

Justice In Love

Luke 18:1-8

Cradock Presbyterian Church

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I love doing these misunderstood parables of Jesus. Once you do understand this one, it gives you great hope, and great help for living now. Hidden in this one is the idea of love. You'll see.

In this part of Luke, Jesus has been talking to his disciples about the coming times, the end of time, when he will return; and especially about the trials and tribulations right before that time. Pretty grim stuff! Jesus wants to assure them: you'll be in good shape because you know how to pray. You should never *stop* praying. To illustrate, he turns to this parable. There are some things in the parable you should know, that his listeners already did. Jesus says, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither *feared God* nor had respect for people." It might surprise you to know that Roman "judges" in these outlying communities were actually not paid by the government! It was a volunteer position, one of great status in the community. But because there was no pay, some judges might have, shall we say, *supplemented their income* by deals they worked from the bench. Characteristics of a good judge were total disregard for other human beings, and total disregard for religion, any religion. Jesus tells us that this judge was typical. "Fearing God" is another way of saying "believing in God." This judge didn't. He didn't "respect" men, either; really, this judge – like most judges – was a power unto himself. He could do anything he wanted. That IS a lot of power!

That power is what makes this story so strong. The widow in the parable isn't acting at all like widows are supposed to act. In that society, women were treated about

like the Taliban treats women today, though without all the beatings and stonings. An unmarried woman couldn't leave her father's house without a male relative with her. A married woman could leave with her husband, but also with other married women. A widow was supposed to move in with her deceased husband's family, and then live by those rules for an unmarried woman. So, the widow in our story wasn't even supposed to be out of the house, approaching this judge! I suppose you could *assume* she got some male from the house to go with her, but the text doesn't say that. And the tense of the verb tells us she was coming *repeatedly*, over and over again. Not only that, but she was *talking* to this judge – which she would surely have been restrained from doing. She was making demands, and even pushing the judge around! Yeah, she was! She was pushing this all powerful, fear-making guy around. First, listen to what she says: **'Grant me justice against my opponent.'** Kinda rude, isn't it? Not even polite! No "your Honor" or any equivalent, which yes, you would expect. Not just once, but over and over and over again. And she gave him an *order*, which the original language implies; she didn't even make it as a request. Hey lady! Isn't this kinda risky? Don't you want to avoid getting this judge mad? He could jail you in a second. Or worse. And you gotta remember that in those days, widows had NO standing before judges like him. If he got tired of all this pressure, this judge could have done to her anything he wanted to do.

Sometimes, though, people win you over with their persistence, their willingness to run risks, their just plain old perseverance. This judge thinks to himself, "You know, I *am* a power unto myself." (That's what it means when he says to himself that he doesn't fear God or respect man.) It's too bad that the translators really go easy on this next

part. What the judge really says next is, “Because this woman is just *cutting me up* I will grant her justice.” Yep, the original language means “cut up” or “beat severely until bleeding.” It implies that it’s about getting punched in the face! I’ve only seen one translation that got close, one that had it that the judge talked about being “slapped in the face.” No, it’s more violent than that. This judge sounds like he’s almost fearing for his life! “I will grant her justice,” he says, and here comes another place we have to go to the original language, “so that she won’t punch me until I have black eyes!” I’m not kidding you – that’s actually what the original language says!

You have to admit, it doesn’t say much for this judge, or for the Roman system of justice out in the boonies. This judge doesn’t hear her case and judge it on the merits, then decide for her. He does it because he’s thinking of himself first. Get this woman away from me! Or I might not make it home unscathed.

Now Jesus brings it to bear on his listeners – and on us. His first question has a word in it in the original language that tells you the answer to this next question will be “yes.” Here’s the question: “**And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?**” Yes! That’s as compared to the unjust judge, where it was always in doubt until the judge decided to rid himself of the bothersome widow. The chosen ones of course have God’s ear. They don’t have to – WE don’t have to – keep coming back, over and over; we don’t have to be obnoxious. The second question from Jesus is powerful, too: “**Will he delay long in helping them?**” This one expects the answer to be “no.” Yes, God will grant his chosen ones justice; no, he won’t delay. So here’s the point: *If even an unjust judge is capable of granting justice because he kept hearing*

from this widow, how much more certain is it that when God hears from you, you'll get justice? It's as certain as anything can be. That was the message those first century Christians needed to hear, and take to heart, because Jesus knew that things were going to get hard. It's a message we need to hear right now, today, because I don't think life is going to get any easier for us. But we *do* have a God we can always turn to, who waits eagerly for our prayers, and a son who encourages us to keep sending those prayers heavenwards. Why? Because unlike the unjust judge, *God loves us*.

Scripture is full of proof of that. You know John 3:16, of course: "For God *so loved* the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life." And from John 16: "I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for *the Father himself loves you*, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God." And from that powerful section of Romans chapter 8: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through *him who loved us*." Beyond that, you know it from your own lives. How many times have you felt the presence of God? How many times in your life have you seen God do something wonderful, something totally unexpected? You know what I'm talking about! We might have problems in our own families. It could be the normal stresses of raising a family – troubles in school, teen rebellion, communications breakdown between husband and wife, money problems, advancing age. They might seem like insurmountable things. Life might seem unfair. We need justice! – just like that widow who kept hammering away at that judge. Thank God, we don't have to keep hammering away. We already

have God's ear. Which is the point Jesus was trying to make, way back there in the first century.

Look, you know you're one of God's chosen, one of his beloved, or else why would you be here today? That means you have God's ear. Guaranteed! It also means that God only wants the best for you. If that's true, then why doesn't he just go ahead and GIVE it to us? Because then our lives would have no meaning. We'd have nothing to work for, nothing to take pride in, nothing to point to as accomplishments. We'd have no reason to turn to God for help, and no reason to encourage others. In the end, we'd have nothing from our hands to offer to God. We don't have to worry about all that! We are God's chosen, AND we're free. That's real love. It gets even better when we know God's listening for us, waiting night and day to hear us when we call out. And oh-by-the-way, our coming to God builds up the relationship, just like earthly children coming to their parents. When we came to our parents, and they helped us, didn't we end up loving them all the more?

Well, then, we should be like this widow in one regard: we should keep on, and never quit! We should keep on praying, persist in praying, until we see the justice, or the help, we need. And when we see that justice, we'll *still* keep on praying, only this time, we'll be giving thanks.

See, when we pray constantly, we open ourselves to all of God's possibilities. When we pray constantly, we are constantly in the presence of our God. You know as well as I do that the world fights against *that* message! The world doesn't want to hear that it needs to rely on, needs to put its trust in, God. People, society in general, keeps

on trying to make us think WE are masters of our own destinies. So when we pray constantly, we point to justice, real justice, for the world. Because God blesses us, we show everyone how *they* will receive the justice and peace the world can never give; we show everyone who it is they should worship and serve. We show everyone that they are loved. So the message for us today is: Keep praying, and don't ever stop, just as Jesus said; because your persistence might yet save the world.

Keep us, O Lord, from getting tired. Keep us from despair, when we fail to see you at work on our timetable. Give us courage for the days ahead, and let nothing get in the way of our time with you. Help us, O God, to remember that we don't need special words to come to you; we just need open hearts. You will supply the rest. In the name of the one who showed us how to LIVE prayer, Jesus our Lord, AMEN.