

Title: “The Widow and the Unjust Judge”

Purpose:

To consider the general subject of prayer and in particular the aspect of our, overly common tendency, to all too easily “GIVE UP”!

Introduction

Complaints, call centres and the temptation to quit

Have you ever been in the situation where you have needed to make a complaint or to get some money refunded, or perhaps just a mistake rectified in some way.

And you have to phone through to some provider or the other and so you get on their customer help number and you are greeted with:

Welcome to Customer Helpline – Your call is very important to us.

If you are calling about your bill Press 1

If you are calling to register your product – Press 2

if you are having trouble connecting – Press 3

So then you press 3

Please choose from the following options – and on and on it goes – until finally you hear:

All our advisors are busy at this time – please hold the line or alternatively go to our website at [www.this is a complete waste of time.com](http://www.this.is.a.complete.waste.of.time.com) !!

I imagine that you have experience fairly high levels of frustration when this is not your first call, but perhaps you 8th time around this system and each time you have someone different, someone who has not read what has happened before, who does not speak good English, who gets cut off.

Today

Today we are coming to one such story, here in Luke 18 – where we find a lady was trapped in another seemingly helpless and utterly powerless situation but who nevertheless prevailed against another faceless entity that was considerably more powerful than she was. And yet she did *NOT* quit, instead she PREVAILED.

Some background observations

Before we launch into the Parable of the Persistent Widow, which was read to us earlier, there are a few things that we do well to notice, and as usual they are not really rocket science, but they are worth taking the time to spot.

So let me give you **SIX SIMPLE THINGS – TO POP IN YOUR POCKET** (as it were):

- **FIRSTLY** – this parable is the first of a pair of parables

You can see that this parable about the widow is on the subject of prayer and so is the next one which concerns the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

So evidently we have a brief thematic section focusing on the subject of PRAYER.

- **NEXT THING** – that we should observe is the fact that both of these parables are a little UNUSUAL.

Q. Now why are they unusual? They seem to look exactly like every other parable I've ever seen, short, interesting and with a bit of a twist and spiritual lesson built-in.

And of course you would be right. But where these two differ is that Luke specifically chooses to tell you up front the basic SLANT of the parable.

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

Verse 9 "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:"

- **THIRDLY** – we should be aware that in both of the parables, there do seem to be some very strong contrasts that run through.

For example: the Pharisee is pretty well the polar opposite of the Tax Collector OR take the judge in the earlier parable – he doesn't look too much like any normal sort of judge that you might commonly expect.

- **FOURTHLY** – this section on the theme of prayer has more than a passing resemblance to the previous thematic section on prayer back in Luke 11.

In that section we learn about prayer and the need for persistence via the parable of the Friend at Midnight. We also get given the Lord's prayer which show us about the right content of prayer. In so many ways this is parallel to the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector where we see which type of prayer was appropriate and which was not because it had all the wrong content.

- **FIFTHLY**– this section is not one that is adrift and isolated from what has just come previously. It is not a section that is, what we might call, standalone.

In the previous chapter, Luke 17, from Verse 20 to the end of that chapter, Jesus is giving the Pharisees and his disciples some teaching about the realities of the end times.

He gives them a very important piece of information which they need to pay careful attention to

if they are not to stumble.

Verse 22 (In chapter 17) reads: “Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. Men will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. For 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. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”

What Jesus is making clear is that God’s Divine Timetable include a DELAY – things will *NOT* happen immediately, certain things (such as Jesus’ own suffering) must happen first. The reality is that people will then begin to get impatient, they will begin to believe and act as though Jesus and the Day of the Son of Man were not coming at all. They would GIVE UP and then BE CAUGHT OUT ultimately.

So what we see is that these parables in Chapter 18 very naturally follow on and pick up on all that Jesus has just been saying.

- **SIXTHLY and lastly** – we learn that the first parable, all about TRUE PRAYER, is directed to the disciples (see Verse 1).

And that the second parable, all about FALSE PRAYERS, are directed at the Pharisees, those who are described and defined as being SELF-RIGHTEOUS.

Moving forward I have just two points:

The first is what I’m going to call “**The Woman’s Struggle – A Parable of Contrasts**”

And then the second: “**Our own struggle – A preference for Comparisons**”

So then #1:

1. The Woman’s Struggle – A parable of contrasts

3 contrasts

As we go through the text of our section, just these verses from 1 to 8 – I want to do so by drawing out 3 contrasts, so:

CONTRAST #1 is – PRAYING over against GIVING UP

And this is clearly the BURDEN of the opening Verse: “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

And right here is our message this morning – (just in case, we are not too sure what the message is today) - then **THIS** is, as they say, **IS WHERE THE COOKIE CRUMBLES!**

Q. Are you tempted to give up praying?

Q. Have you, in fact, given up praying?

It could be in regard to one matter or another matter, it could be at a somewhat wider level – that your recent experience over the past few years has meant that you have, essentially, lost confidence in God hearing and answering your prayers – HENCE – you don't really do too much serious praying because deep down you do not believe that God does or will answer your prayers.

An unexamined life

It was the great Greek philosopher Socrates who, when put on trial and given just 3 stark choices:

1) death, 2) exile from Athens (that great seat of Greek philosophical learning) or a 3) vow of silence –

who famously responded by saying that: "**An unexamined life is not worth living**".

Quite possibly we might fall a bit into that mould where we choose not to ask the big questions. So let me throw it out to you as I have already thrown it into my own court:

Q. Have you fully or partially "GIVEN UP ON PRAYER"?

You do need to be honest

Now you do need to be honest here – it is a bit too easy to just immediately answer: "**Of course not!!**".

If we are followers of Jesus, then we all know that that is the right answer. But just saying "**the right answer**" doesn't actually mean that that is "**the truest answer**" in your case.

Remain open – keep an open mind

So I encourage you, as we go through this 8 verses to simply keep listening and to keep, at least, an open mind on the subject. Maybe God will convict, through His powerful Holy Spirit, more than you are anticipating – after all, this is His **God-breathed word that is living and active and powerful as a double-edged sword!**

Ok

CONTRAST #2 then - is the unjust judge over against our own Father God

See what the description in Verse 2 gives us:

"In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men."

To get a proper feeling for this man it is worth looking at a passage in 2 Chronicles 19 and verses 4-6:

"Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the Lord, the God of their fathers. **He appointed judges** in the land, in each of the fortified cities of Judah. He told them, "**Consider carefully what you do**, because you are not judging for man but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. **Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you.** Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery."

1st prerequisite

So the very first pre-requisite quality for a judge is that he have a fully functional fear of the LORD. That he knows and acknowledges that any decision that he comes up with is going to be in full sight of God, the LORD with whom there is no injustice and no partiality.

Apparently – our judge here falls at the first fence because he lacks this basic essential – he has ZERO FEAR OF GOD.

2nd prerequisite

But that is not all – it goes on to say that he “neither feared God **nor cared about men**”.

Other bible versions translate it as not have any **RESPECT** or not having any **REGARD** for men.

The Greek word here (Gk. entrepō) is one that has two, not just one, sense or meaning.

Sometimes it means:

- **having respect OR having regard** –
- in other places however, the meaning is to do with **feeling shame OR having no shame**

An example of this later meaning would be in 2 Thessalonians 3 verse 14 we read:

“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel **ashamed**.”

West vs East

As you probably realise, here in the **West** live in a very **guilt-based** system – we like to look at things in terms of someone being either **guilty** (in some regard) OR **free-from guilt**.

In other more **Eastern** cultures, the way of viewing the world works along a different axis – that is the **SHAME-HONOUR** axis. People do not talk so much about right and wrong, guilty or not guilty rather of people bringing **shame** upon the family or community and of others perhaps restoring the **honour** of the community (maybe by exacting some penalty upon the one who brought the **shame**).

Before men he had no shame

What is interesting to note is that none of the **Eastern translations** of the NT translate this verb with the Western mindset – they all consistently translate it as having no shame. Let me read you from a work called the **Diatessaron** – a very early harmony of the 4 gospels – written by a Christian theologian in around 160 AD and written in **Syriac** (which is a language that developed from the Jewish Aramaic language).

Tatian's Diatessaron (160-175AD) “There was a judge in a city, who feared not God, **nor was ashamed for men**: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, and said, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a long time: but afterwards he said within himself, If of God I have no fear, **and before men I have no shame**;...”

My point in digging this out is simply to say that here we have a man who is utterly shameless – he truly

represents an immovable object from the point of view that God is not any of his concern and that before men he has no conscience – he feels no sense of shame.

Pestering prevails

Just like the case of the parable of the Friend at Midnight – we see that the only way that this “monster of a man” is going to be moved is because he is slowly worn down by the drip drip pestering that the woman produces.

The widow uses the only weapon in her arsenal, she keeps coming and coming and coming. Wherever this judge turns, she is there – it is almost as though she is stalking him until he finally capitulates – it is, what might be described as: “**a war of attrition**”.

Let’s move on to consider the third contrast – we’ve had 1) FIRSTLY Praying vs Giving Up, we’ve had 2) The unjust judge vs our righteous God – and now lastly:

CONTRAST #3 – the widow over against God’s elect

If our judge was on the scale at the Monster, the Tyrant end – our widow was basically off the scale at the other end altogether.

She is so utterly marginalised that she has no proper bargaining power:

- for starters **she was a woman** – that didn’t give her many points in that culture
- she **had an adversary** – perhaps someone who was taking off her the little that she did have

Perhaps she was on the verge of being reduced to the bread line

- **she was a widow** – that meant she had no husband to protect her, no husband (or seemingly any children) who could represent and speak up for her

very often judges in that culture were **known to be corrupt** – in fact they had developed a nickname for them:

- Officially, they were called, **Dayyeneh Gezeroth** , or “**judges of prohibitions**”
- More popularly, they were called **Dayyeneh Gazeloth** or “**robber judges**”

So this lady was, on a scale of 0 to 10 about -5!!

By comparison we are described as God’s elect (verse 7) “And will not God bring about justice for his **chosen ones.**”

Matthew Henry

The Puritan, Matthew Henry, used this passage to contrast the many differences between the widow and the judge on the one hand, and God’s people and God on the other hand. He gives us 9 contrasts:

- She was a stranger to the judge, where we are known completely by our heavenly Father
- She was alone, where we are many – God’s own family

- She was kept at a distance by the judge, where we are welcomed into the very presence of God
- She came to an unjust judge, where we come to a righteous Father
- She approached the judge on her own account. God is already engaged in his own cause, and we, in praying for ourselves, are asking Him to plead His cause
- She had no-one to speak for her, where we have Christ Jesus himself pleading our cause before God.
- She got no encouragement from the judge, where we have God's own promises that He will hear our prayers and give us whatever we ask for in His name.
- She could only go to the judge at certain times, where we can cry out to God anytime, day or night.
- She had to rely on nagging the judge into giving her justice, where we know it is God's delight to hear our prayers.

I want now to move from #1 – “The Woman’s Struggle – A Parable of Contrasts”

Now #2 -

2. Our Struggle – A Preference for Comparisons

This second point this be briefer and will hopefully enable us to wrap up this parable and take us toward a conclusion.

Important to notice

We should notice something in Verse 6 which is, I think, important – it is, perhaps, a bit of a twist in the parable:

“And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says.””

You would have thought that Jesus would have turned to his disciples and said – so there you are learn from that helpless and hopeless widow – **SHE IS YOUR MODEL.**

But actually Jesus says – No! – You need to learn:

- ***NOT***, first off, from the COMPARISON (comparing yourself with the persistence of the widow) (though of course, I hasten to add, we do learn from that)
- ***BUT***, primarily, from the CONTRAST (by looking at this unjust , shameless and heartless judge)

This is where we are helped to see the God we have, the God we pray to in a truer and better light.

Qal Wahomer

The early Rabbis had developed lists of rules for good interpretation of the Jewish writings, what they called the Talmud. And top of the list was a rule called “Qal Wahomer” which in Hebrew means “LIGHT and HEAVY”.

This rule encouraged people to notice the LOGIC of a passage when we should EXTRAPOLATE from the

LESSER (that is the LIGHT) through to the GREATER (that is the HEAVY). We see this sometimes in NT passages where we read the tell-tale phrase “how much more”.

So as we read all about the wickedness of the unjust judge what we are to see is the comparative greatness of our God who is the total opposite of that.

(Verse 7-8a) “...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.”

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude with two things:

- FIRST – by looking at where Jesus leaves this parable (that bit in Verse 8 which starts with “However...”)
- And LASTLY – by being a bit practical about some reasons in regard to why our prayers may not get answered and why sometimes we stumble with this and simply “give up!”

Verse 8 ends “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

And this is yet another twist – we thought he might have ended re-enforcing the need to PERSIST in prayer – but instead he talks about FAITH.

Q. Why?

Well recall that he has just been talking in chapter 17 all about the end of time and when the Son of Man will finally return. He has been telling them that this will not happen immediately, that in fact there will be a DIVINE DELAY.

Jesus knows that this DELAY will cause many to “GIVE UP”.

On another occasion when Jesus was speaking about the realities of the end times, he says:

(This is Matthew 24v10-13): “At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, **the love of most will grow cold**, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

Jesus tells us plainly that the apparent inactivity of God will cause many to ultimately stumble. They will give up praying concluding that it is a waste of time.

A huge challenge

So the first thing is that we are thrown out by Jesus a very real challenge – he says: Q. When I return (as surely I will) will I find faith on the earth?

He does *not* mean, at the Second Coming – Q. Will there be any believers left – will there be any

Christians still surviving?

He is simply saying, after the long delay, will there be those that have kept on going, that have *not* got up off their knees disillusioned that God doesn't seem to have altered their situation.

PRACTICAL HELPS

Let me end with something very practical:

Q. What are we supposed to think, what are we supposed to do – when God does *NOT* appear to be answering our prayers?

And one very simple wrong answer is: PESTER HIM UNTIL HE DOES!!!

Q. Why is that wrong? Well it does not really display the correct approach and attitude.

Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount regarding right and wrong praying:

Matthew 6 verse 7 “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, **for they think they will be heard because of their many words.** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

This can never work because it has a wrong idea of what prayer is (it is not something merely external – a heaping up of words) and it has a wrong idea of who God is (he is not someone who has to be badgered into submission like the unjust judge).

4 KEYWORDS (“NO”, “SLOW”, “GROW” & “GO”)

Let me share with you a useful set of four keywords that I learned from Bill Hybels in his very helpful little book: “Too Busy NOT to Pray” (which I will leave on the book table at the back):

These are 4 responses that God typically makes to our prayers:

1. The FIRST ONE is pretty easy to understand – and this one is NO – spells *NO*!!

This is where we are praying, what you might call, INAPPROPRIATE prayers.

An example would be James and John asking Jesus to be given the best seats next to Jesus when they are in heaven.

We are told to pray IN Jesus Name – which means that whatever we ask needs to be in a proper alignment to God's will and His purposes. i.e not selfish prayers – that are really just along the lines of “Heavenly Father – now give me what I WANT” – that pay rise, that new car – you know the sort of thing

2. THE SECOND response that God makes to our prayers is S-L-O-W - *SLOW*

This is where God is *NOT* saying *NO!*, but He is saying “*NOT YET*” – the time is not right. And I guess for a lot of us that feels a lot like NO.

However, like every good parent – God knows that INSTANT GRATIFICATION is not always a very good recipe.

There will always be a good reason why next month or next year will be a much better timescale.

3. THE THIRD response is NOT *NO*, it not *SLOW* but it is GROW.

Here God is saying to us, yes the prayer is good, but just right now *you are not good* - there is something about the person praying that needs alteration.

There is some immaturity that needs to be dealt with first, there is some significant barrier to our prayer that is hindering things and that cannot be left unattended to.

Now you are saying Q. So what sort of things would these be?

We'll remember so of the things the NT tells us – Jesus says if you are heading to the altar with your sacrifice and you remember that your brother has something against you stop, go and sort it – and only then come back and get on with your spiritual business.

Or think of Peter – in 1 Peter 3, when he is talking about husbands and wives, he tells the husbands that they need to treat their wives properly otherwise their prayers will be hindered.

Some others are things like prayerlessness. James 4 verse 2 tells us that “You don’t have because you don’t ask God...”.

It can be unconfessed sin – Psalm 66 verse 18 “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;...”

It can be wrong motives – recall James 4 verse 3 “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

So just a selection of what Hybels calls “Prayer Busters”.

4. The LAST response is when God says “GO!” – this is His “YES”.

FINALLY

So returning to the frustration of the call centre, to that overwhelming feeling to just simply “GIVE UP” because that is the easiest thing to do – Q. Is that where you are today in your prayer life?

Q. Is your mindset one that seems to find it easier to read this parable by way of COMPARISON and SIMILARITY?

You are poor like the widow: you are **alone**, you are **unable to get close** to the One that you pray to, when you come **you must plead your own cause**, you can **only come at defined times** and in reality, **the best you can do is just nag, plead and holler** in the hope that your God will answer.

Q. Is your God one, who like the judge, is full of reluctance? Perhaps your God is one who permanently wears a frown and not a Fatherly smile.

Remember – that the unjust judge is painted in all these godless and shameless dark colours for the whole purpose of showing you that your God is the TOTAL REVERSE of that.

AND SO – the message is DON'T EVEN THINK FOR A MOMENT OF GIVING UP

PRESS ON and if it appears that there is some DELAY – well simply check yourself over to see if there be any PRAYER BUSTER in the house – remove it and PRESS ON till you find success.

AMEN