

## The Judge and the Widow – Luke 18: 1 – 8

We are so familiar with looking at parables as similes – as in, “The kingdom of heaven is like a . . .” so when we encounter this parable, it can be hard to switch our ideas to what God is NOT like, rather than what he is like. God is certainly NOT like the unjust judge, so what is Jesus saying with this comparison?

### *Cultural Background*

*An “unjust judge” was not an uncommon phenomenon in the days of Jesus in the Middle East and may not be that uncommon today. Most cases were decided by the size of the bribe rather than any cause for justice. In order to receive a favorable judgment from the courts, one needed to either be a person of great personal influence, or able to pay the judge to decide in one’s favor. Often, many people would stand before the judge and shout for their case to be heard, and the one who gained the judge’s attention would receive a hearing. Women were very rarely seen before the courts. This was a man’s world who knew how to play the system. So, from this background we gain a few understandings:*

- 1. The judge was not there by position of conscience or for a sense of justice. He was there for the prestige and power. He did not fear God or operate from any moral basis. He is there for his own gain.*
- 2. The judge had no sense of “shame”, which was a highly valued character trait in Mid Eastern Society. One must feel shame for a deed – to have a sense of remorse. To feel “no shame”, which is the translation of “nor cared about men” was the worst offense of which a person could be accused. Worse, the judge acknowledges himself that he does not fear God or have any sense of shame. This is a man with no conscience whatsoever.*
- 3. The widow must be a woman with no man to advocate for her and so must come to the courts alone. She had no money to bribe the judge and no person of influence to speak for her. **She is the symbol of helplessness and powerlessness.***

### Questions to Consider for Luke 18: 1 - 5

1. What is the main message that you receive from this parable regarding prayer?
2. What does this parable portray about God’s desire to answer prayer? Does anything make you uncomfortable in this illustration?
3. Read Math. 7: 9 – 11. How does this passage help enlighten our understanding of God versus the Unjust Judge?
4. What is the hardest aspect that you find about prayer?
5. What challenges your faith in prayer?
6. How often do you come to prayer in complete helplessness and powerlessness? How often do we come expecting an answer?
7. What do you admire about the widow?

Quote from Frederick Buechner from his book *Wishful Thinking*, pg. 71

*Be importunate, Jesus says – not, one assumes, because you have to beat a path to God's door before he'll open it, but because until you beat the path maybe there's no way of getting to YOUR door. "Ravish my heart", John Donne wrote. But God will not usually ravish. He will only court. . . . Even if it seems (your prayers go unanswered), keep beating the path to God's door, because the one thing you can be sure of is that down the path you beat with even your most half-cocked and halting prayer the God you call upon will finally come, and even if he does not bring you the answer you want, he will bring you himself. And maybe at the secret heart of all our prayers, that is what we are really praying for.*

Luke 18: 6 – 8

Jesus now expands on the implications of the personal prayers to the greater issues of justice for all his children. There is a wonderful Greek word that describes most beautifully the nature and action of God. He is "makrothumia" which is most often translated "slow to anger". The literal translation of these verses reads:

*Shall not God make vindication for his chosen?  
the ones crying to him day and night?  
Also he is slow to anger over them.  
I say to you that he shall make vindication for them speedily  
Yet when the Son of man comes will he find faith on earth?*

The verses imply that God will bring about justice for the oppressed, but he will be patient with a season of grace toward his elect. Even the chosen ones of God – those that suffer for his sake must search themselves. If God's wrath is called down upon the oppressors, it is also deserving upon the oppressed, for "all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God". We must compare these verses with a known Jewish writing that Jesus was familiar with from Ben Sirach:

*And the Lord will not delay  
Neither will he be slow to anger with them  
Till he crushes the loins of the unmerciful,  
And repays vengeance on the nations.*

Jesus changes this known teaching to show the people that God is merciful, not only to the oppressed but the oppressors as well. God is makrothumia toward all his children. The question remains, "Who will stay faithful until his return?"

1. Where will Jesus find this faith that he is looking for? Will he find it in our church? Will he find it in our lives?
2. What is Jesus looking for?