

## Luke 18:1-8 (ESV)

### The Parable of the Persistent Widow

18 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. <sup>2</sup>He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. <sup>3</sup>And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ <sup>4</sup>For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” <sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. <sup>7</sup>And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. **Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”**

### Introduction

Message

Justice Seeking Faith

Jesus calls us to be his disciples and commissions us to make disciples of Jesus.

It's the first purpose of this church and every church, to be a community of disciples under the lordship of Jesus. So when we hear the words of Jesus read from the Gospels we may listen for his words of discipleship and seek to receive them.

Jesus gave us fair warning that being his disciple would not be easy. We are to deny ourselves, take up *our* cross and follow as he leads.<sup>1</sup> So mindful that it is not easy I am going to go through this morning's gospel passage to listen for his instruction. *Prayer to hear.*

Discipleship is about learning to live in the Kingdom of God that Jesus was revealing and 'inaugurating'. It's instruction and training in how to live as a faithful child of God as Jesus calls and models. It's teaching that calls for a change of heart flowing into changed living.

Repeat warning: It is not easy and the first challenge is understanding a way of life typically so different from what seems normal and expected as practical wisdom for us. We have much to unlearn as Isaiah warned 600 years earlier (Isaiah 55.8-9)

Isaiah 55.8-9

<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares  
the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.  
<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Discipleship with Jesus is not going to be our own wisdom and best practices or virtues amplified.

Today Jesus teaches discipleship through a parable of a widow seeking justice from a corrupt judge. This is a constructed story which we heard read alone but actually sits in context within Luke's Gospel.

So to get into the parable of the widow and the judge I will pick up the context of this teaching in the previous chapter at Luke 17:20

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16.24, Mark 8.34 and Luke 9.23: And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

<sup>20</sup>Being asked by the Pharisees *when* the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,<sup>21</sup> nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” *ie among you*

Luke 17.20-30

When and where will this Kingdom be?

The Day of the Lord - when everyone will see Jesus and his kingdom - will come. Do not be confused about this. It will come with unmistakable revelation the way lightning illuminates everything in a split second. Until that day much will happen and people will live ‘just as it was in the days of Noah,’ [Luke 17. 26-30]

<sup>27</sup> They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. <sup>28</sup> Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building,<sup>29</sup> but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—<sup>30</sup> so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

That is the lead up to our discipleship parable about the widow and the corrupt judge. Jesus is saying that for outward appearances people will continue doing all the things that people do right up to when his Kingdom comes in unmistakable power on the Day of the Lord.

This parable was Jesus’ response to the Pharisees asking “When?” and then “Where Lord?” question about the Kingdom.

### Text

So to get beyond speculative issues he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.



This parable is made up but it presumes the social realities of his time.

“In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.<sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’

The Judge is described in a way that could be considered hardnosed impartiality but is not. From other literature of the time we learn that ‘neither fearing God nor respecting man’ that this is a negative assessment.<sup>2</sup> We should not think of today’s law court judges but of a strong man, a ‘boss-man’ who people respected and feared in that community. He may even have been a warlord. He was powerful, able to direct and enforce. He is neither a model for us nor for God.

The widow is our model in discipleship.

We recognize that she is a model of powerlessness in the world of Jesus’ day.

<sup>2</sup> Some commentators have suggested that the characterisation of the judge as someone ‘who neither feared God nor cared what people thought’ could be construed positively, showing that he is disinterested in his dispensing of justice. After all, in Mark 12.14, the Pharisees flatter Jesus by saying ‘You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.’. But parallels of the double phrase in contemporary literature make it clear that this is a negative assessment. Josephus describes King Jehoiakim as ‘neither reverent towards God nor fair to human beings’ (Ant. 10.283) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus portrays some Roman conspirators as ‘neither fearing the wrath of the gods nor regarding the indignation of men’ (Ant. Rom. 10.10.7; both from Mikeal Parsons p 263). And Luke frequently portrays those who ‘fear God’ as being virtuous (e.g. Acts 10.2). cf <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/does-god-respond-to-nagging/?fbclid=IwAR1EdApGuqIG70yQPIpFr4-H5cD6TPZO1KMJaJVZ3Ti07YMd4VJliHS1mQY>

- The fact that she kept going to the judge for justice suggests that she was alone.
  - She obviously had no husband but it would have been understood by those first hearing this that she simply had no male relative to plead for her.
- As some of you will know first hand, in some places legal appeals without a bribe do not go far. Without a bribe it may be day after day of “Come back tomorrow.” A bribe eases the process and this widow had no money for that.
- A typical case for a widow like this was being deprived of her inheritance by a member of her husband’s family. Imagine being denied residence in her late husband’s home by other family members or a share in his estate.

So her one option was to seek justice from the town boss-man come judge – even if he was corrupt.

The two discipleship points to note from this heroine of the story are:

1. Her focus was justice.
  - a. Justice is about things being made right.
2. She was persistent in her appeals for the justice she sought.

This is what Jesus wanted to impress on those asking when and where questions about the Kingdom. Discipleship does not proceed from a knowledge of all the details. Discipleship is not about gaining information.

In contrast, Jesus’ Kingdom discipleship involves aligning ourselves and others with the purposes of God as he reigns. As Jesus taught elsewhere, it involves owning as our first prayer: “Thy Kingdom come.”

The Kingdom of God -is as Paul wrote to the Romans- [[Roman 4.17]

... not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The prayer “Thy Kingdom come” is a prayer for God’s saving righteousness - his justice- peace and joy to reign among those who seek it. That is the focus of prayer, not what we have for breakfast or when we may eat or not eat as some religions suggest.

So we have the powerless widow with nothing but tenacity in her heart appealing to the corrupt Judge who could not be bothered with a case that brought him nothing. She wants justice. He is not really concerned, until she becomes irritating.

<sup>4</sup>For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’”

The widow’s persistence not only bothered him but was ‘beating him down’. In the Greek this is language from boxing which conveys how he may have felt!

So while he is unrighteous or ‘corrupt’, he could deliver justice to her.

Jesus tells this story to inspire and direct faith towards God for God’s Justice.

<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

The takeaways are:

1. Those seeking to be disciples in God's Kingdom are to seek justice in sustained prayer believing God works to deliver righteousness.
2. God does his right-making work through the prayers of the powerless, even and despite the resistance of the powerful and corrupt.



The Widow illustrates the focus and quality of faith Jesus seeks on earth. This is important to know.

### **Application:**

That is not too complicated but I see a few things that work against this, even in church.

Justice is a widely held value. Who would stand against righteousness? But, but, it is often held with other values that dilute it or drown it out. The Judge was particularly corrupt because he was not really interested in or committed to doing this. Righteousness was a lost value for him and he was not faithful in his duty of care for the weak.

One way I see this at work among us is that the focus of prayer is often more on sought blessings than God's justice. I cannot recognize this focus on blessings as part of Jesus' way or how disciples pray, but its common.

Some standout examples for me relate to being asked as a priest to pray blessings on situations such as a house or a car when there were clear issues of unrighteousness and disorder in people's lives. There is often more of a desire for personal blessing and less regard for justice.

I have to clearly say this is not Christianity as Jesus taught.

In building terms it looks as if people think Jesus will bless the paint and wallpaper when the foundations and structure are rotten and out of shape.

Then secondly, the faith Jesus seeks in praying for justice and righteousness can also be lost through a misguided focus on keeping the peace at all costs. This is something I see deep in church life both in the congregation and more widely in the Anglican Church. Instead of being focused on the Justice of God the focus goes to unity and peace at all costs. Unity is good, very good. Psalm 133 celebrates how God's blessing comes in unity but what Jesus is prioritizing above peace and unity is the right-making power of God as the Kingdom at work among the powerless.

The cost of unity cannot be to deny or bury inconvenient issues of injustice because they disturb the peace and threaten unity. Jesus did not seem to have this in his mind when he cleared the temple of money changers and animal sellers or the many other times he upset the situation by his words or actions.

Even the world has recognized that without justice, genuine peace will not come: "No Justice, No Peace!"

Some of us come from cultures where keeping good form or apparent dignity is very important. It's the opposite of what KidZchurch are covering this morning with the verse:

The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. [1 Samuel 16:7b]

Keeping up appearances can be a big concern and you may have been trained to avoid realities that could be socially awkward, embarrassing, controversial or divisive. Sometimes it's about maintaining social status while other times it's about keeping the social arrangements together.

If that cultural agenda is real for you then there is a danger that important matters of righteousness and justice get buried or ignored because they could be disruptive - and Jesus weeps! Facing issues of injustice could well be shameful and upsetting. So what happens is that injustice is tolerated and potentially someone is left to suffer. The Me Too movement is a well known example of this being exposed.

That was the anticipated atmosphere in the story Jesus told. Many voices would have pressured the widow to let it go and accept the unjust circumstances.

This is not the way of Jesus. In this story Jesus commends those who are faithful to God in seeking God's justice and persisting in that prayer until it comes. That is the quality of faith Jesus seeks from us on his return when he will look for faith.

**Conclusion:**

Do you see things that are wrong?

- They may be wrong around you. 'Bubble 2 & 3'
- They may be wrong within you. 'Bubble 1.'

If there is uncertainty you may ask: What does Jesus say about them?

They are issues close to you that do not please God and have no place in God's Kingdom over which you are not in control

The message of Jesus' parable today is pray in persistent faith for God's justice to come.