Questions for Homegroups on the ‘*Parable of the persistent widow*’ from Luke 18:1-8

**Getting started**

1. What does v1 reveal to be Jesus’ aim for this parable?
2. Have there been times in your Christian life when you’ve been tempted to stop praying, and give up on following Christ? What has usually led to this temptation?
3. What does the word ‘Then’ at the beginning of v1 mean we’ve got to do to understand this parable properly? Look back at Ch 17v20-37 and discover what the theme was there, and what Jesus wanted for his people. We should aim to read this parable in the light of this….

**Into the parable**

1. What would Jews expect their Judges to be like? What is this particular judge actually like?
2. What was the plight of widows in those days? How should Jews in general, and judges, treat them?
3. How did this Judge treat this widow? (v4)
4. What course of behaviour by the widow made the Judge change his mind? (v5)
5. Was the Judge influenced by noble motivations, do you think? (vv4-5)
6. What is the lesson about God that Jesus wants his hearers to learn from the Judge? (vv7-8)
7. Do God’s justice, our status as His ‘chosen ones’ and His promise that we will certainly receive justice from His hands motivate you to ‘pray and not give up’?
8. How do you understand the word ‘quickly’ in v8, given it’s 2000 years since Jesus’ departure to Heaven? [Have a look at 2 Peter 3vv8/9 for a clue!]

**A ‘sting in the tale’**

Having encouraged his disciples ‘to pray and not give up’, Jesus finishes his teaching with a challenging question (end of v8)

1. What does Jesus want to find on the earth when he returns from Heaven?
2. How does this act as a challenge to those of us who are Christians?
3. What should we be praying for people (like Micky in my sermon) who have stopped praying and given up on God because he didn’t see his prayers for his country answered?

**Sermon ‘Parable of the persistent widow’ (Luke 18vv18)**

~ I’d like to tell you about a chap called Micky [image of elderly man]

He was born in 1940s in Northern Ireland, and readily embraced his parents’ faith.

For many years he would regularly pray that there would be an end to the violence and fear that stalked the streets.

And yet, his prayers didn’t seem to be answered and very sadly he stopped praying, stopped going to Church, and stopped calling himself a Christian.

There are lots of ‘Mickys’ in the world today – people whose faith fizzles due to apparently unanswered prayer…

It **may** be because our prayers for our country, our world seem unanswered, or it may be that our prayers for our spouse to come to faith, or that bullying at work be stopped, or an illness be healed, are not answered by God in the way we would like…

If you’ve ever felt that temptation at times yourself, then ‘listen up’, because todays bible passage is for you. So, do look it up – Luke 18vv18 (page 1052) and let’s notice the apparently  [(1) A] simple lesson) **i**t contains…

You’ll see it there in v1

Then, Jesus told his disciples a parable

to show them that they should **always** pray

and **not** give up…..

That’s pretty clear, isn’t it? Jesus wants his followers to be people who **pray** (image of person praying] and who **don’t** give up [image of white flag]…

I hope then that this morning’s service will encourage us all then to be people who pray  - who regularly speak to God about all that’s on our heart, trusting that he hears us, and is powerful enough to answer our prayers in his good time, even when that’s longer than we’d ideally want!

But there’s **one** little word in v1 that you may well have missed, and yet makes a great difference to the way we read it.

Look at v1 again

‘Then, Jesus told his disciples a parable

to show them that they should always pray

and not give up…..’

The ‘**Then**’ connects us to what goes before, the passage we looked at last week at the end of Chapter 17. There we saw that the big theme was the return of Jesus Christ at the end of time, to execute perfect justice and to take his faithful followers to a glorious future in Heaven. Jesus wants his followers to be ready for that day, a day that will come suddenly, and be as dramatic and obvious as a flash of lightening in the sky….

In the light of Jesus’ certain return, Jesus now tells a story to encourage us to keep praying and NOT give up, even when we see a world that is often opposed to Jesus, kicking against his teachings and showing little interest in the eternal future he came to usher in.

Jesus wants us not to be Micky’s, rather he wants us to **continue** praying to God and remaining **faithful** to him – Jesus- as our King throughout the **whole** of our lives.

Let’s then turn to v26, where Jesus gives us a vivid little story, or parable, to teach us this simple, but vital, lesson…

It is  2) A parable of contrasts

The scene is a courtroom, and Jesus introduces us to 2 very different people .

Up there on the Bench, is the **judge** (image of a judge), and there before him is not a lawyer, but a litigant, and she is described as a **widow** (image of distressed woman).

The word ‘**widow**’ flags for us this woman’s **need**. To lose your husband **today** is of course a very sad, painful experience, as many of us here in Church know only too well. But in **Jesus’** day, the plight of a widow was very serious indeed, for the lady had lost her main source of finance and protection in the face of life’s challenges. There were no widow’s pensions, no social security, no citizens advice bureaux, no legal aid. A lady who felt that she’d suffered an injustice, like this widow, was in a very precarious position, for she was in many ways **helpless**…

God spoke strongly to the Jews in the OT of the need for people (and that surely includes judges) to treat widows with compassion and fairness.

So, what was the Judge like? V2 tells us that he ‘neither fears God, nor cares about his fellow human beings’. Both of those deficiencies are serious, for the book of Proverbs teaches that ‘f*earing God’* is the beginning of wisdom. So this man was not wise, however many degrees he had! Nor was he kind and caring to people,  he displayed none of that love for your neighbour in need that was an essential part of God’s law.

This man really only cared about his own comfort. So, when this widow pleaded with him  (Words ‘Grant me justice’) he refused -not just once , but on repeated occasions (v4). He was **heartless** to her cries for justice….

So here we have a ‘battle royal’ between the **helpless and the heartless**, and we might expect the Judge to win, given the inequality of power between these 2 people.

But v4,5 tells us of a considerable ‘plot twist’. Even though the widow might not have powerful relatives to fight for her, she did have ‘one ace in her pack of cards’! She was **persistent**.

* She was a constant presence in the courtroom, always bobbing up to plead her cause….
* We can imagine her with a placard saying ‘*Justice for widows*’ outside the Judge’s home, his Club, and his golf club!
* We can imagine her writing letters to him constantly and whipping up support from the community.

She certainly displayed ‘pester power’, and in the end the Judge caved in. NOT for noble reasons like a desire for justice, but simply to get rid of this woman.Listen to what he says

‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think,

yet because this widow keeps bothering me,

I will see that she gets justice,

so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’

Indeed the words translated  ‘attack me’ is more literally ‘give me a black eye’. He worries that unless he gives her what she deserves, he might receive a ‘shiner’ from her!

It is then a **parable of contrasts,** between a helpless but determined widow, and a heartless, unprincipled Judge concerned only for his own comfort.

And yet, Jesus wants to show us **another** contrast – that between this appalling Judge and the **Lord God Almighty**…..

\*\* The point of this parable is **NOT** for us to think that God is **LIKE** the Judge, because he certainly **ISN’T**…..

\*\* Rather, the point is that **if even** a lousy Judge will eventually grant justice to those who persistently cry to him for justice, **HOW MUCH MORE** will God grant justice to his beloved children who cry to him for justice ….

It’s this **contrast** between the judge and God that Jesus brings out in v7, saying

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.

*‘****Think*** *about God and his people’*, says Jesus…..

God has consistently shown himself to be a God who cares about justice [*please highlight the word Justice on the screen*]. Centuries earlier the father of the Jewish people, Abraham, had once prayed for mercy on a sinful city, saying ‘*Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?’*. The answer is of course ‘**Yes**’. God cares passionately about justice and he can be trusted to bring about perfect justice.

‘Think next’- says Jesus-  about what you are to God. You’re not just a name on a court list , like this widow was to the Judge. You are **his chosen ones** [*please highlight the words ‘chosen ones’].* He loved you enough to choose you, and then rescue you, and make you a child in his family. A God like that can be trusted to hear and act quickly [*please highlight the word ‘quickly’*] to your urgent cries for justice..

‘Quickly’ **doesn’t** mean ‘immediately’, indeed we’ve been waiting 2000 years for the return of Jesus so far, and that might not strike you as particularly quick 😊

But time from God’s perspective is different from ours, as the apostle Peter teaches in his 2nd letter in the Bible. For God a day is like a thousand years and a 1000 years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, but patient, giving time to rebellious, hard-hearted people to turn from their sins and turn to Jesus to be saved.

\*\* Jesus then wants to say to us this morning:-

 ‘*Keep on praying and don’t give up, for you can trust God to bring about justice for his people for the many times we suffer in this world, because we are so precious in his sight and God will certainly bring about that justice , if not before, certainly at my return in glory. Use this window of opportunity to be people who reach out to others through your lips and your lives calling them to turn from their sins to a real trust in me, who alone can bring them eternal life not death…’*

It’s a wonderfully **encouraging**, **confidence- building** message from the Lord to his people this morning, one that I pray will bring us joy, and make us persevere.

There’s one last thing though we need to hear  (3) A sting in the tale

*Jesus [Image of Jesus] finishes his teaching with a challenge in v8*

However, when the Son of Man comes,

will he find faith on the earth?”

Jesus here points forward to that day when he – the Son of Man – will return to this world.  ~ There’s **no** uncertainty about this day, it will surely happen….

~ The **only** uncertainty is what Jesus will **find** on that day….

~ Will he find **faith** on that day [image of a question mark] – the sort of faith that is seen in determined , persistent, believing prayer to the true and living God, or will he find us to be Mickys, people who started well, but who fizzled given the pressures of life for believers, the violence in the world, and prayers that appear unanswered.

Jesus doesn’t want us to be Micky’s!

Jesus wants us to keep **faithful** to the very end *‘Keep on that road to Heaven’*, Jesus urges us…