

## I. Introduction

- A. Today is message number 6 in a series called Underdog. What does God say to us when the world is against us? When even God seems like He's against us?
- B. Let's get right into our Bible passage for today.

## II. 1 Then He spoke a parable to them that men always ought to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1, NKJV).

- A. The first verse tells you right away the big idea of the parable. People should always pray and not lose heart. Don't quit. Don't give up. Don't walk away. That's the big idea from the passage and that's going to be our big idea for today.
- B. When you are an underdog, you have two choices: Pray or lose heart.
- C. Pray—turn to God. Turn to the all-powerful one. Turn to the great equalizer of the universe. Call on God.
  - 1. Do you pray?
    - a) "Call upon me," God says, "And I will answer you and show you great and mighty things" (Jer. 33:3).
  - 2. Whatever it is that causes your underdog status—whatever giant towers over your life—you need to bring it to God.
  - 3. The only way to walk in victory is to see your problems from heaven's viewpoint. What if you could fly to heaven today? What if you could walk into the throne room of the cosmos? The starry skies for a canopy and streets of gold. Angels flying and crying out the holiness of God. The saints of ages past singing around His throne.
  - 4. What if you could see God as He governs all things, as He sustains every molecule of creation in its existence?
  - 5. What if you could see the great movements of heaven and earth that God sets into motion every time He hears a prayer?
  - 6. What if you could feel just a fraction of His almighty power, like walking beyond the safety perimeter of a nuclear power plant?
  - 7. And what if, when you approached the throne of God, He smiled, welcomed you, and called you by name, and told you He was glad you were here?
  - 8. If you could see God in His infinite power and boundless love—and hang out there for ten minutes and then come back to earth—would that change you?
  - 9. Would that give some perspective on your problems? On your enemies? On your fears? On your illness? Your financial problems?
    - a) See, when you are an underdog, you have two choices. The first choice is to pray.
    - b) The second choice is—

## D. Lose heart.

- 1. This means to be worn out, weary, and exhausted. Have you ever been there? I've been there. Some days the cares overwhelm you. You feel like you can't go on. You're running on fumes, and you can't make it another day.
  - a) You wonder about God.
  - b) You wonder about life.
  - c) You wonder if you can get over your heartbreak, or your loss, or your habit.
  - d) You wonder if loss is forever, and trouble owns you.
    - (1) You lose heart.
- 2. It's the kind of thing the people of God did in the Old Testament. They had travelled to the Promised Land with dreams of soft beds and in-ground swimming pools. Then they spied out the land and discovered giants in the land.
- 3. They were underdogs. And they resented it and hated it.
- 4. The Bible says that the whole nation sat down and cried. They wouldn't budge. They spent a whole night crying. They fainted. They gave up hope. They lost heart.
- 5. I like the way Luke frames this parable: either you make God big (prayer) or you are going to make your problems big (lose heart). Your choice.
- 6. But it's a choice with a twist. Here it is:

## III. 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man" (Luke 18:2, NKJV).

- A. This is called the parable of the unjust judge. And I want to remind you that Jesus made it up. Jesus crafted this parable.
- B. In a very bold move, Jesus made the God-figure of the story into an unjust judge. Think how that would go over for all the uptight religious people you know. Not so well. It didn't go over well with the religious people in His day, either.
- C. God is not religious.
- D. Jesus was not religious.

- E. Church, let's not be religious.
  - F. Jesus is going to tackle two subjects that most people find diametrically opposed: He is going to tackle judgment and grace. Both.
  - G. Jesus gives you a glimpse into the justice system of the heavenly realm, and what you see might surprise you. The first character is an unjust judge who doesn't care about anybody.
  - H. Here comes the second character:
- IV. 3 *"Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary'"* (Luke 18:3, NKJV).
- A. Again, Jesus makes a bold choice. In ancient times, a widow had lost not only her husband, but her social status too.
  - B. She is not at the top of the heap. She is not a winner. She is on nobody's a-list. Jesus picked an underdog—with two strikes against her:
    - 1. Strike one: she's a widow.
    - 2. Strike two: the judge she's going to stand before doesn't care about justice.
  - C. But justice is what she wants, and justice is what she asks for.
  - D. The widow appeared before the unjust judge saying, "Get justice for me from my adversary."
  - E. Remember this is a parable, a carefully crafted story with theology embedded inside it.
  - F. And the first core of theology here is something about justice.
  - G. Let's pause, because this is a tremendously important truth for our times. Everybody wants justice. Everybody wants their due. Really?
  - H. One of my favorite books on theology is from Louis Berkhof, called *Systematic Theology*. It's complex, but when I need a clear definition, I go there. Here's what Berkhof writes about the justice of God:
    - 1. "Justice manifests itself especially in giving every man his due, in treating him according to his deserts."
  - I. Scripture is clear on the justice of God.
    - 1. *Rise up, O Judge of the earth; Render punishment to the proud (Psalms 94:2, NKJV)*.
    - 2. *Clouds and darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne (Psalms 97:2, NKJV)*.
  - J. Justice means that God gives you exactly what you deserve. He is fair. He is impartial. He never wavers from strict standards of righteousness and truth.
  - K. When you ask for justice, be very, very careful.
  - L. Because if you have a God who is only just, you might be in trouble.
    - 1. *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23, NKJV)*.
    - 2. *"The soul who sins shall die..." (Ezekiel 18:20, NKJV)*.
    - 3. *19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God (Romans 3:19, NKJV)*.
  - M. When people ask for justice, they don't know what they're asking for. Because if God gave us what we deserved, we would be under condemnation right now. We are guilty. We are fallen. We are sinners in the hands of an infinite God of infinite justice.
  - N. And when the woman comes to the judge, what does she ask for? She asks for justice against her adversary.
  - O. The fact is that if any one of us walked into the courts of heaven, and said, "God, give me what I deserve," we would be banished into a place of condemnation forever. That's what we deserve, hot lunch with no cold beer to wash it down.
    - 1. Question: What do you deserve?
    - 2. Answer: Worse than you have right now.
  - P. The day our culture redefined justice as something other than the strict dispensing of punishment and reward is the day we created an entitlement mentality that is going to destroy us all.
  - Q. People stand in line for justice. Are you crazy? Stand in line for charity, yes. But for justice? Never.
  - R. God doesn't owe you. The world doesn't owe you. Nobody owes you. Except for the penalty of sin, God owes you nothing.
  - S. Only a fool would ask for justice from God.
  - T. Like the widow asked for justice from the judge.
  - U. What she doesn't realize—what we all need to realize is this: The very fact that you are breathing, and thinking, and free, and one inch above hell; is proof of the fact that there is another force in the heart of God beside justice.
  - V. And until you come to grips with that other force, you will never be able to handle your underdog status with any dignity at all.
  - W. So, Jesus presses the story deeper:
- V. 4 *"And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me'"* (Luke 18:4, 5, NKJV).

- A. Here Jesus changes all the ground rules. He blasts God right out of the tidy religious box most of us have confined Him to.
- B. The underdog widow asks for justice.
- C. The unjust judge just postpones the case.
- D. The underdog widow comes back and asks again for justice.
- E. The unjust judge postpones the case again.
- F. And so it goes over and over and over until the judge gets tired of it.
- G. And finally, he gives in and rewards her.
- H. Why?
- I. Well, why is not as important as why not. His reasoning has nothing to do with justice, and everything to do with persistence.
  - 1. Only a fool would ask for justice from God.
  - 2. But only a fool would give up asking altogether. Don't quit. Don't give up. Don't walk away from God because He didn't answer you.
  - 3. Jesus paints two equal and opposite bad reactions to being an underdog:
    - a) One is seeking justice and feeling entitled before God.
    - b) The other error is seeking nothing, and turning from God altogether. Giving up. Quitting. Throwing in the towel with God.
      - (1) *5 "Yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me" (Luke 18:4, 5, NKJV).* This is funny stuff. Jesus has a sense of humor.
    - c) Never give up asking for your miracle. Never give up on God.
      - (1) Pacific Garden Mission had a sign on the walls: God answers mother's prayers.
- J. Only Jesus could write a story like this. Only Jesus could get away with an unjust judge as an image of God in a parable.
- K. Because He wants every underdog to know three secrets:
- L. Secret one: you don't deserve anything good from God.
  - 1. Neither do I. It's not about justice. And since it's not about justice, there is a very important corollary to go with it: NO WHINING. Never whine when you don't get what you don't deserve.
  - 2. The problem that makes you an underdog? Whining.
  - 3. This is enormously difficult, especially since some of us have the spiritual gift of whining. Whining is proof that you live with an entitlement mentality. God owes me better than this. Really? Why? What good have you done that God should be good to you?
  - 4. The reality is just the opposite, and a way of thinking that very few saints ever achieve: God, thank you for the life I have. I'm grateful for any ray of sunshine, any ounce of strength, any shred of hope, and any token of goodness You send my way. Thank you for my life, such as it is. Thank you. You are working a plan, and it's wonderful. You are a good God, and You've treated me better than I deserve. And God, even if You never do one more good thing for me than You've already done in Jesus, You've been good enough for an eternity of praise. Thank you God for my life such as it is.
  - 5. That is the prayer of a saint of God who understands secret one: you don't deserve anything from God.
- M. Secret two: God is ready to give undeserved good things, because that's the way He is.
  - 1. That's His heart. He is a God of all grace, and Father of mercies.
  - 2. When the unjust judge ruled in favor of the underdog widow, it was simply because she kept on asking.
  - 3. He arrives at his judgment, not on the merits of the case, but simply on the basis of his own convenience.
  - 4. He is willing to be seen as a bad judge just so he can have a little peace of mind. And that is our God. Does that offend you? Does that mess with your mind a little? Because that is exactly what Jesus was after here.
  - 5. God is willing to be perceived as a bad God.
    - a) A God who forgives hookers.
    - b) A God who blesses tax collectors.
    - c) A God who makes a killer one of His best missionaries.
    - d) A God who throws a party for the prodigal, even while the holy older brother stands out in the cold.
- N. Secret three: Never quit asking for your miracle.
  - 1. Because God loves faith and the day you quit asking is the day you gave up on God.
- O. There is two part logic here:
  - 1. *8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8, NKJV).*
    - a) Sinners, raise your hand.

- b) This is what God did for us while we were sinners. Did we earn this? No. Did we deserve it? No. Did we do good works to achieve it? No.
  - c) Jesus did it all.
  - d) We were dead sinners. We were rebels, shaking our fists in God's face, and God sent His son to be the Savior of the world.
  - e) There is nothing like this in all the religions of the world. God did the work. God took the initiative. God offered the sacrifice to balance the scales of justice all by Himself—and the offering and the sacrifice was Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ. God offered Himself to satisfy justice so that grace could flow.
  - f) Jesus died for people who don't deserve ANYTHING from God. You have to let that sink deep inside.
  - g) This is so important for underdogs and here's why: if you don't get this, you will be bitter against God. You will feel like you deserve better. You don't. I don't.
  - h) And you will turn every prayer into a selfish demand instead of a humble request.
  - i) And the second part of how you have to think is this:
2. *32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things (Romans 8:32, NKJV)?*
    - a) If God was willing to give you Jesus, won't He give you dinner? That's the idea.
    - b) The lesser is included in the greater. If God is willing to give you the greater (Jesus), it follows that He'll give you the lesser too (everything else you need).
    - c) But when?
    - d) When does He come through on Romans 8:32?
    - e) Answer: whenever He wants to.

3. What do you do when you're an underdog?

VI. *6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth" (Luke 18:6-8, NKJV)?*

- A. Jesus is telling us to pay attention to this totally unreligious God we have.
- B. All you can do is pray on the basis of your own unworthiness and Christ's total worthiness.
- C. Maybe you are hurting, and praying, and still hurting, and you wonder why.
  1. And maybe the devil whispers: you're not worthy. God is punishing you. He saw that sin you did—you have to stop it. Clean up your life first, and then try again.
    - a) No. That's a lie. You do not approach God in your own worthiness. Never have. Never will.
  2. Maybe the devil whispers: sacrifice, serve, pay—do stuff for God, and He will fix your problem. He will make you something other than an underdog.
    - a) No. That's another lie. God's dealings with you have never been about barter. God accepted Christ in your place, and that's enough to last forever.
  3. God does not want your offer to pay, He does not want your promise of a reformed life, He does not need your religious performance, or moral achievements, or you straightening up and flying right to bless, or heal, or enrich, or repair or do anything to answer a prayer.
  4. It is not about what you deserve or earn.
  5. It never has been, never will be, and never can be.
  6. It is about what Christ has deserved and earned, and how God, in His wisdom, decides when and where to hand out the CHARITY.
- D. Jesus ends with a question: will He find faith in the earth?
- E. Not will He find good works.
- F. Not will He find moral self improvement.
- G. Not will He find people busy for Jesus in church.
- H. Will He find faith? Your job is faith. God's job is outcomes.
- I. Faith in the dark hours.
- J. Faith in the underdog season.
- K. Remember—in the spiritual realm, victory isn't the victory.
- L. Faith is the victory. Keep the faith.
- M. Don't whine.
- N. And never give up asking for your miracle.