

# Jesus Stories VII: The One About The Annoying Lady

Reconnect – September 6, 2009

**Text:** Luke 18:1-8; Philippians 4:6-7

**Key Thought:** Don't give up on God – keep praying, keep trusting, keep following Him.

Jesus said, One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. "There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, 'Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.' The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, 'I don't fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!'" Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?" Luke 18:1-8, NLT

## Pre-Intro: Squidward persistence

### Intro: Calling 911

- Tell the story of Friday night and the kids getting to check out the fire truck with the firefighters – great time had by all, great people, admire what they do (tell stories – “not much on religion” – “you do God's work every time you go out”
- Got me thinking about 911 – they are “first responders” – meaning that for every 911 call, whether it's a multi-vehicle pileup or a cat up a tree, they are the first responders, and that means they have to be as fast as possible
- When you call 911, they are immediately dispatched to get to you as fast as they safely can – why?
- Why do they need to be so quick? Because they don't know what they're getting into – the unknown – you might think a situation is under control, but they won't know until they get there, so they get to you ASAP – they just don't know

### 911 and prayer

- So many times we expect praying to be like calling 911 – that God needs to come rushing to the scene as a first responder every time we get into a panic
- And then we're disappointed when he doesn't – “where is God?” we wonder – “how come he doesn't love me enough to come to my rescue quickly?” – “how come he hasn't fixed my situation yet?”
- It makes us want to keep calling – maybe there's a busy signal – maybe we can't find the “eleven” button in our prayers (you know... 9-11?) – maybe we have a bad connection
- But the difference between God and the fire department... is that God already knows what's going on he sees the bigger picture – and that can sometimes affect his timing
- Which of course, makes us want to just keep calling until someone comes – police, fire, ambulance, bylaw, city worker, welcome wagon... God
- And it was to people just like you and I – hurried, worried, busy, distracted, frustrated people – to whom Jesus told this story:

## Read text: Luke 18:1-8

**One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.**

- We're going to come back to this – but this is a rare time in a parable where Luke introduces it with the reason it was told – he gives the interpretation before the story – let's keep that in mind

**“There was a judge in a certain city,” he said, “who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, ‘Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.’**

- The judge:
  - “neither feared God nor cared about people” – Jesus said that the heart of following God is to love God and love your neighbour – this judge is 0 for 2 in that, and he's supposed to be an example to his village or town of wisdom, doing the right thing, living right – what's up there???
  - How do you get to be a judge? Political favour? Wealth? Noble birth? Then as now... it's not about what you know or who you are, but too often who you know and what you seem to be
- The widow:
  - We likely think of her as being an old lady, but she could be just about any adult age
  - She was married, and her husband died – perhaps she's from a different region originally – and now she's alone
  - She has no resources – she's clearly on her own, and she doesn't even have any (male) relatives to represent her to the judge – she is all she's got – and she has no rights other than what is laid out in the Law, other than what this judge has the power to enforce for her
  - She can't go get a job – her one way to go forward is to remarry, and barring that, to try to find a useful place in society – but something is getting in the way of her living her life – some sort of injustice
  - (Luke choosing this parable of Jesus is one more chance for him to talk about the poor and dispossessed and disenfranchised – the widow, the orphan, the foreigner – and how Jesus has great care and concern for them, just as God does throughout the pages of the Bible)
- “repeatedly” – she asked and asked and asked and asked and asked and asked and asked – annoying! (which is why I played the lego animation – because I realized, as I watched it, just how annoying it was – and how can we hear this story and “get involved” in it without being annoyed???)

**The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, ‘ I don’t fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!’“**

- Relationship between them: She’s a nuisance, a nobody – “quit wasting my time”
- Players to look at: judge, widow, their relationship – as well as what brings them into this in the first place – perhaps she is a landowner who can’t deal with her tenants anymore – maybe they won’t pay the rent anymore – or perhaps she is being cheated or has been cheated – whatever it is, it’s all she has – it’s life and death to her, and nothing to this judge – it’s likely about money – she’s likely being defrauded
- “wearing me out” – literally, “giving me two black eyes” – “I’m taking a beating here”
- It’s what you do when it’s all you have – like our kids ask us for what they want, over and over again, like a dog on a bone – “can we get a puppy?” – or if you’re like my son, you’re a little more slick: “so, when are we getting a puppy?”, or “can we get a doggy tomorrow?”
- How many times did she talk to him, or appear before him? How many tongues were wagging? (he didn’t care) How much effort did she put in to getting what she wanted? Did she put the rest of her life on hold for it? And how did she celebrate when she was done? Who knows – it’s not in the story
- But she is successful – the only tactic she has, the only card in her hand to play, works – she gets justice over her adversary

**Then the Lord said, “Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?”**

- Even a broken clock is right twice a day – but God is not a broken clock
- It’s another *a fortiori* argument – from the lesser to the greater – God is not like the unjust judge (he’s much better), we are not like the widow (we have a much deeper relationship with God and greater worth in his eyes than the widow does to the judge in the story)
- “justice” – every right made wrong, every suffering alleviated, every tear wiped away – that’s what the end of time will be like, for those who have invited God into the centre of their lives, for those who have followed Jesus through thick and thin
- “when the Son of Man returns” – when Jesus comes back to close out the world – because there will one day be an end, whether we see it or not – one day all of this will come to an end, and God will pull down the curtain – and each of us has to be sure that we are continuing in “THE faith”
- “how many will he find on the earth who have faith” – literally, “THE faith” – how many will still be following God, still praying, still crying out for the right thing to happen, for justice to be done?

## One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.

- “never give up” is literally, “not to lose heart” (*mē engkakein*)
- It’s not JUST about the act of praying, as if “persevering in prayer” is like digging a hole in the backyard (even if sometimes it does feel like that)
- It’s NOT “never give up” on praying... as if praying was a mechanical exercise, or putting loonies in a vending machine, or about finding the right phrase or “putting enough time into it” – praying without God is just talking to yourself!
- It’s “never give up” on GOD – on trusting Him, on remembering His love and His care in the past, on believing that He is strong enough and great enough to make the difference in any situation.

## Praying and not giving up

- Have you ever been there? Where you felt like God WAS the unjust judge? Where no matter how hard you prayed about something, it didn’t happen?
- Peterson, Tell It Slant – “Most people, maybe all, at one time or another, pray. And many – who knows how many? – quit. And why shouldn’t they? If they don’t get what they ask for, if they don’t get what they think of as an “answer,” why keep at it? The remarkable thing about prayer is not that so many people pray, but that some of us keep at it. Why do we keep at it? Why do we keep praying when we have so little to show for it? Anyone who has made a practice of prayer knows the feeling, overwhelming sometimes, that prayer is a leaky bucket. You go to the river to get a pail of water and by the time you get home the water is gone, the bucket empty, and all there is left to show for your effort is a damp trail soon to be wiped out by the sun.” (125)
- Prayer is difficult to understand – because sometimes we don’t get the answer we want – sometimes things don’t happen the way we wanted them to – and then we think that God has either forgotten us or doesn’t really care
- I’ve prayed about girlfriends (not recently), I’ve prayed about jobs, I’ve prayed about money – a LOT
- This is called a **wordle** – you can do these yourself with any text you find on wordle.net – and what it does is track frequency of usage (!)
- This next slide is a wordle of my talk this morning – neat, eh?
- But then it also seems, based on my experience and based on the lives of people over the last 2000 years who have followed God, that there are some things that God wants us to really “go after him” for – and that he uses that process, that “delayed gratification”, to grow this faith, “THE faith” in us
- Ill. – “I heard it on the John Tesh Radio Show” – he was on one night this week while I was going out to the grocery store, talking about the kinds of teens who end up succeeding – it was a study that was done by some university – they would put kid after kid in a room alone with all kinds of candy, tell the child not to have any candy until the researcher came back and told them they could – and then, of course, they filmed what the child did while they left them there to wait
- Would the child take the candy before they were supposed to, or would they be able to wait until they received permission?

- They then did a follow-up survey years later to see how successful the children had been – and they found a link between success and the children who had been able to wait to take the candy with permission
- Tesh then went on to say that it was about “patience and self-control” – that they were qualities that we should look to develop in our teens and in ourselves – and that delayed gratification – i.e. not giving your kids everything they want, right away, as soon as they demand it – was one of the keys to developing those qualities
- What’s remarkable is that phrase “patience and self-control” – Tesh is a Christian, with a huge national platform to teach our North American society – for about 30 hours a week! – and “patience and self-control” are two of the nine “fruit of the Spirit” that Paul mentions in Galatians 5 – evidences that God is at work in a person’s life, changing them (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control)
- God sometimes wants to use our dialogue with him in prayer to bring about patience and self-control – patience to trust that He will act in His timing, and self-control, to be able to live in a faithful way in the meantime, without going out and trying another way to get what you want – without “giving up”
- Sometimes it’s his great love for us that says “no” to our requests – from “God, please make that girl like me”, to “God, I really need this job”, to “God, why can’t you make my life like THEIRS?”
- And other times he wants to grow us - because anyone who’s ever seen a spoiled kid before knows how off-putting that is to see – it’s all fine and good for us to be spoiled ourselves, somehow, but it seems that we recognize it better in others for what it is – repulsive and revolting – and God is interested in “raising us right” in patience and self-control and all the rest, rather than letting us grow up spoiled, selfish and self-indulgent
- Peterson, Tell It Slant – “That is why we keep praying and do not lose heart. We do it because we know that God is everything that the evil judge is not. We know that neither silence nor absence is evidence of contempt or indifference.” (128)

### **Key Thought:**

**Don’t give up on God – keep praying, keep trusting, keep following Him.**

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7, NLT

## **Conclusion: praying for our kids**

### **Hope, Conor, ? – the long view in mind**

- This parable is really about God – about his great love for us, the way he sees us, his big view of things
- Ill. – praying for a child (Hope) – when I couldn't pray anymore – God sent other people along to pray for me, to pray instead of me
- Making up our mind about #2 (Conor) – again, what to do, and what was the answer?
- But prayer is more than just requests – and while you're glad your kids ask YOU for things and not your neighbours (because if they do, then they're in trouble), you treasure the times as your kids are growing up that they just want to talk – without asking – just to share their life with you, and yours with them – and that, after all, is what God is looking for – for us to let him in, more than convince him of the rightness or wrongness of something – after all, he already has that all figured out

### **Response: Amazing Love (song)**

- A reminder of the character of Jesus, and the love of God, and how we can trust him now and in the future based on who He is and what He's already done