

JJ<sup>1</sup>

About three years ago, you might remember seeing news stories about a very sick four year old boy named Charlie Knuth. He has a terrible skin condition that leaves him with the equivalent of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree burns. While the condition itself doesn't threaten his life, complications from it do. The treatment to help with his terrible sickness was experimental and therefore expensive. Sadly, Medicaid refused to pay for the procedure, stating that the treatment was neither proven nor effective. His parents kept approaching the decision-makers at Medicaid with their requests. Their requests continued to be denied. Finally the family went to the media. As soon as Medicaid was about to get the proverbial "black eye", they decided to cover the little boy's treatment. Medicaid could handle the pestering. That was nothing new for them. But when it came to getting a very public black eye, they quickly changed their minds.

That is essentially the situation we find in the parable Jesus teaches today. Jesus begins by telling us the whole point of teaching this parable: "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give

up." The lesson we're taught is to see both our need to pray and to never give up in praying. How fitting that our first lesson is Jacob wrestling with the LORD in prayer (Gen. 32:22-30), and our second lesson shows us the confidence we have in prayer (1 Jn. 5:3-15).

In his parable, Jesus presents us with an unjust judge. Jesus describes him as a rat among rats. He's in it entirely for himself as he "neither feared God nor cared about men." There was also a widow in that town who had been wronged in some way. The way Jesus presents her situation, it seems to be a clear-cut case. Then again, not so much. She's a widow living in first century Israel. The time and circumstance would have made it hard to find justice in any court, let alone the court of a man who didn't care about anyone, no matter who they were.

"Grant me justice against my adversary!" was her plea. And he refused her. But the widow would not be defeated. Each dismissal only drives her to go back again and again. Then it seems we're brought into the judge's private chambers. "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,

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<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!" Yes, he keeps getting bothered by her, but that doesn't really seem to be the problem. He's still getting paid. The Greek literally says "...I will give her justice so that in the end she does not give me a black eye with her coming!"

You see, he's just like the insurance company I mentioned before. He doesn't care about her situation. He doesn't care that she needs help. He doesn't care about people. He puts up with complaints and pestering all day long. But now it seems everyone else was starting to see. While he didn't care about people, it seems he obviously cared what people thought about him. He didn't want to lose any prestige or clout in the community, so he gives in.

Then Jesus says, "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?"

Now of course Jesus isn't saying that God is like this unjust judge who doesn't care about us. Jesus told us at the beginning of the parable that the example for us is the widow and to show us our need to pray and not give up—to **give God a black eye**, of sorts.

When things don't go according to plan. When you're frustrated. When calamity

strikes. When we suddenly find ourselves alone. It's especially at these times that we **give God a black eye**—but which kind of black eye depends on how we react to our situation.

The very fact that Jesus had to teach this parable then, and has it taught yet today reveals very plainly that you and I don't always see our need to pray and that we often do give up. It also reveals more than that. Do you think it was just a fluke that Jesus chose an unjust judge as his character for God in the parable? Even though God is the complete opposite, that is how we often view him.



Sometimes we may feel as though we've been widowed by God. Sometimes it can seem like God doesn't care—God has turned his back. You've been there. I know you have. I know you have even if you haven't

ever confessed it to me. I know you've been there because you're just like me. You're weak, sinful, selfish, near-sighted people, like me.

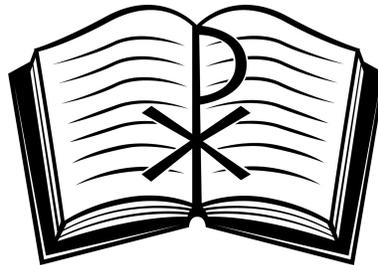
That's when the temptation strikes: "Why should I pray? He's obviously not listening. He obviously doesn't care. I should just give up!"

We come to that point by falling into what is essentially the original temptation of Satan: "God doesn't care. God is holding out on you." When we fall into this temptation is when we **give God a**

**black eye** for the wrong reason. We give God a black eye in our hearts by holding on to anger against him. Our pleas for God's mercy and requests according to his will morph into a sick perversion of prayer, filled with demands and sinful requests, seeking to bend God to our will, rather than asking that ours would be bent to his. "If you do this, then I'll..." is how those prayers often go. If you can even call that prayer!

As you fall deeper into this dark temptation, you pummel God, giving him more black eyes as the attitudes in your hearts erupt from your mouths. You bad-mouth God and grumble and complain about him to your family, friends and even in public. You blacken God's eye by lying about God, his promises and his reputation. And all it does in the end is leave your eyes blackened with the stress, weariness and sleepless nights of a restless, unrepentant heart.

Then we're **GIVING GOD A BLACK EYE**, but not in the way Jesus teaches us to do through his parable. When we give God a black eye in this way, we're making God into an unjust judge who is no different from every other false god man has created—a grumpy, disinterested god who sits on a far-away mountain who doesn't really care and is only in it for himself.



Friends, you and I all know this isn't who our God is. You know the One Jacob wrestled with in prayer so long ago doesn't fit into the philosophy that there is one god known by many names and approached in different ways. You know that the God of the Bible is the Lord, the One True God.

Jesus didn't just tell this parable to beat us in the brow with our sinful unwillingness to always go to him in prayer. He also told this parable to woo us into his warm embrace and invite us to consider all the reasons we have to always turn to the Lord in prayer and to never give up.

And the Lord said, "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?"

Friends, the answer is, "Yes! Of course he will!" The Lord said, "Will he keep putting them off?" Friends, the answer is, "No! Of course he won't!" The Lord said, "I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."

Jesus is saying, "Give your heavenly Father a black eye for the right reason. He isn't an unjust judge who doesn't care. He is not only the perfect judge but the ever-loving judge who judged his Son in your place! He sent me into this world to offer up perfect prayers on your behalf. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane when 'my soul [was] overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death' (Mt. 26:38), I

kept praying to our heavenly Father because I knew his love for me and his love for you! At one point on the cross, I couldn't even cry out to him as my Father, because he actually did judge and disown and abandon me as though your sins of being unwilling to pray and so quick to give up praying were my own. And he did all this so that he'd always be gracious to you. He hears you! You are his chosen ones! And he proved it by giving me to you!"

So, friends, how do we react to all this? We **give God a black eye** for the right reason. Like the widow in Jesus' parable, we don't give up, holding God to his promises according to his own command and promise! God teaches us and invites us to pray in this way! Like Jacob finally learned to stop relying on himself and hold God to his promises, Jesus invites us to also stop relying on ourselves and to pummel his throne, day and night with our prayers. But not with the attitude that we'll finally wear God out and he'll have to give in, but with faith in his promises that he will come to our aid, and quickly so.

Ah, and there's another opportunity to see our need to always pray and to not give up. Our lives are short and we live in a culture of instant gratification and we're praying to the One for whom "a thousand years...are like a day that has

just gone by..." (Ps. 90:4). While God invites us to constantly pummel him with our prayers, we are not invited into his throne room just yet. Meaning, we aren't given all the details of his plan for our lives and exactly how and when he will answer our prayers. But remember, this is the God who gave his Son for you! He cannot go against his Word to you and he cannot forget or forsake you. As John writes: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 Jn. 5:4,15).

Friends, keep **GIVING GOD BEAUTIFUL BLACK EYES**. He loves them. He longs for them. Keep on praying and don't give up! Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.