

The Parables of Jesus: The Unjust Judge

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Date: 04 July 2021

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[0 : 00] So let's pray. Father God, we are here this morning to worship you with our hearts, our minds, our gifts, and even, Lord, our voices again.

Thank you that you've been with us through this pandemic, Lord, that you continue to walk with us as we navigate the seemingly uncertain future. As restrictions begin to lift and we recognize what this new normal could be like.

Lord, it's a great comfort to us to recognize that our future is not only known to you, but you also hold it firmly in your hands, Father.

Help us to rest in the comfort and knowledge of that amazing truth. Lord, we've celebrated the birth of our nation this past week.

And today, our U.S. neighbors are celebrating the founding of their own nation. Lord, we recognize the great freedom we have in our country.

[1 : 03] And we're grateful for the many opportunities that are available here. Sadly, Lord, we also recognize that Canada's history includes a deep legacy of subjugation of others.

A denial of rights and freedoms. An assimilation of people's culture, their traditions, and their values. Lord, human sinfulness and selfishness often causes us to put ourselves, our own interests, before those of others.

Lord, we recognize that our history speaks of not loving our neighbors as ourselves. Not caring for the least of these, as your son Jesus taught us to do over and over.

Creator God of love and justice. Comforter of those who mourn. Father, we have learned of more indigenous children lost.

We continue to learn of more children who were never able to return to their families. From schools they should never have been forced to attend in the first place.

[2 : 24] Lord, this news is devastating to us. And we recognize that it's probably only just begun.

Lord, we pray for healing for the families of those children who are now adults, who are now grandparents, who are now passed on their own, Lord.

We recognize that communities have, over recent weeks and months, renewed pain. Experienced renewed pain. That they should never even have to have experienced in the first place.

Lord, it can be easy for us as your people to point fingers. To identify other faith communities as somehow we claim that we were not responsible.

But Lord, we must stand united as your children. As we continue to seek to listen. To seek to understand. To be part of the healing process.

I believe you are calling us to participate in. Comforting God, we pray for the healing in communities and families of all people who experienced residential schools.

[3 : 41] Comfort for those who are grieving. And the strength to pursue. Reconciliation. Lord, as Chief Cadmus Delorme of Cowessess First Nation has so beautifully said.

We all inherited this. Nobody today created residential schools. Nobody today created the Indian Act.

Nobody today created the 60s Scoop. But we all inherited it. And we just have to acknowledge that people are healing.

And people are hurting. Let's do something about it. Lord, guide us in being your agents of healing and hope to those who are hurting deeply.

Lord, we ask that you would heal your people. Heal our nation. Heal our world. And Lord, above all, may your kingdom come.

[4 : 57] Amen. Amen. Oh, shoot. Now you know I have Kleenex behind the pulpit. Welcome here for this Sunday, July 4th.

We're continuing in our sermon series on the parables of Jesus this morning. And throughout this series, we've been visiting familiar stories, revisiting them.

And some that may be less familiar or even brand new to you. And we're exploring these parables that Jesus told in the Bible. Over 40 of them, as I've said before.

And my prayer again is may God grant us eyes to see and ears to hear the truth that is found in these beautiful parables of Jesus.

Over the past two weeks, we took a closer look at two of the parables that fall into the category, as some scholars have grouped them, of wisdom and folly.

[5 : 56] Maybe you remember that. And this morning, we're moving to some examples of the next category of parables, which are known as parables of the Christian life. The Christian life.

What does that mean? Well, I believe it means living a life that is connected to God. Through prayer, through perseverance, through trusting Him and being faithful to God in our circumstances, despite whatever they may be.

And this morning, our window into this idea is found in the parable of the persistent widow. It's interesting to me that the parable we're looking at this morning is one that seems to have some of the most variety in how it's titled in different translations of Scripture.

It's known as the parable of the persistent widow, as I've just said. Maybe you know it as the persistent woman. That's how it's referred in other translations. This one caught me a little bit.

The importunate, which also means persistent, by the way. That's not a word I use often. You're very importunate. The importunate widow. Or it may be even most familiar to you, which is a totally different perspective, as the unjust judge, which is how I've titled this sermon.

[7 : 18] It's found in the book of Luke 18, verses 1 to 8. Luke 18, verses 1 to 8. Turn to it in your Bibles. You can open your Bible app on your phone or listen as I read.

Luke 18, verses 1 to 8. Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said, For some time, he refused.

But finally, he said to himself, Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet this widow keeps bothering me. I will see that she gets justice so she won't eventually wear me out with her coming.

And the Lord said, Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his own chosen ones who cry out to him day and night?

Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, says Jesus, he will see they get justice and quickly.

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

[8 : 44] The word of the Lord. Excellent. Thank you, Florence. Thanks be to Florence for, thanks be to God is the liturgical response I'm trying to get us to, as good Baptists to adopt.

Jesus often told his parables to larger groups of people. Almost like mini sermons or object lessons. But do you remember in looking at this passage so far, who Jesus' audience was for this particular parable?

The disciples. Pretty small group. This is an intimate moment of the rabbi, a teacher, communicating specific truth to a specific audience.

This message was directed at the disciples. And knowing that Jesus would send these people out to preach about the kingdom of God, there's likely something important to be found here, wouldn't you say?

Do you know what a spoiler is? Certain people do? It's when someone tells you, movie fans know, or TV fans, it's when someone tells you the ending of something.

[10 : 06] The ending of a book. The ending of something that you haven't read. The plot twist in a TV show or a movie that you haven't seen. Isn't that the worst? We may not always appreciate spoilers, right?

I know sometimes I don't. Connor will come and tell me something. I'm going, no, no, no, I don't want to know. I don't want to know. But we can recognize that even before this begins, even before Jesus tells this parable to the disciples, the text gives us a huge spoiler.

We're told in the text that this purpose of this parable, Jesus is about to tell his disciples is, quote, to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Gives it away right at the beginning. If you're familiar with this parable from the past, have you found it a bit confusing, perhaps? Have you perhaps considered the message to be, well, even if people are mean, keep pestering them until you get what you want?

Does that feel like how it's been interpreted by you before? Or maybe even, even if people are mean to you and won't listen, keep at it, and eventually maybe you'll wear them down.

[11 : 24] Is that what it has felt like to you? So then I'm glad, I'm so glad that spoiler in advance tells us that this parable is about prayer.

Most of us can probably recall situations in our lives when we've been reliant upon or dependent upon the decision of other people to change our circumstances, can't we?

We've been reliant upon Dr. Hinshaw and Premier Kenney to give us an idea of what comes next.

We've been reliant on the government to tell us how much taxes we have to pay.

We've been reliant on Pastor Kent to tell us what he's going to preach on Sunday morning. So we can recognize that often we need to rely on people in our circumstances.

And someone else being in a position of authority over us who controls our outcome somehow, and it's ultimately up to them to decide our fate.

[12 : 30] Does that drive you bananas? We ended up in, now don't panic, we ended up in emergency. Michelle and Emily went to emergency at the Misericordia.

You think Canada Day shouldn't be too bad, right? They went at 1 p.m. I picked them up from Emerge at 3.45 the next morning.

You want patience? You want perseverance? So we literally communicated back and forth and said anything? Any update? Any sign of anybody? Nope. And we just waited, right?

At moments patiently, at moments impatiently. But there's a perfect example of being at someone else's mercy to make the decision. And Michelle and I are both relatively stubborn.

So once you've spent five hours or six hours, it's kind of too late to go, eh, nah, I'm just going to go. And start over next time?

[13 : 30] So you recognize that in some situations in a line or things like that, you're waiting on someone else to make a decision that determines your fate. Perhaps the person has a vested interest in the outcome.

Perhaps the power or prestige they may gain in the process of controlling your fate. And it's factors like that that may be in the way of a decision going in our favor.

Or somehow for justice being served for us. And that's exactly what we see at play in this parable.

One of the main characters of this story is a widow.

And in the time when this story would have been told, we can recognize that widows were in perhaps one of the most vulnerable positions in society. If they had no one to provide for their needs, I mean, that doesn't even really wrap, we can't wrap our heads around that.

A widow would work nowadays, right? Or would look after herself and that's just common sense for us. But in that time, they wouldn't have that opportunity.

[14 : 43] They would be considered of lesser status in society. In fact, they would have had relatively little status. And when you combine that reality with the perspective and attitude that we see in the judge in this story, he's disinterested, right?

He's disengaged. He's not all that concerned with, as we read, either God or man. Circumstances would seem pretty bleak for that widow then, wouldn't they?

But despite the judge's indifference and despite her seemingly limited influence or power over her circumstances, we learn that the widow persevered.

She recognized where she needed to go for justice. She recognized the proper channels, right, to go to this judge. And she kept at it.

Through the example of the widow in this parable, Jesus was driving home a point to his disciples. And it's just as true and valid for us today.

[15 : 52] As the Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 5, 16-18, this will be quite familiar. Be joyful sometimes, always.

Give thanks. Only when things are going well? No. In all circumstances. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

The widow in our story had no one to represent her. No one to fight for her in the courts. She literally had to make her own case.

And despite a judge who seems largely indifferent, not motivated by much, except perhaps status, it's the widow's perseverance that changes her circumstances in the end.

She keeps at it. And this indifferent judge, this unjust judge, as we know the story, relents. So is Jesus saying then in this parable, we need to get pushy with God?

[17 : 09] That we need to whine and complain and keep bugging him until he gives in and we get what we want? I don't think so.

That sure sounds more like a selfish brat to me than a deserving child, right? I remember going to Sears. Sears isn't even a thing anymore.

When I was about seven or eight years old and begging my dad to buy me a Star Wars action figure. I begged him and begged and complained and whined and finally my dad relented and I still feel bad to this day.

This story is not telling us that God is not moved by our needs, that he's some sort of unjust, disinterested judge. He's not unaware of our challenging circumstances.

Do you remember in the parable a few weeks ago that we looked at, do you remember what Jesus said about how God cares for birds and flowers and how that relates to us?

[18 : 22] And as we learn from our passage this morning, this disinterested judge ultimately gives in to the persistent pleas of the widow for justice. My friends, do you think or do you sometimes feel like God is indifferent to your pain?

Indifferent to your circumstances? Do you think he needs to be pestered before he'll finally give in and come to your aid?

Give in and give you perhaps what you want? I think we can agree, I hope we can agree that this is not the nature of our God as we understand him.

Certainly not the picture that scripture paints for us. I want you to remember some key things about the Christian life that are emphasized in the parable that we've considered this morning.

First, pray without ceasing. Talk to God about your needs. Talk to him about your struggles, your pain, your disappointment.

[19 : 30] You can be mad with God, he can take it. He knows these things already, talk to him about them. Always praying means not being constantly on your knees, praying and you never do anything else, but it means having a perspective of prayer, a perspective of connection with God, with conversation with God.

I don't generally sit down and say, now I'm praying and now I'm not praying. I have a constant stream of conversation with God that happens out loud sometimes in my head and my heart other times.

A perspective of prayer, an attitude of prayer, means living every day before God believing that he will answer your prayer. Second, remember, God answers.

God responds to our requests, but, here's the caveat, according to his will, not ours.

According to his timing, not ours. If you're experiencing frustration with God, ask him to shed some light on where he's headed in your circumstances.

[20 : 55] perhaps he's trying to teach you something that you're not hearing because you're looking for the next thing.

As you may have heard this short story before, but a general will give, or a commander or a superior officer will give direction to someone.

And you don't get new directions until what? you've completed the task that you were given. So if God is not acting in your life or you feel that he's not acting, try and seek what he's working on in you or what he may be teaching you that you're not hearing.

It's a good thing to keep in mind. Friends, we're called to live by faith, trusting that God will show up. This is not something that we take lightly. God will show up. He will provide. As I've said before, I'm sure all of us have many examples of when our circumstances should not have played out the way they did, but God stepped in.

[22 : 08] God provided. Sometimes when we least expected it and often in ways that we didn't imagine. Third, and trust me on this one, it's God's will that we want in our lives, not our own.

Can you recognize that? I can give you lots of examples from my own life where I desperately wanted X and I got Y and said Y.

And yet now I can look back and say, if I got X, oh boy. Can you recognize that in your life? Have you ever asked God for something in a very specific way, with very specific parameters, specific timing, only to recognize that the way your circumstances played out according to God's will and God's timing were far better than what you had in mind?

God sure is good, isn't he? Friends, God may delay answering, or his answer may be different from the likely very specific way we've asked.

But if he delays answering or answers in a different way, we can trust that he holds our future, and ultimately it's God who knows what is best for us.

[23 : 46] So friends, persist in prayer. Persist in connecting with God. Recognize that we have a good, good father who will always fight for us.

He'll always provide for us in ways that we can never even begin to imagine according to his will at work in our lives.

Amen.