

Opening Words

There was once a widow who would not be silenced and finally received what she needed. Jesus told this famous story, and it has many lessons for us. Let's learn them together.

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Jesus was telling a story to encourage his disciples not to lose heart and to pray always. He told a story of a widow who continually went before an unjust judge crying out for legal protection. Let's catch the end of the story and then look at the lesson from it.

The judge and his aides prepared themselves for the day's work. With great pomp they paraded to the village gates and prepared the platform and the cushions upon which the judge would sit. As they did this they looked upon the crowd that was forming and there in the front of the line was the woman, with a look of determination on her face.

The judge sat, and the court was announced "in session." And just as the woman started to cry out, "Give me legal protection," one of the aides came up to her and said, "The judge will see you." The woman was astonished, but she quickly collected her thoughts approached the judge and said, "You know my husband. You know how hard he worked. You know that land is ours. My opponent, the wealthiest landowner in this area is trying to take it from me. This is all I have. You must stop him. You must give me protection."

And the judge leaned close to her and said, "If I do this, does this mean you will stop coming to this place and screaming at me?" And the woman said, "If you give me legal protection, I will never come here again." The judge breathed a sigh of relief. He turned to one of his aides and gave him some instructions who wrote some things on a parchment, gave it to the woman, and said, "Here is what you have asked for." And the woman, with a look of triumph in her eyes turned and faced the crowd. The men quietly parted and the woman walked through the multitude of men victorious in her quest for justice.

Jesus had finished the story. He looked upon his disciples and said, "Let me now explain this to you. Let me encourage your hearts. The unrighteous judge did it. He granted her request. Listen to what he said. He said that even though he did not fear God or have respect for granting justice to people, he still did what she asked!

"And I say to you, if that *unrighteous* judge gave her justice, don't you think that God in heaven, your Father, who is good and who loves you will bring about justice for his chosen ones? Of course, he will. He will keep the covenant with you. He will bring about his covenant righteousness. He will bring his covenant justice in your behalf.

"You should be like the woman. Although she feared, she did not let her fear control her. She cried out to the judge every day. And you should cry out to your Father day and night. And even though

you are not perfect, he will be very patient with you. He will keep his anger far from you. He will bring about justice for his chosen ones.

“I have shared with you that I, the Son of Man, the heavenly one, will be vindicated. Yes, I will suffer but God will vindicate me. I trust in him and he will raise me up. In the same way, you trust in him also. Don’t give in to your fear. Have faith in God. I ask, when the Son of Man comes, when the Son of Man is vindicated in the difficult days that will come, will he find you with this kind of faith? Will he find faith on the earth?”

That was a great question Jesus asked his disciples, and it is a question he asks us. As Jesus looks out upon the earth today, does he find faith? Let’s see how this story applies to our life.

First, the story reminds us, painfully, that we live in a fallen world. The disciples were fearful. Jesus told the story because the disciples were under stress. Jesus himself was in danger. The disciples were in danger. The political authorities were keeping a wary eye upon Jesus. Herod knew about Jesus and was very concerned that he was causing disturbances in the land. Pilate was the Roman governor and he was ruthless and cruel. He would stop at nothing to keep order, and if he learned of this movement of people following Jesus and determined that it was causing problems in the land, he would bring it to a swift end.

The religious rulers were following Jesus and hounding him, trying to trap him with silly questions and discredit him in the eyes of the people. Many of them were plotting to arrest Jesus and kill him, and those who were his closest followers would not be shown mercy either. There was, indeed, much to be afraid of.

If that were true of these men, it was also true for those in society who were vulnerable. Who was more vulnerable than widows and orphans? God, in his Word, set down laws that his leaders should protect them and others who were weak. In the book of Exodus we read, “You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, *and* if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry.” The prophet Isaiah said, “Learn to do good. Seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” Such commands and circumstances remind us that they, and we, live in a fallen, difficult world.

Second, the story reminds us that though God has given specific commands to help those who are weak, our leaders do not always do this. Sin not only affects the hearts of individuals, but sin also affects the government systems we have in place so that justice is not dispensed. The story of the unjust judge revealed a reality that was true in the ancient world and true in our modern world – judges and leaders often do not carry out their God-given responsibility to enact justice. Many are like the judge in the story who did not fear God and who did not respect man. This judge had no sense of honor and shame.

The prophet Isaiah, after he exhorted the people to dispense justice and to protect the weak said, “Your rulers are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, nor does the widow’s plea come before them.” Yes, our world is filled with fallen people and with fallen and sinful government systems that oppress the poor.

Third, the story does tell us that even though we live in a fallen world, sometimes good things do happen. The widow in this story did get her wish! She did get legal protection and the reason she did was because of her *persistence* in crying out for it. Her persistence is a lesson for us to persist in our faith and in our prayer. This was the lesson Jesus gave to his disciples. Like the widow, don't give in to fear. Like the widow, keep crying out to God.

Many of us have fears that surround us. The disciples were fearful because Jesus kept talking about dying, and they knew if he was killed they would probably be killed too. But Jesus did not want them to give in to fear. Instead, he wanted them to pray. What are your fears? Do you feel vulnerable and weak? Jesus encourages you to cry out to God day and night over those things that bother you, that trouble you, that make you afraid. Luke 18:1 tells us that Jesus told this story so that "at all times they should pray and not lose heart."

The New Testament is filled with exhortations to pray and to keep on praying. In Acts 1:14 we find that after Jesus was enthroned at the right hand of God, his followers met and devoted themselves to prayer. We find in Acts 2:42 that the first followers of Jesus devoted themselves to four things – teaching, worship, fellowship with one another, and praying. When the Church became very large, the apostles asked the members to appoint seven men to help them in caring for the widows in the church so that they could spend more time in prayer. Paul told the Roman Christians to devote themselves to prayer. To the Christians in Ephesus Paul said, "with all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit. Be on the alert with all prayer and petition for all of God's people." And to the Christians living in Colossae he said they should devote themselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving in their hearts."

For the disciples, a middle eastern widow crying out before a judge for legal protection was a familiar scene and would help them to understand that they should cry out to God like that.

There is one more lesson for us. The unjust judge granted the woman her request, at last. Jesus wanted to drive home the point that our Father in heaven is not unjust. He is the righteous God. He is the just judge. He is the one from whom all just laws come. He does care for people. He is concerned about honor and shame. He does want to meet needs. He is not partial. He takes no bribes. He is full of love, concern, and compassion for the needs of all mankind. If the unjust judge could be moved by the constant pleas of a widow, how much more will the just judge of all the earth, the compassionate God, the heavenly Father be moved by the cries of his people!

Jesus guarantees that all prayers will be answered. Some will be answered quickly in our life. Some will not be answered until he returns but justice will be done for all. And even though we come to him imperfectly, he has great patience with us. He is merciful and kind.

The widow who would not be silenced. A story of sorrow, a story of injustice, but a story of perseverance in crying out for what was right. It is a story to encourage us, to lift our hearts, and strengthen our faith. The question we must answer is, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find our hearts full of such faith?"

Hello again everyone, I don't have to tell you that the world is full of injustice and suffering, but Jesus has inaugurated his kingdom of justice and righteousness in the world. It is his power that can

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change a life, a community, and even a nation. As we take these stories of the women Jesus loved into the world, please pray for us and remember that we can only do this with your generous support. May the Lord richly bless you!