

PARABLE OF THE WIDOW AND THE JUDGE

The parable of the Judge and the Widow is about persistence in prayer. It's a parable of exhortation telling us how to pray when faced with hopeless situations. We are not told how many times the widow came to the judge nor how long it took to get what she wanted. But her persistence is mentioned three times in the parable: (1) 'and she kept coming to him saying' (Luke 18:3), (2) 'because this widow bothers me' (18:5), and (3) 'lest she give me a black eye by coming forever' (18:5).

Outline

Luke's Introduction (18:1)
The Parable Proper (18:2-5)
Our Lord's Application of the Parable (18:6-8)

Cast of Characters

In this parable the persistent widow represents believers who are persistent in prayer: "His elect who cry to Him day and night" (Luke 18:7). The unjust judge, however, does not represent God, because God is a Just Judge! The two are direct opposites; they're contrasted, not compared.

An *A Fortiori* Argument

This contrast between an unjust judge and a righteous God sets up what's called in logic an *a fortiori* argument. The rabbis called it *qal wahomer* ("from the light to the heavy"). What is an *a fortiori* argument? Let me illustrate. If a man can do 100 push-ups, it follows that he can do 50 push-ups. If he can do the harder, he can certainly do the easier. But the reverse is not true. If he can do 50 push-ups, he may not be able to do 100. Doing the easier does not guarantee he can do the harder.

Point of the Parable

Now, by applying this logic to our parable we

discover the core principle or teaching: If a widow can obtain justice from an unjust judge who doesn't care, how much more can we obtain justice from a Just Judge who cares? If persistence pays off with an unjust judge, how much more will it pay off with God in prayer? God cares about us and desires our requests, the unjust judge does not. Archbishop Trench puts it this way: "If a bad man will yield to the mere force of the importunity which he hates, how much more certainly will a righteous God be prevailed on by the faithful prayer which he loves" (*Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, 177).



The woman is in an apparently hopeless situation. She is a woman in a man's world, a widow without money or powerful friends. The judge cannot be appealed to out of duty to God, and no human being can make him ashamed of any evil act he may perpetrate on the innocent. Yet this woman not only gets a hearing but has the case settled in her favor. Taken with its introduction the main thrust is clearly persistence in prayer. If this woman's needs are met, how much more the needs of the pious who pray not to a harsh judge but to a loving Father.

However discouraged and hopeless their situation may seem to be, it is not as bad as that of this widow. They can rest assured that their petitions are heard and acted upon. When fear grips the heart the believer is challenged to pray, and to pray continually in the face of all discouragements with full confidence that God will act in his best interests (Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 136-137).

Lessons for Living

1. *God usually doesn't answer prayers right away.*

We learn this quickly from experience. Sometimes it seems like God takes forever to answer the simplest prayers. Most of us are impatient: we want things and we want them now! We

don't like to wait. Wouldn't it be nice to receive answers to prayers immediately as soon as we pray? To pray just once and get an instant response? It would certainly take all the work out of praying. But God doesn't seem to work that way, at least not very often. Usually we're surprised when God answers our prayers quickly.

2. Too often, when our prayers are not answered immediately, or soon, we get discouraged, give up, and quit praying altogether.

We pray a few times, and then start thinking, "What's the use? God isn't listening. He's not going to answer. He's too slow!" We get tired of waiting and begin accusing Him of slowness. It's natural—and we're all guilty.

3. Prayer demands persistence and patience.

We have to learn how to wait...to wait on God's timing. "Wait for the Lord; Be strong, and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord" (Psalm 27:14). God answers prayer according to His desires in His own time, not according to our desires, timing, or persistence.

4. God is able to answer prayers immediately the first time we ask.

Why doesn't He, then? Obviously, He chooses not to! It's a matter of choice, not inability. I can think of three reasons why God refuses to answer most prayers right away. The first is to keep us from thinking that He is our servant, that we can control Him, that we can use Him to carry out our will, that we can make wishes and receive them by rubbing the Genie. God is not our servant; we're His servants. It's the other way around. The second is to show us how dependent we are on Him for answers. We're helpless. We're beggars. We can't provide the answers. So He show us clearly who's Boss. And the third is to make us more appreciative of His help. If God gave us everything on demand we'd soon take Him for granted. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. When forced to wait, we tend to appreciate things more.

5. Don't quit praying when your prayers aren't answered quickly.

God wants us to pray at all times and not lose

heart (Luke 18:1). The widow never gave up. Had she not persisted, had she given up too soon, she would not have obtained her request. A line from Petula Clark's popular song from the '60s expresses it well: "Don't give up, don't let it get you down!"

6. Keep praying until you get an answer or until the problem resolves itself...no matter how long it takes!

Recognize that your prayers may not be answered right away. Don't pray once and wait for an answer. Be repetitious! Repeat the same prayer over and over until God answers. He may answer immediately, or within a week, or a month, or a year, or many years. Jesus could have received twelve legions of angels immediately (Matt. 26:53). Paul got an answer to his thorn-in-the-flesh prayer after three tries (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Jeremiah prayed for divine guidance and received an answer after ten days (Jer. 42:7). Nehemiah prayed to return to Jerusalem for four months before God answered his prayer (Neh. 1:4). And Isaac prayed for a child for twenty years before Rebekah gave birth to twins (Gen. 25:21)! Sometimes prayers are answered immediately, sometimes it takes years. God has a right to answer them when He wants. Our job is to be persistent...and patient.

7. Don't keep persisting after God says "No!"

If God's answer is "No," stop praying. If His answer is "Wait," keep praying. If His answer is "Yes," there's no further need to pray—just thank Him. Don't keep persisting until God gives in; that's asking for His permissive will. He may give it to you to teach you a lesson, that He knows what's best for you, that you just think you know. Believe me, you don't want His permissive will!

8. Your prayers may not be answered because you weren't persistent.

You gave up too soon. James says, "You do not have because you do not ask" (4:2). To this I'd like to add, "You do not have because you weren't persistent." To repeat the teaching of our parable once again: had the widow not been persistent, had she given up too soon, she would not have received her request.