

5. The Parable of the Tenacious Widow

(Luke 18:1–8)

As we *Journey through the Parables*, we are finding deeper meanings in the lovely, simple stories that Christ uses to open our understanding to the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. Today we come to *The Parable of the Tenacious Widow*, which is also sometimes known as *The Parable of the Unjust Judge*.

A widow is a woman whose husband has died, and the Bible talks about them a lot. As far back as the Code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest legal systems we can find, there were laws about taking care of “the widows, the orphans and the poor” because those were the people who really needed protection. You see, the idea back then was that each man had a household, which included his wife and children. The man was supposed to protect and take care of the family. But if he died, leaving his wife a widow and his children orphans, then they didn’t have someone to protect and take care of them. They often became poor and hungry. The phrase, the widows, the orphans and the poor, is a listing of the people who might starve or die without someone’s protection and help. Throughout the Bible, God and His prophets and our Lord Jesus always remind us to take care of the widows, orphans and the poor. We should defend anyone who is defenseless; we should be kind to people who need kindness, instead of thinking that their troubles aren’t our problem.

You might remember that back in Bible times, many people believed that if a couple did not have children, God was somehow unhappy with them. They understood that babies are a blessing, and when God didn’t bless them, they thought it meant that there was something wrong with them. (Now of course, we understand that these are actually medical questions and not spiritual questions, but they didn’t understand at the time.) In the same way, they thought that having a long life was a blessing from God, so when a woman’s husband died, it was the opposite of a blessing! They figured that God must be showing some kind of judgement against her if He would send her such misfortune. Among some hard-hearted people, that meant that they didn’t like the widows. They avoided them and other poor people as well, and they didn’t want to talk to them or take care of them.

Jesus was always spending time with the sort of people that everyone else avoided! He ate with the tax collectors and the sinners, and He loved the widows and orphans and other poor people. There are many stories in which Jesus will heal a widow, or bless her or praise her for being a good example. To God, every human being is loved and important, whether they are rich or poor. In this parable, Jesus will offer us a good widow as our role model, our example to follow.

In the title of this parable, this widow is called “tenacious”. What does that mean? Well, it means that she can hold on! Someone who is tenacious keeps arguing or asking or insisting, no matter what you say to them. Tenacious people will not give up! They’re persistent and determined. This widow was tenacious.

We often have to wait until the end to understand what Jesus wants us to learn from a parable, but this time, St. Luke tells the meaning of the parable right at the beginning: “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying [...]” Jesus is going to tell a story that will help us remember that we should always be praying, and never give up on praying! His message will be about being tenacious in our prayer life.

Jesus begins the parable with, “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.” What sort of person does He mean?

- What does it mean to “fear God”? In the Bible we read that we should love God with all our hearts, but we also read things like: “O fear the Lord, all ye His saints; for there is no want to them that fear Him.” (Psalm 33:9) It seems that fear of God is a good thing! The Saints explain it like this: at first, people do the right thing because they’re afraid that God will punish them if they don’t. They have fear of God’s punishment. Later, as they continue doing the right thing, they grow closer to God and love Him more and more every day. Then they start doing the right thing because they love God and they want to please Him and they want to stay close to Him. So we can do good things because we fear God and His punishment, or we might do good things because we fear that sinful actions will separate us from our beloved God. Most of us will feel both of these kinds of fear with our parents: we might fear getting in trouble for doing bad things, but we might also fear getting separated from them because we love them and want them to keep taking care of us.
- What does it mean to say someone does not “regard man”? To show “regard” for a man would mean showing that you care what happens to them, and that you want to show them respect and maybe even love.

This judge didn’t do any of that. He didn’t really care what God thought about his actions, and he didn’t care what people thought or whether he hurt them. Can you imagine having someone like that as your judge? He must have been awful.

Jesus continues,

Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’ ”

Someone, an adversary, is giving the poor widow trouble. She cannot protect herself from this person, so she needs the judge to protect her. Unfortunately, he’s a bad judge who doesn’t care about God or about people, so he really doesn’t care to help her. But she keeps asking, and eventually the judge decides to help her. He didn’t become merciful and loving, and he didn’t help her because he cared what she thought. He still didn’t care what God thought. He helped her because she was annoying. He wanted her to leave him alone and stop asking! He helped the widow so that she would go away. This was pretty smart of the widow! Because she kept asking and asking, he finally helped her.

Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.”

Jesus points out that if an unjust judge like this man will give in and help a widow because she keeps asking, won't God be at least as good to His beloved people? God is our judge, and we're lucky because He's not awful like that man. He loves every single one of us, and wants us to be well. What's more, He knows everything! Because God knows our hearts and loves us, He judges us fairly. Jesus asks, if such a bad judge even helped that widow, won't our very good and loving judge help us too?

But Jesus' last line is a bit strange. He says that God will take care of us if we are tenacious like this widow. If we hold on, and keep praying, and keep trying, God will not forget us, but He will take care of us! But then He says: “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” Wow. Jesus is talking about when He comes back, at the end of days. When the end of time comes and Jesus comes back in glory to judge the living and the dead, and to establish true paradise right there on earth -- *will He find any faith on earth?*

Perhaps Jesus is talking about us! We don't know when the end of days will come; no one knows when Jesus will come again. What if it's tomorrow? Will He find people of faith on earth? We should always be ready for Jesus to come back; like the ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom, we are supposed to be getting ready. Is that hard or easy? People have been waiting for Jesus for a long time! The apostles waited all their lives, because they thought He would be back soon. But He didn't come back. We are still waiting for Him. Maybe it's hard for people to stay faithful while they wait!

When we think of this widow, who is a good example to us, we see that she holds on. She doesn't give up, even when it seems like that judge is never going to say yes! She just keeps trying and trying. Remember that St. Luke told us, “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart”. Even if we are praying and it doesn't seem like God is listening, or if we are waiting for Jesus and it doesn't feel like He is coming, we should be like this widow. We should persist in praying and in hoping!

If the tenacious widow kept asking and asking the judge for help even though she knew that he was unjust and didn't care, how much more should we keep asking God for help? We know that God is just and kind, and that He cares for us so much and wants only what is best for us. He always provides what we need when we need it. When we ask Him to care for us, it shows that we know He is our provider and that we need His help. Asking helps us to stay humble, because it reminds us that we are not the ones making the good things happen in our lives: God is doing that. When we ask God again and again, it shows Him that we are truly trusting His care for us and that we want what He wants for our lives.

So let's keep asking! May we never stop.

Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear! Let's hear and understand!

QUESTIONS:

What is a widow, and why is it important that we know the woman in this parable was a widow?

- *A widow is a woman whose husband has died. In Bible times, there were laws about taking care of people like widows who did not have a man to protect them and care for them. So the woman in the parable did not have anyone to keep her safe and provide for her needs.*

Why do we call the widow in this parable “tenacious”?

- *“Tenacious” means that she could hold on! She kept arguing, asking, and insisting, without giving up! She was persistent and determined.*

Why does Jesus tell this parable? What does He want us to learn from it?

- *St. Luke tells us why, before he even shares the parable that Jesus told. He says that Jesus told this parable so that “men always ought to pray and not lose heart”. So it helps us to learn that if we are praying and it doesn’t seem like God is listening, or if we are waiting for Jesus and it doesn’t feel like He is coming, we should be like this widow and keep praying and hoping!*

FOR DISCUSSION:

Have you ever tenaciously asked and asked for something? Tell what you asked for. What was the answer that you got? Have you ever practiced and practiced something? What did you practice? Did your tenacity with your practice pay off? What good thing came from all of that practice? How is asking God again and again for help and/or trusting Him the same as asking for the thing that you asked for or practicing for the thing you were practicing? How is it different? When is it most important to be tenacious?