. Consider the contrasts of this story:

The widow was a stranger to the judge but we are the children of God. Romans 8:15-17

The widow had no access to the judge but we have open access to the Lord. Hebrews 4:16

The widow had no one to help her but we have an Advocate in heaven. 1 John 2:1

The widow had no promise of help but we have the promises of God’s word. 2 Peter 1:4

The widow came to a court of law but we come to the throne of grace. Hebrews 10:19

But notice again the rest of the passage. **“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?”**

Jesus’ parable doesn’t teach us we will always get quick and easy answers to our prayers. He says sometimes God’s chosen ones are crying out to him day and night. He tells us that God is not reluctant to answer our cry, he’s not like the wicked judge, he isn’t afraid of getting a black eye, he doesn’t have wrong motives, but the truth is God doesn’t always reverse the unfairness in our life. Jesus said the Father would see that we get justice, and quickly he says. But then Jesus seems to relate it all to his coming! All things will be made right when the Lord returns. That’s the good news. But...we may have to wait for his coming to see some injustice made just and

right. It may not all happen the way we expect here in this life.

I know I'm supposed to tell you to just pray and keep on praying and everything will be made right according to your faith. And that's what I am doing. But how can I say that some things may not be made right in this life? Look at Revelation 6. The bible speaks of those who had been slain because of their faith in God and they called out in a loud voice, **"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Revelation 6:10.** Those folks died waiting for, crying out to God for justice. We can read Hebrews 11 about those who died, who weren't delivered in spite of their prayers. Justice will come, but it may not come as soon as you want. Dr. King used to say, "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice."

God is going to right the wrongs and the injustice of this wicked world, but it may not happen when we want. We want it to happen now, but God may have another plan, a broader plan, a better plan. He may have more to teach us through this. He may have more people to influence by our faithful and Christ-like response under pressure. He may decide he can trust us with the delay, believing that like the widow, we won't give up as we cry and pray for healing or help or justice. We will keep on praying so we won't faint, even if the answer is delayed. We will trust because we know who we are dealing with – not a crooked judge, but a faithful and loving heavenly Father who wants heaven's best for us. Prayer helps us keep that perspective. Prayer moves us to a deeper understanding and relationship with our Father. Pray and keep on praying not because you are wearing God down, but because prayer keeps you from wearing down. Prayer will lift you up into his presence where there is relief from the pain of injustice.

Life's unfair. Pray and don't give up! Life is unjust. Pray and don't faint! Pray and don't become weary! Jesus said the Father will see that we get justice. But when? How? Ultimately, Jesus seems to tie it all to his return.

Look what Jesus says in the last part of verse 8 **"However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"** Is he asking, "When I come back, will there be any Christians left? Will the church even exist any longer? Will everyone have abandoned the faith?" We know that can't be the case because he is coming after his church. There will be faith on the earth. But the NIV and the KJV both leave the definite article out of the translation. It would be better translated as **"When the Son of Man comes, will he find this faith on the earth?"** What faith? This faith: the kind the widow had. When the Son of Man comes, will he

find this kind of faith that keeps on trusting and believing and asking and seeking and knocking even when life is unfair, even when the wicked seem to prevail, when injustice seems to win the day. This kind of faith that says “I will keep trusting because I know the one in whom I place my trust and He is himself trustworthy.”

Jesus speaks of his return – “When the Son of Man comes” – Jesus knew there could be a long interval between when he said these words and when he would return. The question then is, how will we live with the unfairness? How will we cope with the questions, the mysteries, the unanswered prayers as we wait for his coming and his justice? Will we pray and refuse to give up on life, refusing to duck the hard questions, refusing to withdraw from life or become bitter or angry? Will we press on in faith until He comes? That’s the widow’s kind of faith! That’s the kind of faith he is looking for: the kind of faith that stands in the tension between the now of the Kingdom of God and the not yet of the Kingdom of God. Can we keep the faith all the way to the coming of the Lord? Even if we don’t understand? Even if we haven’t received justice? Can we walk on in trust and in faith?

There is something else you need to know, something else you need to remember, in the midst of the unfairness and injustice, when we are crying out for God to remember us against our enemies, remember the Lord said, **“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you!” Hebrews 13:5** We look for his coming, for his deliverance, but don’t forget his presence, here, now, with us in this moment. That’s why we can pray and not faint. We aren’t looking to an unjust judge for help, we are looking to a faithful Father who is with us now. **Justice may not be here but He is!**

As I prayed and prepared for this message, I decided we were to have communion. I could think of no better illustration for what this parable is talking about. Jesus said to do this in remembrance of him. When we eat the bread and drink the cup, we aren’t just remembering something that happened 2,000 years ago, but we are proclaiming, testifying that what he did for us on Calvary, the salvation he purchased for us then, is at work in us this very moment. His saving mercy and grace is present here and now, working in us, cleansing us from sin. We are testifying that the victory he won over sin and hell and the grave, that victory is having an impact upon us right now. At the same time, when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are looking forward to the ultimate day, “until he comes”, when every injustice and wrong will be made right, when every enemy including death is under his feet, As we eat the bread and drink the

cup, it's like what happened 2,000 years ago and the hope of what is going to happen some day in the future all come together, converging at this moment as we remember and proclaim his death and resurrection. As we remember and proclaim we are saying, "Don't faint, keep trusting because in Christ justice is coming and every wrong will be made right."

This week I walked through the Territorial Museum in Guthrie and a few weeks ago I was at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis. I thought about the injustice of racism. Native Americans forced from their land. African Americans denied basic human rights. Like this widow, for years they cried for justice to judges that neither feared God nor man. This past week I read *The Narrative of William W. Brown A Fugitive Slave*. Written by Mr. Brown in the 1840's, it is a powerful and troubling account of slavery in America by a fugitive slave.

One story he told really troubled me as I thought about this message and about crying out for justice; about waiting for God's response to our cry. He told of a group of slaves being marched to a riverboat where they were to be taken to New Orleans and sold. One of those forced to walk was a young mother with her infant child about four or five weeks old. During the walk of twenty some miles, the baby grew fussy and began to cry. They spent the night at the farm of an acquaintance of the slave trader. When they prepared to leave the next morning the baby was crying again. Annoyed, the slave trader took the baby from the mother, handed it to the woman in whose house they had stayed. "Here, I'll make you a gift of this baby. I can't stand the crying anymore." The baby's mother begged and pleaded with the slave trader to give her baby back, but he wouldn't hear of it. Like the judge in this story, he neither feared God nor cared about men.

That story shook me. How do you find justice, ever in such a horror as that? How can that ever be made right? It can't, not here. I can't tell you that everything is going to be made right here and now for you. It wasn't for that poor mother, but I can tell you because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, justice has been secured for all of us. I can tell you he was with that grieving mother that day and he is with you and with me today. That assurance reaches across the centuries to give us assurance. The day will come when wrongs will be made right.

William Brown wrote that he had often heard the slaves singing a song supposedly composed by a slave:

**"O gracious Lord when shall it be,
That we poor souls shall all be free?"**

**Lord, break them slavery powers –
Will you go along with me?
Lord break them slavery powers,
Go sound the jubilee!
Dear Lord, dear Lord, when slavery'll cease.
Then we poor souls will have our peace;
There's a better day a coming –
Will you go along with me?
There's a better day a coming,
Go sound the jubilee!"**

The widow cried, "Grant me justice against my adversary!" We cry, "Lord deliver us from the sin that would enslave us." And the Lord assures us, "Justice is coming. A day of jubilee is coming. Victory is coming." But between then and now, He says "I'll go along with you. I am present, here, now with you." He is present to give us hope, to give us comfort, to give us peace, to assure us again and again that justice is coming, that a better days a coming. Hear what I'm telling you: As surely as you will hold the bread and the cup of communion in your hand this morning, that's how real his presence is with you today and that's how certain his justice will be. He will make all things right and new when he comes! Trust, pray, don't faint, don't quit, don't give up. Let's pray!

A great injustice was done as your sins and my sins were laid upon the Innocent One. But by his sacrifice, our sins have been forgiven and he declares we are justified by his mercy and grace. On the authority of God's word I declare to you those sins you have confessed and for which you have repented before the Lord, those sins have been covered by the blood of Christ. You have been washed clean by his grace. Hear and believe the good news. In Christ you are forgiven. Your name is recorded by his grace and through his mercy in the book of life. Freely you have received his forgiveness, now go and sin no more, instead, live and walk in that mercy and walk in forgiveness and love toward others.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, be among you and remain with you always. Amen!

You that are going to help us serve, if you will come. You don't have to be a member of our church to receive communion, but all those who have been to the cross, who have made Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life, you are welcome to receive communion with us. Hold the cups until all have been served and we will take communion together.