

The Parables of Jesus Lesson 13

The Parable of the Persistent Widow

In a world where justice often feels delayed and prayer can seem like it goes unheard, Jesus tells a story about a powerless widow and a corrupt judge. It's a parable not just about prayer, but about perseverance. It is about what faith looks like when heaven seems silent and the world seems unfair. Through this short yet powerful parable, Jesus invites us to keep trusting, keep praying, and not lose heart, because God is not like the unjust judge. He hears. He sees. And in His perfect timing, He will act.

The Text of the Parable

Luke 18:1-8 NIV when Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

⁴ "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

A Parable of Waiting

The key and main point in this parable is found in the first verse of Matthew 18: *"Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."* (Luke 18:1)

This parable addresses unresolved injustices, and Jesus tells this parable as a call to courage and perseverance, especially for those living in between the promise of the kingdom and its visible fulfillment. The central question that we are left pondering is how do we live faithfully and wait when justice feels delayed?

There are other scriptures that wrestle with these same questions:

Psalms 10:1 – "Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"

Psalms 13:1-2 – "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"

Historical and Literary Context

This parable follows Luke 17:20–37, where Jesus is asked by the Pharisees 'when the kingdom of God would come?' The Jews had an expectation that Messiah would come, set up his kingdom, defeat Israel's enemies, and bring in everlasting justice and righteousness. Jesus goes on to say what is most famously said in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew, of how life will continue on as normal until sudden destruction and judgment happens.

"As in the days of Noah the flood came and destroyed them all..." (Luke 17:26-27)

"Two women grinding at a mill... one will be taken, the other left..." (Luke 17:35)

(Interesting Side Note: An early Jewish apocalyptic text called the Apocalypse of Zephaniah (1st century BC/AD) features scenes where two people are walking, grinding, lying in bed, then suddenly separated at divine judgment. The imagery conveys sudden judgment and the urgency of preparedness. Jesus likely draws on familiar apocalyptic motifs to teach that God's justice will come swiftly, and one must be spiritually ready.)

Thus, what are the disciples to do in the meantime while they wait for God's justice and judgment? That is when Jesus tells this parable.

Exegesis of the Parable (Luke 18:1–8)

Characters

The Widow - Powerless yet persistent. She represents the faithful, prayerful people of God

The Judge - Corrupt, indifferent, unjust. He acts only to avoid trouble, not from righteousness

Verse-by-Verse Highlights

- v. 1: The point of the parable is stated, “keep praying, don’t lose heart”.
- vv. 2–5: A dramatic picture of an unjust judge giving in to the widow’s persistence.
- vv. 6–7: Jesus draws the contrast: How much more will God respond to His people who cry out day and night.
- v. 8: The challenge: When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth? Will we persist?

Key Themes

1. Persistence in Prayer: The widow does not stop asking for justice.
2. Contrast, Not Comparison: God is *not* like the unjust judge, He is better, quicker, and righteous.
3. Divine Justice: Jesus assures that God *will* bring justice, though it may seem delayed.

Principles from the Parable

The parable teaches timeless spiritual truths. In every generation God’s people live in tension between injustice and hope. For us the widow represents the Church in all ages, always called to pray persistently and trust in God’s justice. The unjust judge is a metaphor for the broken systems of the world, which contrast with God’s perfect justice. “Will He find faith?” is not just about one final moment, but about the ongoing spiritual readiness of believers to remain faithful when prayers go unanswered, and justice seems delayed.

The Parable of the Persistent Widow is not just about prayer, it's about trust in God's character, hope in His justice, and faithfulness in the face of silence.

Whether you are a first-century disciple awaiting the fall of Jerusalem, a modern believer awaiting Christ’s return, or a believer longing for God’s justice in a broken world, this parable calls us to:

- Keep praying
- Keep believing
- Keep standing for righteousness
- And don’t give up, because the Judge of all the earth will do what is right.