

The Parable of the Unjust Judge

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[0 : 00] Hello everyone, and welcome to the next installment of the Parables of Jesus. Today's parable is all about justice and injustice and what God is going to do about it, and what He wants us to do about it as His people.

Well, I wonder what your response is to injustice. When you see something that's unfair and not right, what is your response to it? How do you feel about it? There's certainly a lot of injustice going on in the world at the moment.

There's this huge response to what happened in America. In South Africa, we've got riots, and here in Cape Town, a huge movement to get justice for land distribution and housing and service delivery.

I remember once being outraged when there were some street children that were digging in a bin. I just couldn't handle it, and I bought them some food, and then their boss, one of the big boys, came along with a big stick and beat them up and took all their food.

I was so angry. And when we see these things, how do we respond? What actions do we take? And what does God say in His Word? How does He want us to respond?

[1 : 06] Well, today's parable is going to help us understand how we should respond to injustice and how God responds to injustice. Well, let's take a closer look at the parable together to see what Jesus is talking about.

So firstly, we come across the unjust judge. Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said, In a certain town, there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men.

And in the ancient world, it was rife with this kind of judge. They were put in positions, especially by the Romans, and all they really were there to do was to gather bribes and pay off their master that would have put them in that place initially.

And so we've got an unjust judge who doesn't care about God and certainly doesn't care about people. And then there's the widow, someone from the totally other end of the social spectrum. There's a huge power gap between this judge and a widow. A widow in the ancient world had very little rights. If she was sent back to her family after her husband died, they would have to pay back the dowry.

[2 : 15] The estate wouldn't have fallen to her. It would have fallen to her children. And sometimes they were sold into slavery just to make ends meet. And so you've got this widow. And not only that, she's being oppressed by her own adversary.

It says this, There was a widow in that town who kept coming to him, to the judge, with the plea, Grant me justice against my adversary. So she's in a real strait and she needs help.

She needs someone who's going to help her fight this person who wants something from her.

Probably money or land or maybe something a bit more sinister. Maybe he wants her himself and he's not going to give up until he gets what he wants out of her.

And she needs help. She's defenseless. And she needs someone to take up her cause to help her fight off this person who is trying to do her harm. And then part of the parable highlights her endurance.

She doesn't give up when she needs help. It says this, There was a widow and she kept coming to him with the plea, Grant me justice against my adversary.

[3 : 17] And for some time he refused. But finally the judge says to himself, Even though I don't fear God or care about men, Yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice.

So that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming. She wasn't going to stay silent. She wasn't going to allow no for an answer.

She was going to keep pressing and keep pushing and keep bothering this judge. In fact, in one sense he almost got scared. The Greek behind, you know, he says, Will she wear me out or tie me out?

It's actually, Will she give me a black eye? And that's how strongly she feels about her case for this judge. And eventually he just gives in because she doesn't stop badgering him and coming to him for help.

And that brings us to the fourth element, which is about justice. And the word justice is scattered throughout the whole text. There was a judge.

[4 : 13] This woman wants justice. Her adversary in the Greek is an anti-just person. It's someone who wants to do harm. And eventually the judge says he needs to give her justice.

He needs to give her the right thing. He needs to defend her cause. And Jesus himself says it's about justice. He says this, Listen to what the unjust judge says. 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? I tell you, he will see that they get justice and quickly. So this parable, although it starts off by telling us what it seems to be about, that first verse is a bit of a throw-off actually, where it says Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

The parable is not actually about prayer and about giving up. Those are actually applications of the parable. The parable is actually about God and his response to injustice and the fact that God will bring about justice for his people.

At the end of the parable, Jesus says this. He says, Listen to what the unjust judge says. And then he compares God to the unjust judge.

[5 : 30] He says, 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? No, he's going to make sure that they get justice and get it quickly.

God is someone who cares, who does listen, and who does answer the cries of his people. It's opposite to the poor widow.

Unlike the poor widow, who's totally outside the judge's circle of friends, God is going to give justice to the elect. He listens to them. Notice that note about the elect. Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones?

That's the elect. Now, the elect are people that God knows. He's specifically called them. He knows them by name. He knows who they are. So it's not like the widow and the judge.

There's a juxtaposition. There's an opposite between the unjust judge and God, who is a just judge, a just God. Because he's going to give justice to his elect, the people that he knows.

[6 : 29] The Bible again and again makes the point that God loves his people and listens to their cries for mercy. That's what our Old Testament reading showed us.

Psalms 146. Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.

The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the foreigner, sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. There is hope for those whose hope is in the Lord. Their hope for people who are hungry, funny enough, is not that they're going to get fed, but their hope is in God, who will answer their cause. The hope of the oppressed is not so much that they're going to get freedom from the oppression.

Of course, that's part of it. But the Psalm says, blessed are those whose hope is in the Lord, and then let the Lord take care of their problems. There's a pecking order in what we should want.

[7 : 29] We must first trust in God and his justice and mercy, and turn to him for those things, and then wait and see how he will respond and how he will actually make it happen.

And why does God do all these things for his people? Well, it's there in the text. The Lord loves the righteous. It's as simple as that.

He just loves his people. He wants what's best for them in that sense. He wants what's good for them. He hates it when they are under oppression, and when bad things happen to them.

Because he knows us and he loves us, just like any father does with their child. So God's relationship with the elect is not the same as the relationship with the unjust judge and the widow.

They don't know each other. He doesn't really care about her. And he'll only do it because she keeps on badgering him. The parable isn't making the point that we need to keep on badgering God.

[8 : 26] It's actually saying the opposite. We don't have to badger God because God already knows us. We're his elect. He knows who we are. He's called us to be in relationship with him, to be in covenant with him.

And so God knows who he are. He cares about us. And so he answers our prayers freely. We are elect because God knows us and loves us. Election is a good thing because it speaks to us of the love of God and the care that the Lord has for his people.

Now how did the people of Israel know about this love and care of God? Well, they know about it because of his saving actions, because of all he's done for them throughout their history. Again and again, God's people cry out to him for help and God responds.

The main highlight of that, the one that they would always look back to, is the Exodus event.

Deuteronomy reminds them of this. It says this. It talks about how they went down into Egypt. It says, The Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor.

Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors. And the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery and toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders.

[9 : 43] He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. They know that God will do what he says because they've experienced it in their own personal journey, in their culture, in their history.

And exactly in the same way, the God of the Old Testament is still moving in the New Testament, but now just with Jesus. He's still acting on behalf of his people to overthrow oppression and to bring justice to his people.

Remember, this is exactly what Luke chapter 1 says in that Benedictus. We looked at these passages over Christmastime. Benedictus says this. Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

He's going to take action for them. And it's because of the tender mercy of our God by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.

So notice, it's the tender mercy of God that moves him to redeem and act and save his people. The comparison in the parable is that if there's a human judge that doesn't care about people and eventually will give them justice, how much more will God give justice to his people that he already knows and already loves and who call after him for help.

[11 : 04] It's, of course, a great comfort to anyone who needs justice. It should give us faith to keep on asking God and to keep on being faithful to him. The motivation behind being faithful to God is the faithfulness of God himself to us and to his cause and to the establishment of his kingdom.

And Jesus says that is the motivation for prayer. Because God will act on behalf of his people, we can take our problems to him and he will make sure that we get justice.

Now, just a word about the justice that God is going to dish out and how it's going to look. We've got to link it to the gospel and to the kingdom and especially, obviously, to Jesus. Now, it's not just any old justice we're talking about here.

It's kind of kingdom-shaped justice. It revolves, or rather, I should say, culminates in the coming of Christ. And that's why the context of Luke 18, the parable of so important, that's why we read Luke 17.

The arrival of God's kingdom was something every Jew was looking forward to. It was meant to be a time of celebration and salvation and blessing for them and judgment on their enemies.

[12 : 21] In a word, justice. But Luke 17 has some very ominous-sounding words about the arrival of the kingdom. It sort of takes a sharp turn to the left. And the reason it's ominous is that the king sent by God, Jesus, is going to get betrayed and experience injustice at the hands of his own people.

Chapter 17 says this, For the Son of Man in his day will be like lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first, he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

God's own king is going to suffer injustice and the injustice of the worst kind, betrayal at the hands of his own people. Which is why there follows all these warnings in chapter 17 about what will happen to the people who are unjust towards God and towards his king.

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

[13 : 42] It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. The final and full arrival of God's kingdom is going to spell doom for those who either picked a fight with him and his king or picked a fight with his people.

Justice will be dished out. But which side you're on will determine how you experience that justice. Now this opens up the whole question of will God's justice be quick or slow?

Now or later? When will we see this justice? Luke 18 says that God will not just give justice, but give it quickly. Will he keep putting them off?

I tell you, he will see that they get justice and quickly. And yet it also talks about God delaying or putting it off. And it says we must not give up or lose heart, but be persistent in prayer.

That's what it says at the start. We should always pray and not give up. So, there's a bit of a dilemma here. If justice is going to come swiftly, why is this emphasis on not giving up?

[14 : 53] There seems to be two emphases on the coming justice of God. While it is certain and sure, on the one hand it is swift, and yet on the other hand, there may well be some time of delay before we experience it or see it.

Hence the need for constant prayer to not give up. So we have to understand the patience of God towards those who commit injustice. To understand how God can be both patient with injustice and quick to bring justice.

And I know they sound mutually exclusive, but in the plan of God, they're not. Think of when you were naughty. Remember, you were told to wait until your dad gets back home.

So you're the one committing injustice on your brother or sister at home, and then you've been caught out, and you say, okay, now wait until your father comes home. Boy, those are the longest hours you can hope for.

And you're waiting, and it's just never ending. It's actually more scary to wait for your dad to come home than when he actually comes home. But your dad's busy doing his own thing, and he doesn't think time is going fast. He arrives home, he hears about the problem, and swift justice is dealt out.

[16 : 04] So it's a little bit like that with the justice of God. But that's if you're experiencing, or if you've given injustice, and you know that your doom is coming. What about if you've experienced injustice?

It's kind of the opposite. Then you want it to come as quickly as possible. Justice delayed is justice denied. Every delay feels like an eternity.

Think of going through the court process, or of waiting for insurance to pay out. With children, remember, we can all remember taking those journeys in the car on a holiday somewhere, and your brother and sister is poking you, and you hate it, and you're crying out for help, and you can't poke them back, because they're too far away, and then you, Mom, Dad, make them stop.

And you want them to make them stop now. You can't wait any moment, and you cry, right? And then eventually the hand reaches back, and swift justice is dealt a few blows again, and then you can sit smugly for a while, until that hand creeps over that now invisible line that they're not touching, but the hand can poke over that line, and then the whole process starts again.

But what about when justice doesn't come quickly, when it takes time, sometimes days, sometimes months, sometimes years? What if we don't see it at all?

[17 : 19] What are we supposed to do then? Although God does promise justice, and He does promise that we will see it. So this combination of patiently waiting for judgment on God's enemies, justice for us, who have been unjustly dealt with, and justice for His people, that's us.

This waiting patiently, this theme is picked up often in the Bible, perhaps one of the best places it's spelled out is in Peter, and 2 Peter chapter 3, He says this, Above all, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing, following their own evil desires.

They will say, where is this coming, He promised? ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. But do not forget this one thing, my dear friends, with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. You know, God has His own timing when it comes to bringing justice. He has His own plans, and we play but a small part in it. But the reason He is slow, is so that the elect may come to salvation. [18:40] Think about it. If God had answered the prayers of the early church, or even of Jesus, as He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane, and prays for that cup to pass from Him.

But of the early church, under all those persecutions, and their bloodletting, and they were crying out to God for help. Imagine God had visited His ultimate, final justice. The kingdom had arrived at that time, in its full entirety.

Well, there would be no place for us in it. The number of elect would be full. We would be locked out forever. And so God's patience, over 2,000 years of it now, is so that we, can enjoy His justice as well, His love, and to be one of the elect.

And then we can also cry out to God for help. And in case you're tempted to think that God's patience looks like inactivity, Peter ends that section in chapter 3 with a sure and certain promise. Luke makes the same point at the end of his parable.

[19:53] Jesus says this, When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth? Meaning, will He find faithfulness? Will He find people who have stayed faithful to Jesus in spite of ongoing injustice, oppression, and even persecution?

Well, that's why this parable is so important for us. It tells us what to do when we experience injustice and when we don't see God acting quickly.

It feels like He's not acting quickly to us, but God's got a plan for these things. Well, what are we supposed to do? It tells us to hang on, to hang in there with prayer and with faithful faith.

Not just faith, but faith that lasts. We've got to have faith in Christ and in God and that He will do what He says He will do. We've got to trust Him every day for their vindication of us, their vindication of our prayers and of our situation.

Continuous prayer is the antidote to giving up. It is itself an act of faithfulness. It is something Jesus is looking for at the end of the parable. He doesn't want us to lose heart, to give up, to give in or throw in the towel.

[21:14] That's surrendering to the enemy. Jesus is looking for strong men and women of courage and conviction, of durability and fortitude, strength.

When I was at high school, we had a marathon athletic event called fussbait. It was 24 hours through the night, running, relays, and all kinds of other things.

And that's what God wants. He wants people who are going to fussbait, who are going to dig deep and manage to stay the course no matter what. That's part of what He says in those first verses.

Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. Some translations have give up hope or lose heart.

It's the same idea. We mustn't shrink back. Even though oppression can be ongoing, we've got to take a stand and do something about it. What is it that we're supposed to do?

[22:14] Well, God wants us to pray, which is kind of surprising. Maybe not for Christians, I guess, but for people who want justice, the one thing they don't want is inaction.

They want action. And prayer, no offense, kind of looks like inaction. You're quiet. You're sitting there. You're not doing much. But God wants warriors.

He wants prayer warriors. Not warriors that go and kill. Not just social justice warriors that go out and burn and break things.

But warriors. That call out to Him to speak out to others and to stay faithful no matter what the course, who stay the course. Here's a question then about us and how we respond to injustice.

How is your prayer life? When you see what's going on in the world and you get that burning sensation and you want to do something about it, do you take those issues to the Lord in prayer and do you keep on praying about them?

[23:21] Or is it just a once-off? And then you move on to the next topic that grabs your fancy and then stirs you up and agitates you. Or maybe you don't pray because you don't have faith that God will do what He says He will do.

Will God establish His kingdom on earth? Yes. He's busy doing it. Remember the parables of growth. It's not the time of the end. The time has started. Do we need change in South Africa? Yes. How are we going to achieve this? Well, God's answer is stay faithful to me and stay faithful and constant in prayer.

We don't go around protesting, burning things. We don't withdraw and sit and do nothing. Prayer is not sitting and doing nothing. Prayer is actually an active thing because it kind of makes God active. He says that He will move in action in response to the prayers of His people. Now, I know we know this, but it's good to be reminded of these things. Verse 7. Will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones who cry out to Him day and night?

[24 : 29] There's that active ingredient. Are we going to do what God wants and be faithful to Him in praying about justice and for His kingdom to come? This parable is teaching us that if we want God to move in justice, we must have three things.

We've got to have prayer, which is necessary for God to take action. God will answer the cries of His elect. But we also need endurance or persistence in prayer.

God will answer the elect who cry out to Him day and night. and who pray and don't give up. And then what ties that together is faith.

Faithfulness. Endurance. All this is tied together by faith and the promise of God who says He will take action and bring justice to the world.

So then, taken in context, the parable is teaching us that God will hear and answer the cries of His people against injustice by again sending the Son of Man to earth.

[25 : 36] Jesus is going to come back. He was here the first time and He's going to come back and He's going to bring judgment with Him. He's going to sort out all the injustices. And so here's the promise that when we pray to God about injustice, you know, eight chances out of ten we will see it fairly soon depending on the size of the injustice.

Look, it can take years. Remember that in the Old Testament when the Jews cried out to God it took over 400 years for God to answer and then for God that's like a day.

That's no problem. Yeah, I've done it. When huge injustices in the world have fallen you know, it really is a result of prayer. We don't think of it often like that. But think of apartheid.

Think of the fall of the Berlin Wall. These are all answers to prayer. Prayer is going on in the background all the time with these things. And yes, it feels like an eternity when you're going under oppression but you know what?

In the blink of an eye it changes. I mean, who would have thought that Mugabe was going to disappear like that? Or who saw that Zuma was going to fall because of all of this corruption?

[26 : 41] In the blink of an eye God can change things and it's all due to people being persistent in prayer. So the parable is teaching us that God will answer the cries of his people against injustice.

it revolves around Jesus and what he's doing now and what he's going to do at the end of time. And they know it will be certain and soon although they cannot be sure of the exact time.

So God's justice is certain and soon but that kind of soon is in God's eyes sometimes not in our timing. And so that calls us to be patient and persistent in prayer and in crying out to God knowing that he knows us and that he loves us and that he will give an answer to us.

You know if we don't see answers of injustice in this world be certain be dead certain that you will see it on judgment day. These things are going to happen.

God will come and make all things right. We can cling on to those promises and endure with faithful patience and faithfulness to God and through prayer as well.

[27 : 48] Well let's turn now to God in prayer and ask him to help us to remember these things in our daily lives. Heavenly Father you are a God of justice and a God who loves his people.

Your kingdom has been established in Christ. It has started but injustice continues through the world. Lord we cry out to you against the problems of our world.

There's so many issues in South Africa at the moment that need your help Lord. We're burning inside to see change. Lord will you answer the prayers of your saints? Will you stir them up to pray for these things?

And so change can happen and people can be saved and your kingdom will spread and grow.

We've got many promises in your word for that. Lord keep us faithful knowing that you are going to bring justice.

That you're not like the judges of this earth. You are a God of love and mercy and who answers our prayers who listens to us and knows us. Lord answer our prayers bring justice establish your kingdom may your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
[28 : 57] And to you be the glory and the honor and the power in Jesus name Amen. Amen.