

The Widow and the Judge

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Introduction.

- A. One of the most common struggles that we face as Christians is the battle to make our prayer lives what they should be. We read about Jesus, who commonly prayed all night long, but we know that in our lives, we have to work to pray at all. Too often, we forget to pray until we're in bed and about to go to sleep. Then, as we start praying, the prayer typically ends up fading off into dreamland.
- B. Perhaps the basic problem here is that we don't see a clear need in our lives to pray. We're not exactly sure what prayer does. After all, the days are long past when Elijah could pray and have fire come down from heaven to consume his enemies. The word has already been confirmed, and God doesn't work in those miraculous ways anymore. With Satan's help, we often have little trouble rationalizing away the times when we do get what we prayed for. Sure, we may have recovered from our cancer or our heart attack just fine, but there are plenty of non-Christians who never pray at all and recover just the same. Worse still, what about the times when we pray for something and don't get it? Basically, why should we pray at all?
- C. This question is not new. Jesus was the greatest miracle worker of all time, but even His disciples wondered why they should pray. Our Lord thought this question was important enough that He addressed it in His teaching. We see Jesus' answer in a parable, recorded for us in Luke 18:1-8. Let's turn to this parable now to see what we can learn about prayer from the story of the widow and the judge.

I. Opponents.

- A. This story begins with a description of the two opponents. Jesus provides us with this description in Luke 18:1-3. This parable is about two people: a widow and a judge.
- B. Jesus defines the judge first. He says of him that he "did not fear God nor regard man." Basically, the judge was a corrupt, evil person. Now, folks in Chicagoland might think they know a little bit about official corruption, but all of the Chicago aldermen, mayors, and governors who have taken money under the table are amateurs compared to the officials of the ancient world. Nowadays in the US, bribery is something that is frowned on. If you are an official on the take and they catch you, you go to jail. Not so in the Roman Empire in the time of Christ. Back then, bribery was just the normal way of doing business. If you were going to court and wanted a favorable verdict, you bribed the judge. Money, not justice, was what mattered.
- C. Now, coming to this judge who has no interest in justice, we find a widow who needs help. We don't know what her problem was; just that she wanted protection from her adversary. There's one problem, though: this woman is a widow, and back in Jesus' day, being a widow meant that you had no money. Nobody could save for retirement back then, so widows started out with no money, and there wasn't anything they could do to support themselves, so they couldn't earn money. They had nothing, and that placed this widow at a huge disadvantage when dealing with this corrupt judge. Judges like him only decided in favor of people who paid them enough money, and what the judge wanted was exactly what the widow couldn't give.

II. Conflict.

- A. The opposed thinking of these two people led them to conflict. The judge wanted money, but the widow wanted justice. We see how the story played out in Luke 18:4-5.
- B. Here's how things went: Round 1 was the first time the widow came to see the judge. She asked for justice, the judge asked to see the color of her money, and she went away disappointed. Round 2: the widow comes back, and probably the same thing happens.

However, even though the widow keeps on not getting the answer she wants, she doesn't give up. She keeps on coming back, and coming back, and coming back.

- C. At this point in time, the judge realizes that there are other things in the world he wants besides money. He still doesn't care about God, he still doesn't care about justice for his fellow man, but he now cares a great deal about getting this widow to leave him alone. Our translation here is kind of timid; it doesn't really do the Greek justice. Our judge just says, "I'm going to help her lest she weary me," but the original text says, "I'm going to help her lest she hit me under the eye." Isn't that great? This powerful, corrupt judge is getting beaten up by this powerless widow, just because she won't leave him alone. He says, "She's killing me!" At the end of the story, the widow gets what she wants just because she keeps asking and won't give up.

III. Application.

- A. Of course, this isn't just a pretty story. Jesus concludes His message with an application for us, and we see His words recorded in Luke 18:6-8. He's not talking about widows and judges; He's talking about our relationship with God.
- B. The first application that Jesus makes is in Luke 18:7. He invites a comparison between the unrighteous judge and our righteous God. The unrighteous judge was evil; God is good. The unrighteous judge had no interest in justice; God is the personification of justice. The unrighteous judge had contempt for the widow; God is filled with compassion toward us. So, then, if the unrighteous judge helped the widow simply because of her persistence, what will God do for us if we persist in asking Him for help? The help that the judge gave so unwillingly will be the help that God gladly extends to us.
- C. We need to remember, though, when we pray, that God answers our prayers on His timetable, not ours. This is what Jesus is trying to emphasize with the question in the last part of Luke 18:7. The various translations are all over the map on this one, but the New King James that I've quoted here seems to be the closest. The idea is this: Just because we haven't seen the answer we want from God yet doesn't mean the answer isn't coming. God is wiser than we, and He knows not just what we need, but also when we need it.
- D. Finally, though, in Luke 18:8, we see how God will act when He finally does act: decisively. When we receive our vindication from God, when we see the answer to our prayers, God will take no half-measures about it. On the day of judgment, if not before, God will see to it that we receive our answer. This has a special application to the times when Christians are persecuted, but it is generally true of all the things that we pray for.

Conclusion. However, prayer is only available to the faithful child of God. If you would like to come to Him or be restored to Him, now is your opportunity.