

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The Parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge*"ⁱ

On Sunday mornings we are working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse, and we find ourselves at **Luke 18:1**.

As I have reminded you before, the chapter breaks in Scripture are helpful, but they were added by man. One of the dangers with them is they can cause us to think, "*This is a new chapter, so it must not be related to the previous chapter.*" But it's the opposite in this case. We need to keep the previous chapter in mind to interpret these verses correctly.

Everything Jesus taught in these verses flows from his teaching at the end of **Luke 17** on his Second Coming:

- Briefly look at the second half of **verse 8** and notice the words **when the Son of Man comes**. This is the context. The parable is related to Jesus's Second Coming.
- One commentator wrote, "The parable serves as a concluding illustration to **Luke 17:22-37** [about Jesus's Second Coming]."ⁱⁱ
- John MacArthur's sermon on this parable is titled, "Persistent Prayer for the Lord's Return."

So, here's what's going on...

Jesus knew that as his disciples waited for his return they could become discouraged, lose heart, and begin to doubt.

So, look what he says to them in **verse 1**...

Luke 18:1 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

It's a theme in Scripture that we **ought always to pray**:

- **Romans 12:12 be constant in prayer**
- **Ephesians 6:18 praying at all times**
- **Colossians 4:2 continue steadfastly in prayer**
- **1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing**

When I was [Catholic](#), there was only one way to pray: kneeling with your eyes closed, head bowed, and hands folded. I remember one time when someone wanted to pray with me and I thought we couldn't pray, because we couldn't kneel.

When I became a Christian I learned that we didn't have to pray this way, but I read verses like this one that we **ought always to pray**, and I was confused. I thought, "*How could I pray all the time? I won't have time for anything else, such as eating, working, or even sleeping, because I can't pray while I sleep.*"

To be honest, if you're like me, and you have trouble sleeping, you pray because you know it will help you fall back to sleep.

So, if we are not expected to – literally – pray all the time, what are these verses referring to?

This brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: "Ought always to pray" involves a disposition toward God.

There's a place for concentrated prayer times in our lives but praying all the time refers to a receptive disposition toward God.

Let me give you an example that I believe illustrates this...

When we were in California, one of my good friends, Pat Mundy, was a cop. One time I was with him, and he noticed someone he said, “didn’t look right.” I asked him why he noticed this person, and he said, *“As a cop you’re always looking around at people and situations, seeing if things seem off. Even though I am off duty, I can never really be off duty.”*

This is the same for Christians. Even when we are, “Off duty,” which is to say not praying, we are never really “off duty,” in the sense that:

- We haven’t flipped off a switch and started ignoring God
- We are not out of communion with him

Instead, have a receptive disposition toward God:

- We are still sensitive to him and what he wants from us
- We are always ready to seek him in whatever situation we face

Last Sunday night Pastor Nathan was teaching through 1 Samuel 3. That’s the passage when God repeatedly calls out to Samuel, but Samuel thinks it is Eli. Samuel keeps going to Eli, but Eli tells Samuel it is not him and he should go back to bed. On the third time Eli recognized God was calling to Samuel, and listen to what happened...

1 Samuel 3:10 The Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “SPEAK, FOR YOUR SERVANT HEARS.”

We don’t hear from God audibly like Samuel did, but we hear from him through his Word.

And even when we are not praying, we should have a disposition that says, **“Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.”**

We are going about our daily lives, doing the things God wants us to do:

- We are at our jobs
- We are going to school
- We are spending time with family
- We are talking with friends
- We are having a meal

And we are always receptive to God and sensitive to his will for our lives.

Jesus also mentioned one of the most common temptations when praying: **[losing] heart**.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: We can “lose heart” when praying because it is hard work.

We know that one of the main reasons we give up doing anything is because it is difficult. We **lose heart**, which means we become discouraged, which is how it is translated in some Bibles.

And it is very easy to **lose heart** when praying because prayer is difficult. Every time we pray, it is a spiritual battle.

Listen to this verse...

Romans 15:30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to STRIVE TOGETHER WITH ME

Now let's pause for a moment. The Greek word for strive is [*agōnizomai*](#) (pronounced ag-oh-need-zi-my). The first four letters are a-g-o-n. It is related to our word *agony*. It means, "To enter a contest: contend in the gymnastic games; fight."

Paul is asking his readers to join him in doing something difficult. Even agonizing.

So, what is he going to say?

- Strive together with me...in giving financially until it hurts
- Strive together with me...against temptation
- Strive together with me... in being persecuted for Christ

Nope.

Listen to this...

Romans 15:30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me IN YOUR PRAYERS TO GOD ON MY BEHALF,

He asked them to agonize, of all things, in prayer for him!

Did you know that prayer is agonizing?

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Here's another example...

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras...a servant of Christ Jesus...ALWAYS STRUGGLING ON YOUR BEHALF IN HIS PRAYERS, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Paul praised Epaphras because he was **always struggling in his prayers**. Again, the word for **struggling** is [*agōnizomai*](#).

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Let me share another story with you from when I was Catholic...

My dad taught us numerous prayers when I was growing up and I recited them all of them, especially before bed.

Reciting prayers is NOT hard work; it does not involve striving or agonizing. If there is anything hard about it, it is the boringness. I could zip through all my prayers without ever thinking about what I was saying. I could say an entire rosary with my mind elsewhere.

I became a Christian and read Jesus's words...

Matthew 6:7 When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

I had to completely change the way I prayed.

Instead of reciting prayers, or as Jesus warned against [**heaping**] **up empty phrases as the Gentiles do**, I had to concentrate on what I was saying. And it was hard work to concentrate.

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I don't know about you, but my prayers frequently sounded like this...

“Father, please help me serve you well...oh wait, when I get home I need to respond to that email...Lord, can you help me become more like Christ...should I train chest or back today?...God, will you please help me teach my students well...That reminds me I still need to mow the lawn. I hate doing that, because of my allergies.”

Praying was and still is hard work for me.

It is easy to lose heart and give up. We wonder:

- *“Will my prayers accomplish anything?”*
- *“Am I wasting my time?”*
- *“How long do I have to keep praying for this?”*
- *“Should I keep praying for this?”ⁱⁱⁱ*

So, Jesus preaches this parable to encourage his disciples, including us, to be persistent and not give up in our prayer lives.

Look with me at **verse 2**...

Luke 18:2 He said, **“In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.**

This judge is evil and corrupt. He does not represent God!

To say he neither feared God nor respected man is to say he disobeyed the two greatest commandments: love God and love others...

Mark 12:29 Jesus [said], **“The most important [commandment is...] 30 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”**

If he had no regard for God or man he also had no regard for justice:

- If he had no regard for man, but he had regard for God, he would still have a regard for justice to please God.
- If he had no regard for God, but he had regard for his fellow man, he would have regard for justice for man’s sake. We know atheists crave justice when they feel an injustice has taken place.

But if you have a man with no regard for God or man, he will have no regard for justice ...which is the case with this judge.

And there happens to be a widow in the city who craves justice, and this sets up the confrontation. Look at **verse 3**...

Luke 18:3 **And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’**

Let me share something important with you about parables...

We don’t have to worry about details we are not given.

Parables are not supposed to answer all the questions we might have about the situation they describe. Instead, they are intended to drive home one or two points. The smaller details have nothing to do with those points, so we ignore them.

In fact, sometimes if you press parables too far, you can end up misunderstanding them because you’re taking away points from details that are not intended to make points.

For example, in this parable, we are not told:

- What injustice was committed against the widow
- Who the adversary is who wronged her

But these details don't relate to the main points, so we ignore them.

Now let me remind you of one detail that IS important to the parable...

Widows were the picture of vulnerability, so people could easily take advantage of them. Think about Jesus condemning the scribes...

Luke 20:46 “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, 47 who DEVOUR WIDOWS' HOUSES...They will receive the greater condemnation.”

Scribes would devour widows' houses because widows were so easy to take advantage of.

But this guy is a judge, so you would expect him to help, but it says...

Luke 18:4a For a while he refused,

Pause here. This is much worse than it looks.

There are many verses I could give you about helping widows, but I'll share just three.

First, it was commanded in the law...

Deuteronomy 14:28 At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce...29 And...THE WIDOW, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled.

The prophets commanded it...

Isaiah 1:17 Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, PLEAD THE WIDOW'S CAUSE.

The prophet's condemned people who didn't help widows...

Isaiah 1:23 Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and THE WIDOW'S CAUSE DOES NOT COME TO THEM.

In the New Testament we're told to help widows...

James 1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans AND WIDOWS in their affliction.

So when the judge – someone who should have helped the widow – didn't, it looked very bad.

As a widow, she didn't have a husband to help her, and the fact that she is the one going to the judge means that more than likely she didn't have any sons to help her either.

She had nowhere to turn except **to the judge**. But if you look at **verse 6** it says the judge is **unrighteous**. This means corrupt, or unjust, which is how it's translated in other Bibles.

A corrupt or unjust judge would be one open to bribes. But a poor widow wouldn't have money to bribe him, so he ignores her.

Things look desperate. There was only one thing she could use...and that was her persistence. She would have to annoy the judge until he finally gave in, which is what happened. Look at the rest of **verse 4**...

Luke 18:4b but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'"

We can tell the widow's claim was just. The judge put her off, not because she didn't have a case, but because he is unjust.

But her persistence paid off! Picture her approaching him in the marketplace, in the public square, at the gate of the city, maybe even going up to his home. She was relentless. He probably felt like wherever he went, she was there.

So, interestingly, even when the judge helped her he did so for selfish reasons. He didn't care about her, but he cared about himself. He just wanted to get rid of her.

Now we get to hear the interpretation of the parable. Look at **verse 6**...

Luke 18:6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says.

This is Jesus's way of saying, "Listen to the point of the story..."

Luke 18:7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?

Even though the judge doesn't represent God, the widow does represent us, or in particular, the elect. And this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: The widow represents us...to an extent.

The words **cry to him day and night** take our minds to **Romans 8:15**...

Romans 8:15 You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

The idea is the way the widow cried to the judge day and night, we cry to God the Father, day and night.

The widow is a fitting picture of us in two ways:

1. First, the widow was helpless to remedy her situation and we are helpless to remedy our situation
2. Second, the widow was at the mercy of this judge, and we are at the mercy of God, our judge

But I have told you before that every picture, or type, breaks down and it is the same with this widow. Although our situation resembles hers in some ways, there are other ways our situation is much better than hers:

- She had little access to the judge in her time of need and she received no mercy or grace from him, but **Hebrews 4:16 Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**
- She had no advocate to represent her, but **1 John 2:1 We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**
- She was dealing with a judge who was unjust, but our God is just.
- She was dealing with a judge who was cruel, but our God is compassionate, gracious, and kind.

- She was a widow who was unloved and had no husband, but as a member of the church, we are the bride of Christ with him as our loving husband.

Let me tell you one of the last points, which is very encouraging to me...

She was a rejected widow, but **verse 8** says we are God's elect. That means he has chosen us.

Few biblical truths bless me more than knowing that I am one of God's **elect**. He has chosen me. He will not un-elect me or un-choose me. My salvation does not lie in my goodness or faithfulness, but in my election.

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Now maybe you listen to this, and you say, "*How can I be one of God's **elect**?*"

The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas a similar question, and I tell you what they told him...

Acts 16:31 Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

If you want to be one of God's elect, repent and believe.

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Now look at our last verse...

Luke 18:8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

This parable is commonly misunderstood. Let me tell you the common misinterpretation and then I will tell you the correct interpretation...

The common misinterpretation is this...

"The persistent widow kept bothering the unjust judge until he finally gave her what she wanted, because of her persistence, even though he had no regard for her. How much more will your Heavenly Father, who loves you, answer your prayers if you will be persistent with Him. So, keep praying and be persistent until God gives you what you want."

But that's not what this parable is about.

And you can tell that's not the correct interpretation by looking carefully at verses 6 through 8. If that was the correct interpretation Jesus would say something like this...

Luke 18:6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God [ANSWER] his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will [ANSWER] them speedily.

But instead of being about God answering our prayers, it is about him giving us justice...and this brings us to lesson four...

Lesson Four: The parable is primarily about God giving his people justice.

Notice the word justice occurs 4 times:

1. In **verse 3** the widow says, **'Give me justice against my adversary.'**
2. In **verse 5** the judge finally says, **"I will give her justice."**
3. **Luke 18:7 And will not God give justice to his elect?**
4. **Luke 18:8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily"**

The parable is primarily about a persistent widow seeking justice and an unjust judge giving it to her.

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The judge was described so unjustly to set up a “how much more than” situation. The idea is if an unjust judge can be persuaded to give justice to a woman he has no regard for, then HOW MUCH MORE will God, who is just, give justice to his elect whom he loves.

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When will God provide this justice?

We are given the answer in **verse 8**...

Luke 18:8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, WHEN THE SON OF MAN COMES, will he find faith on earth?”

The justice is executed **when the Son of Man comes**.

Few things have as much to do with justice as Jesus’s Second Coming. The Second Coming is, above all things, about Jesus executing justice on the earth.

If you were here for last Sunday’s sermon, you remember the closing verses of **Luke 17** zoom in on the Battle of Armageddon when Jesus destroys his enemies. You might remember how bloody it is. The carnage is unimaginable.

That is Jesus carrying out justice on the earth. Then he sets up his kingdom establishing perfect justice over the earth.

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Now obviously the second half of **verse 8** looks to Jesus’s Second Coming, but the first half of the verse does too with the word **speedily**, or some Bibles say **quickly**.

This is the word *tachos* (pronounced tah-hoss). You might remember me talking about this word in a recent sermon. It doesn’t mean soon. Jesus is not saying he will return in the near future and execute justice. He is saying, like we talked about in the sermon, he is coming quickly, or suddenly, to execute justice. People will not have time to prepare or even repent.

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We see wickedness around us. We want justice. Sometimes we wonder why God doesn’t seem to be doing anything about it.

People tend to think God looks very severe in the Old Testament, but as I have shared with you before one of the most common criticisms of God in the Old Testament is that He allowed the wicked to prosper, or go unpunished.

Here’s another way to look at it...

Throughout the Old and New Testaments there have been people, represented by the widow in the parable, crying out to God for justice.

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One of the other questions you might have is, “*How does this work when we don’t always get justice in this life?*”

That’s true. It is important to understand that the justice God’s elect receive might not be in this life, but may be in eternity. Persistent prayer means persistent faith even to the end. Those who pray persistently even to the end of their lives will experience vindication...if not in this life than in the next.

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Now look at the second half of **verse 8** again...

Luke 18:8b Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

And this brings us to lesson five...

Lesson Five: Do we have faith like the widow?

Sometimes people read verse 8 and say something like, *“This means the world is getting so bad that when Jesus returns he won’t find any believers.”*

That’s not what the verse means. If there were no believers on the earth when Jesus returned there would be nobody to enter his kingdom.

Briefly look back at **Luke 17:34**...

Luke 17:34 I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. 35 There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.”

The one taken is taken in judgment to the battle of Armageddon, but the one left is left to enter the kingdom.

Jesus can’t be questioning whether there will be any faith, or believers, left on the earth or there wouldn’t be anyone to enter his kingdom.

Jesus is not asking if there will be faith when he returns. He is asking if there will be faith LIKE the widow had when he returns:

1. Will he find faith that longs for justice...like the widow longed for justice
2. Will he find faith that is persistent...like the widow was persistent:
 - a. The end of the parable is intended to connect back to the beginning.
 - b. The phrase **cry to him day and night in verse 7** is synonymous with **ought always to pray** in verse 1, because **day and night** mean **always**.

So another way to interpret **verse 8** is to connect it to **verse 1**:

- Will Jesus find faith that continues to pray as we **ought always to pray**
- Or will he find faith that **loses heart**

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Now let me conclude with this...

You might have a nagging question. I think it is a question that we can’t help but wonder when we interpret this parable correctly, and I would summarize it like this...

Why the delay?

God is just. Why doesn’t he execute justice?

We understand why the judge in the parable delays, because he is unjust. But God IS just, so, again, why the delay?

Here's the answer...

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

God only delays so there would be time for people to repent. He knows that when his Son returns it will be too late.

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If you sit here today as one of God's **elect**, that is wonderful. But if not, do not presume on God's patience. At some point his patience comes to an end and then he will execute justice on the earth. You will want to have repented and believed in Christ at that time.

If you have any questions, or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service, and I'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Done:

1. Stein
2. RT France
3. Hendrickson
4. https://youtu.be/nkV_tpQnV6Y?t=1169

ⁱⁱ Robert H Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Volume 24) (The New American Commentary)*, p. 444.

ⁱⁱⁱ Why aren't our prayers always answered at once? Here are possible reasons:

1. To teach us patience and other virtues
2. To increase our Thanksgiving when we finally receive the blessing. How much more thankful have you been four things that took considerable time and effort in the making, versus things you were given quickly with little to no effort.
3. God might know it is not good for us
4. God might have something better for us
5. May be is simply doesn't fit into God's will, not only for us, but for God's overall plan.