

I. Intro

A. About twenty-five years ago – on November 6th (I remember the date because it was my birthday) – I was involved in a car accident.

1. It was my fault. It was snowy. And I did not stop at a stop sign but at about 2 mph I slid about ten feet into an intersection where a woman – who was going about five miles an hour – slide into me. It was a slow motion event. We had plenty of time to look at each other and realize that we were going to collide before we did. She was pretty upset. I assured her that although she hit me this was my fault. The officer certainly agreed and hit me with a big fine.

2. There were other indignities. The worst being that Austin, who was three at the time, appointed himself guardian over Sheri's car. And for about the next month he insisted on going with me anytime I took Sheri's car – “the good car!” – to be sure I didn't wreck it also. And from his perch in the car seat in the back he would bark out orders about going slow and looking both ways not hitting other cars. He is lucky he survived to see four.

B. That was the worst part of the whole thing. But as I said, the officer gave me a big ticket and as he did he said, “If you go to court the judge will cut this way back.” Now, this is not a Chicago story, but I knew the judge. And I knew that I knew the judge, so I called him before the court date and said,

1. “I'm going to be in your court on Monday. Should I tell someone that we are friends? How does this work?”

2. He asked some questions about the accident and then told me that there was very standard protocol for things like this and in a small town where he knew lots of people it didn't work for him to recuse himself all the time. So told me to expect justice not mercy or grace. My ticket was reduced but not by as much as I was hoping.

C. Today – as we continue this series that I started in India a couple weeks ago (put on sunglasses) maybe this helps.

1. It was a long shoot because we could not find a quiet place for ten minutes. We set up to film at 8. What you saw was filmed around 11:30. We lost a couple hours because they wouldn't let us film at the site where Thomas was buried or anywhere near there. We got the run around for over an hour. But a bigger challenge was that we kept be interrupted by loud noises. At some point I put on my glasses.

2. Our son Ben, who does some work with tech, was one of those who got the video via email and he immediately sent back an email saying, “Dad, what’s with the Blues Brothers glasses? They make you look blind.”

3. On a more serious note, the trip was helpful. HBI is doing great work. It’s not yet clear exactly how we will partner with them. There are real challenges with the idea of helping with a Drop in Center for the children of the women who are being trafficked. Our Global Ministries team will keep working to get the right project. We will keep you posted.

D. Anyway, I briefly introduced the series from Chennai. Today we take another step into this series on the Kingdom of God – which is a heady concept but we are keeping it simple. A kingdom is where a king’s rules are honored. The Kingdom of God is where God’s values, ethics, heart, grace is on display because the people embracing it have yielded themselves fully to him.

E. And it involves a story Jesus tells (a parable, a little story with a big point). And this parable touches on prayer and justice and widows and persistence.

II. Let me read Luke 18:1-8

A. Then 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.’

B. 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!’”

C. 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?”

III. So there are a few things to see here in order to grasp the point of this parable.

A. Some things are obvious. There are two very dissimilar characters: a man and a woman; he has power and she does not; we are looking on at a clash between money and poverty, humility and arrogance.

B. There are other details perhaps a bit less obvious at first. For instance, this story is the capstone of a series of parables that Jesus has been telling. (Parables such as some of the more famous one (lost coin, lost sheep, prodigal son) that are only recorded in Luke. This particular one follows a Q and A session with Jesus in which the disciples had asked him about the end. How is this going to end? When is the Kingdom coming? When will He return with power. It's a pretty heavy, occasionally dark and foreboding section, and it ends with this parable. We need to factor that in. We need to pay attention not just to what Jesus says, but ask ourselves, "Why this story now?"

C. Secondly, we should also note that Jesus has set up a pretty extreme situation here. It's bad.

1. The widow has been wronged twice – she is not asking for special consideration, she just wants justice and she is not getting it. So, she was wronged by someone and then wronged by the judge.

2. The fact that she goes to court alone in that culture – without a husband, son, brother, nephew, male friend of some sort to help plead her case – is bad. It shouldn't be. There were all kinds of mandates to care for widows in both the Old and New Testament.

a) Exodus 22:22-24 reads: ²²"Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. ²³If you do and they cry out to me," it will be trouble.

b) Isaiah 1:17 reads ¹⁷Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

c) James 1:27, saying: Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

3. Things should have been OK for her but they were not. A woman in that culture at that time had almost no rights or regard. It was uncommon for her to have no property or vote. And if her husband died, she was often unable to retain the family money or home or possessions. They would go to his brothers. She would then become one of his wives until the money was spent and then she and her kids were often out on the street.

a) This still goes on today. One of the women you helped support years ago through Scholar Leaders, is Rose Galedima, who did her PhD dissertation on how to stop this practice in Nigeria today and then went back there to fight this.

4. So her situation is bad. Jesus has set up a situation in which she is a stand in for those who are poor, helpless, deprived, uncared for, oppressed.

- D. Third, no one is expecting that she is going to get a fair trial.
1. She has no rights, nor does she have the money to bribe the judge or power to threaten him. And that is usually how it worked.
 2. The judges were notoriously corrupt. At that time there were three different levels of courts
 - a) You had the Sanhedrin – 71 judges who were experts on the Old Testament and oral tradition. They were oppressive and politically ambitious and unjust. This is the group that engineered the conspiracy that leads to Jesus's crucifixion.
 - b) Under them there was “the lesser Sanhedrin.” Every large city had a 23-judge council – largely shaped by the doctrine of the Pharisees and the politics of the Sadducees. You might remember all the crazy interpretations of the Sabbath laws.
 - c) In addition to these two you, Rome had also set up a number of judges who looked after criminal matters on behalf of Caesar. These were the worst because they were Gentiles and didn’t really care about the Jews. They were called the Prohibition Judges. But in Aramaic if you change one letter you get Robber Judges. And that is where this woman likely where she fell.
 3. And on top of that we are told that this particular judge did not – fear God or respect man. Which is a description of a bad judge. He is a law unto himself. In his courtroom he is King. He sits on a throne and renders verdicts, deciding whatever is convenient for him. Jesus calls him the “unjust judge.” He’s bad.
- E. The situation is bad and yet, she prevails. How? She wears him down with her persistence. Some translation have him saying, “She’s beating me up.” Others say, “She’s blackening my eye.” The term that is used here is a Greek boxing term.¹ You get the idea he comes out of his house in the morning to go to work, there she is.
1. “Good morning, Judge. I’m going to walk to work with you so we can talk about my case, the one where you haven’t given me justice. Let’s review the facts.”
 2. He comes out for a lunch break, “Hey Judge, let’s pick up that conversation about my case.”
 3. On the way home, “Hey Judge, good to see you again.”

¹ The Greek term *hup piaz* means to strike someone with a full blow just below the eye.

4. And she's talking to him about the case in front of his family, friends, coworkers, and colleagues. "You know, you haven't gotten me justice. You know it's wrong. You know what was done to me is wrong. How come you haven't done anything about it? You're supposed to be a judge." And at the end of every day she says, "see you first thing in the morning."

5. And eventually he taps out. He says, "I give. You win." He has no fear of God, but he's afraid of this woman. It's a pretty sweet story. Sheri loves the stories where some young punk tries to steal a purse from some 80 year old and she smacks him down with her cane. This has a bit of that in it.

IV. So, what is the take-away? Why does Jesus tell this story? What am I supposed to learn or do in light of what Jesus says here?

A. Well, one of the first questions to ask in a parable is, "Who am I? Which of the characters in the story am I? Am I the younger brother or the older brother? Am I the person beat up on the side of the road, the religious leader who doesn't help or the Samaritan who does? Am I the judge or the widow?"

1. Perhaps a better way to frame the question here is, in what ways am I like the judge? We often see ourselves as victims. We tend to see others' sin against us more clearly and quickly than we see our sin against others. How am I like the judge?

2. How am I misusing the power that is mine because I am rich or educated or – in this culture – white, or I have power because of my title? Am I using the resources that are mine to help others? Or am I like the judge?

3. Do I fear God and respect others, or am I like the judge?

4. Who could you be helping but you're not? Who could you be serving but you're not? Who could you be defending but you're not?

5. Does your schedule reveal a real care for people? Does your budget reveal a real care for people?

B. I think that is a profitable line of questioning. And I would encourage it.

V. But it is not the point of the parable.

A. Some parables we have to figure out. Not this one. We are told what this parable is about. Luke 18 opens with this line: "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."

B. This is a call to prayer, and it is a call to prayer in the face of chaos. Just before Jesus told this story he had been talking about suffering and trials and hardships. And then he tells this story – which says, “don’t lost heart. Keep praying.”

C. And the contrast between God and the judge is set up to say, “after all, if that no-good loser, if that self-centered, arrogant, wind-bag who only cares for himself will eventually do what you ask, how much more can we expect from a good and loving God.”

VI. Over the last few months I have been working on the fall series.

A. The sermons are going to be out of the first six chapters of Daniel, where Daniel and his friends navigate life in a land where they have no power and very little influence. I started re-reading Daniel a couple years ago because it feels to me like the church has lost home court advantage. We are not being persecuted, but we are losing some of the benefits that we had for hundreds of years. And so I have wanted to see how Daniel and his comrades lived faithfully.

B. But the book is very different. I am writing the book as a soft evangelistic work for you to give to your friends, and it asks, what is coming our way and how will I best navigate the future. And so I have been reading about the future. Not the second half of Daniel or the Book of Revelation but demographic projections an tech reviews and political forecasts and the works of various futurists and think tanks.

1. I’ve never done this before. Partly because whenever I started I ran across some article where someone says, “We’re going to download our soul onto ten floppy drives and live forever.” And I think, “No we’re not. That comment reflects no understanding of what it means to be a human.”

2. It’s been a fascinating six months of reading. Some of the things in the pipeline are cool. But there are some storm clouds on the horizon. I am not losing sleep over them because God is in control. I know how this all ends. But I think we are going to face some hard times.

C. This parable was written to tell us how to navigate the challenges. And the statement is, pray!

VII. Some of you are thinking, “I’ve tried but he doesn’t answer. It doesn’t work. Yes it does. Keep trying.

A. I am not saying he is going to do what you ask. But here is the promise. He hears and then, as the loving, all powerful one, He does what is best.

B. And the very act of prayer keeps us in the right posture to receive whatever that answer is.

- C. I am not going to promise you that it will be easy.
- D. I am not going to promise you that his timing will match your hopes.
- E. But he hears. In I John 5:14 – 15 we read: ¹⁴This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

VIII. Don't overthink this.

- A. Prayer doesn't have to be long; it doesn't have to be formal; it doesn't have to be eloquent. Talk to God.
- B. Let me remind you of the ACTS model.
- C. Let me remind you of the ongoing 10 & 10 Challenge
- D. Let me remind you that everyweek before the service starts at all three campuses there are groups that gather to pray and you are invited.
- E. Let me remind you that after every service there are people up front waiting to pray with you
- F. Let me encourage you to keep prayer a regular part of your small group. Be praying for each other and keep a list so you can see how God does answer.
- G. The big idea here is that persistence in prayer is a holy, virtuous, noble, good thing. Bring your requests to God; bring your family before God; bring your friends and your concerns and your fears before God.

IX. Pray / Transition to Communion.

- A. In the parable Jesus told the judge was cruel and heartless. The God we pray to is not. And one of the principle ways we know this is that he did not hold back, but sent his Son.