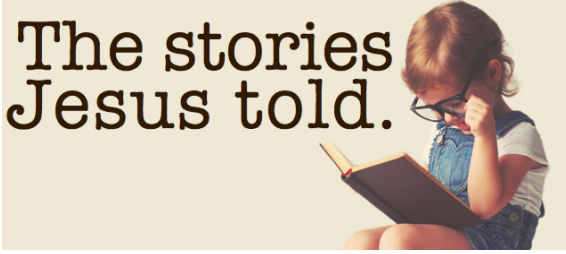


The stories Jesus told.



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Luke 18.1-8 | July 23, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue engaging the parables in our summer series The Stories Jesus Told, directing our attention to the Parable of the Persistent Widow in Luke 18.1-8.

II. Connecting with One Another

Describe a time when you had to convince someone that you were right (and that someone else was wrong). How did it go?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Luke 18.1-3

First century courtrooms were a bit different from what we see on Law & Order. Instead of relying upon the authorities to investigate, accuse, and take a wrongdoer to trial, it was the responsibility of whoever was wronged.

N.T. Wright explains, "If someone had stolen from you, you had to bring the charge yourself; you couldn't get the police to do it for you... So every legal case in Jesus' day was a matter of a judge deciding to vindicate one party or the other."

How does knowing that historical background alter your understanding of what's going on in these first three verses?

b. In verse 2 we learn about a judge "who neither feared God nor cared what people thought."

Have you ever known anyone like that? Why is it problematic – especially for a judge!?

Why is both fearing God and caring for people important? Can we have one without the other?

c. It has been argued that this parable is about "the new renewed Israel gathered around Jesus, awaiting from God the vindication that will come when those who have opposed his message are finally routed."

If so, this parable clarifies Jesus' previous teaching in Luke 17.20-37. What do you think?

Who first comes to mind as those who opposed Jesus' message?

What does Luke 17 lead you to believe?

- d. In the ancient world, women were often without necessary resources, and thus, had to rely on the hospitality of their village. Though she was not rich, powerful, or influential, this widow was in need of justice. She had been wronged or defrauded. She had, as the saying goes, "nothing but a prayer."

Have you ever been in her shoes? What did you do?

- e. Read Luke 18.4-8

N.T. Wright concludes that this parable (especially alongside the Parable of the Sinners which follows it) makes "a powerful statement about what, in Paul's language, is called 'justification by faith.' The wider context is the final law court, in which God's chosen people will be vindicated about their life of suffering, holiness and service. Though enemies outside and inside may denounce and attack them, God will act and show that they truly are his people. But what Jesus is saying here... is that this future verdict is already known, in the present, when someone turns from sin and trusts God to be merciful."

Reflect on some key verses that reveal justification by faith, and then, to the right of the reference, write a personal reflection in the first person (see the first as an example):

Romans 4.5 – *I have been justified not by my work, but by my faith in God*

Romans 4.22-25 –

Romans 5.17-19 –

Romans 8.15-17 –

1st Corinthians 1.30 –

1st Corinthians 6.17 –

Galatians 3.27-28 –

Philippians 3.9 –

- f. Though this parable has been called the Parable of the Widow, it could similarly be referred to as the Parable of the Unjust Judge. Indeed, he only acted justly because he felt like he already had two black eyes (which, believe it or not, is the literal meaning of the Greek word used!).

We can see an obvious connection between God and the main character in many of Jesus' parables. Do you think Jesus means for us to see a 1 to 1 correlation in this story?

Is the unjust judge a symbol for God? Why or why not?

- g. Eugene Peterson concludes, "The sketch of the evil judge in Jesus' story is everything that we know God is *not*. Because we have been immersed in all these centuries of story and song, prayer and reflection, we recognize at once that this judge is an evil and grotesque parody of the God who is revealed to us... 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." (see, for instance Matthew 7.7-11)

Do you know anyone who isn't yet convinced of God's character (like Eugene Peterson is)? What do you think prompted them to question God this way?

- h. Have you ever struggled to remain patient and persistent in prayer? If so, you are not alone! Time permitting, read these passages from the psalms: 10.1 13.1-2, 22.1-2, 44.23-24, 74.10, 77.7-9, 79.5, and 90.13. (In fact, if you ever have trouble praying, that's what the Psalms are there for!)

- i. Read Luke 18.6-8

Those "crying out day and night" in first century Galilee were pleading for release from Roman occupation.

What do you "cry out day and night" for? What about your family and friends? What about those in need around the world?

- j. Jesus' concluding question is not a generalized abstraction. It actually reads, "will he find the faith on the earth?" What is "the faith" you think he's referring to?

IV. Pray

- a. Ask God to give you a patience and persistence in prayer,
- b. Cry out for yourself – or those you know who are in need spiritually, physically, or emotionally,
- c. Lift up the hundreds of children on campus for VBS this week, that they would come to know their Maker – and that they were built for a purpose!