



Persisting in Prayer Luke 18:1-8

When we get on the internet and read the news, it only takes a millisecond to realize that this world is full of injustice. You may turn on the TV, and you quickly hear about a murder or people starving or human trafficking. I even think about the persecution around the world for Christians, and can feel so burdened for them in the midst of their pain. Did you realize that according to Open Doors ministries – which reaches to the persecuted church – **322 Christians are killed for their faith around the globe, 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed, and 772 forms of violence (like beatings, abductions, rapes, arrests and forced marriages) take place per month?**

These are injustices, and I wonder to myself “If I were in their situations, what would I be thinking? Would I endure? Would I praise the Lord still?” When we think of all these things we can begin to feel the same way the psalmist felt when he said, “¹How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ²How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”¹

“How long, O Lord?” Sometimes the pains of life seems unbearable, but when we look around and see it happening exponentially, and we see the persecution of people who claim to be God’s children, we can wonder, “Has God forgotten?” We pray over and over again, “Let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” but we still wait to see Jesus return. We read the psalmist praying, “¹To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. ²O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me. ³Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed; Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause.”² Yet, when we hear that prayer, it seems as though there’s a lot of triumphing from the enemy. All the while, we understand that *someday* justice will come. But we’re tempted to lose heart. We’re tempted to unbelief. The promises of future glory seem too far out. We just want to know God will answer now.

How are we expected to face the troubles in life? How do we grow in hope of Jesus’ return even when things can become more painful or difficult? How do we fuel our zeal for godliness when difficulties arise? If persecution comes to us, do we have hope of enduring?

Before I go any further, turn in your Bibles to Luke 18. We’re going to study another one of Jesus’ parables, and this parable is told after Jesus talks about the delay to his return to restore everything. In chapter 17, Jesus says, “²⁶Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.”³ The days of the Son of Man are those days before he comes and restores everything. Jesus says here that when he comes again, people are going to be going about their own things, doing life their own way with basically no thought of Jesus.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Ps 13:1–2.

² *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ps 25:1–3.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Lk 17:26–27.

Jesus says that his disciples (meaning, those who trust him and follow him) are going to long for Jesus' return but they're not going to see it in their timetable. There's going to be delay.

After Jesus explains these things, he moves into this parable known as "The Parable of the Persistent Widow." Let's read it together, and before we do, let's pray.

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,² saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.³ Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'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.'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?"⁴

Jesus basically says that if you want to persevere in the midst of injustice and if you want to keep faithful as a disciple all the way until the end, pray. That actually may sound confusing to us, though. Does prayer actually have that much power? Well, remember what I said last week about prayer. Prayer in-and-of-itself has no power. Meaning that if you're just spouting words off into the sky to some unknown deity, you have no assurance of answer. But the prayers of Jesus' disciples are powerful – not because of the disciples – but because of the God who hears those prayers. As Christians pray, God is delighted in hearing and answering those prayers because in true, biblical prayer, a person is confessing their desperate dependence on God. When we're praying in dependence (i.e. – faith) God hears those prayers because God does not turn away anyone who is truly coming to him in dependence and trust in him (see John 6:37).

God hears and grows his children (Christians) through persevering prayer. Look at verse 1 and see that Luke starts off this parable by telling us *who* Jesus is speaking to. He's speaking a parable to *them*. The "them" here are the disciples, as stated in chapter 17 and verse 22. In speaking to his disciples about the difficulties that are going to come, he then gives a parable so that men will *always* pray and not give up.

Again, as I've done the last two sermons in this series, I need to emphasize the importance of being a follower of Jesus. The Bible tells us we were created for God's glory. We were made to find our joy in him, and yet all of us are born sinners. Not only do we not want God, we want to take the Ruler and Sustainer, the Eternal One, and make him serve us. We want to take his gifts and turn them in on us. We have sought to usurp his throne, all the while, we're on the pathway to death because we've rejected Him – who is life.

Please hear me, if you are not a follower of Jesus. If you've not embraced Jesus as the only Savior who took the punishment that sinners deserved and then gives eternal life and reconciliation with God, please call on him this morning! Why wait? Any message on prayer does not matter for you if you don't

⁴ *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Lk 18:1–8.

call on him to forgive you and rescue you. Proverbs 1:24-25, 28-29 says, **“²⁴ Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, ²⁵ because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, ²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. ²⁹ Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. . . .”⁶** If you don’t turn to God, you don’t have God. And, if you don’t have God, you don’t have the most wondrous relationship with the eternally magnificent! And if you don’t have this relationship, you aren’t praying to him, nor is he promising to answer.

But for all who believe on Jesus, we learned even last week, **“¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”⁷** What amazing love that God Jesus would die and take my punishment and then not only would God accept me, but God wants me, and God also wants to answer my prayers to him! Just these thoughts should cause us to not want to give up in prayer. But, when the rubber of our faith meets the road of life, we can be tempted to stall. When difficulties arise, we can wonder with the psalmist, “How long?” We can tend to question whether or not God is faithful. But in this parable, Jesus calls us to keep praying. Prayer is a means by which our dependence on the Lord continues to thrive and persevere because God hears and grows his children, Christians, through prayer. And, through prayer, God *will* bring justice. Therefore, pray and don’t give up.

These are things we see in this parable. So let’s jump in now. The story goes that there was this city with a judge in it that was responsible for the justice in a given area. However, Jesus describes this man as someone who doesn’t fear God or regard man. In other words, he doesn’t subscribe to the “Greatest Commandment” to “Love God and love others.” Automatically we should be thinking that he’s not going to be a very helpful person. He’s corrupt. He’s a judge who only thinks of himself, and in that day (as well as today) there could be judges who would take bribes to make more money. He’s not concerned with justice. He’s infatuated with himself.

Jesus then goes on and says that in this city, there’s a widow. Stop here. If this guy doesn’t care about God or other people – no matter how rich they may be – is he going to care about a widow? In that society (as in certain societies today) widows had it even worse than in our society – monetarily and status-wise. Clearly, if this judge really is fearless, then he is not going to care for this woman. So, Jesus wants us to realize the dire circumstances of this woman – not only in being a widow, but in being a widow under this judge’s jurisdiction.

But then there’s something almost shocking that takes place: she “kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’”⁸ Jesus doesn’t describe the injustice that’s taken place, but the type of injustice isn’t the point. The point is that there’s injustice and this widow has an adversary. Of all people to answer her need, it’d be the judge, but he doesn’t care about justice.

What we see here, though, is that this woman knows that there’s only *one* person who can answer her. She’s desperately dependent so she decides to continually come to the judge. This is persistence! In the Greek language that this was written in, the phrase “kept coming” is in a tense that indicates that she

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Pr 1:24–25.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Pr 1:28–29.

⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), 1 Jn 5:14.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Lk 18:3.

started something that she's going to keep doing until she gets a response. So, it's not merely that this woman is persistent. It's that this woman will not let up.

The story of this widow has come to my mind multiple times in parenting. I wonder if it has for you, too. Have you ever had your child persist in asking for something? Now, clearly they're not oftentimes coming to you asking for "justice" against their adversary. Although, they could be thinking their sibling is their adversary. Nevertheless, they have persistence down. And they persistently ask because 1) they want something, and 2) we're the only one who can get it for them. This is the **Principle: if you truly want something, you will persevere in asking the one who can give it to you.**

Well, Jesus says that for a time the judge refused. That was in keeping with his character. But, after a while, he's annoyed and maybe a little fearful. He says 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." ⁹

Obviously this man knows that he doesn't really care about people, but the persistence of this woman bothers him, and it causes him to think that he should give her justice. But the reason he gives the justice is so that she doesn't beat him down by her continual coming. I think we need to try to understand that phrase of "beat him down." This phrase literally translated means to "strike under the eye" or "give a black eye to." Does this mean that the ruler is afraid she's going to punch him in the face if he doesn't answer her? Well, one modern translation seems to think so when it asserts that she might come and attack him. But this doesn't seem to fit the idea of the phrase. There is evidence that this is a figure of speech that talks about damaging someone's reputation.

This probably is the idea here, too. While the judge doesn't fear God or others, he probably wants to keep his position and his lifestyle. With her incessant urgings to him, he's afraid he'll lose his status. So, even though he's still only thinking of himself, he does answer this woman's need and decides to give her justice. What we see of this judge is that he's unjust and concerned about himself. As a result, we should think that there's *no hope* for this widow and she should give up. However, we see the exact opposite. She hopes and doesn't give up!

This is precisely what Jesus wants us to grasp. Even in the worst of circumstances, human beings can persist. Even under despotic rule, certain people can rise to the occasion and fight for justice. They don't lose heart. The story of this widow has all the makings of any great book or movie – from the ashes a person rises and wins! With this understanding, let's move into the lessons Jesus wants us to understand. Let's read verses 6-8 again together: 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?" ¹⁰

The Lessons:

Now, why is Jesus telling us this story? And why is he using such a sinful and painful circumstance to illustrate his point? Jesus is making an argument from lesser to greater. In other words, Jesus is *not* saying the judge and God are the same. He essentially says that if the judge works *this way*, then why would we not expect God to do so much more?

⁹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Lk 18:4–5.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Lk 18:6–8.

1. God is God.

I know that this is an obvious statement, but it needs to be reiterated in our minds. I remember lyrics to a song from several years ago that says, “God is God and I am not I can only see a part of the picture He's painting God is God and I am man So I'll never understand it all For only God is God” (Chapman, *God is God*). This song talks about the turbulence of life, and this author has gone through the turbulence. Some years after writing this song, his daughter was hit by a car and killed. The driver of that car was his son. And yet, to this day, this man continues to cling to Jesus. He was right, in the midst of troubles like these, our most basic comfort is remember that God is *God*. God is loving. God is perfect. God is compassionate. God is slow to anger. God is infinite. God is holy. God is unchanging. God is all-glorious. God is truth. God is just! Nothing that I see around me has changed the perfect character of God. And nothing around me has de-dethroned him. Yet, in life, **We often let what we see be the judge of God instead of believing God will be the judge of what we see.**

Look at what Jesus says in verse 6: “⁶Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. ⁷And shall God not avenge. . . .”¹¹ If we can understand a judge trying to save his own skin, how much more then should we resolutely believe that God will avenge? Is God not God? He most certain *is* God!

Therefore, God is the *only* One who can give us the justice we yearn for. As the widow went to the judge because only he could give her what she was asking for, so Jesus is saying that only God can give you what you're longing for. He's the only One who can answer our prayers and give the complete peace and perfection we're looking for. If God is God, and he is, then look to him!

But you may say, “But you have no idea, Pastor Timothy. How can I wait?!” I honestly can say that I have never lived in any one of your shoes. But I can say that it is possible to trust that God is who he says he is while still having undergone torture. In the book of Revelation, we read of people who had been killed for their love of Jesus. They were martyred. And even in Heaven, they're described as *praying* before God's throne saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”¹¹ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer. . . .”¹² Do you see here that the martyrs blood still isn't avenged? The world still doesn't believe on Jesus. They still think they've won. Even to this day, people are killing Christians. Even to this day, people are imprisoned for their faith. Even to this day, and it may seem the world is winning, but these martyrs in heaven aren't angry with the Lord. Even in heaven, they're praying. Talk about persistence in prayer. They are continuing to pray for vindication.

God's response to them is rest a little while longer. He does go on in Revelation with a reason, but still he doesn't tell them *when* it's going to come. That said, when you read the book of Revelation, you see that our God is a just and holy and righteous and perfect God. You do see that he will punish. Jesus will come to judge the world. And we also see glorious hope in Revelation. Those who trust in him are in eternal rest, peace, life, vibrancy in a New Heaven and New Earth. The glory is so great that the apostle Paul was beaten, tortured, shipwrecked, and despised wrote, “¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”¹³ Paul is not saying that injustice and pain here doesn't matter. God cares for the afflicted! But what Paul is saying

¹¹ *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Lk 18:6–7.

¹² *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Re 6:10–11.

¹³ *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ro 8:18.

here is that the glory to come for those who trust in him don't simply receive a bare justice. We don't just get vengeance. We receive so much glory that we ourselves won't be getting out the scales of justice to see if God has done right. We will say "It's not even worth it to compare."

Ventura, God is God!

2. God loves his children.

You may think I've already stated this point, and I have in some ways, but it needs to be made explicit. In verse 7 Jesus asks, "shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?"¹⁴ Again, Jesus is talking specifically about those who trust in him! The term "elect" or "chosen ones" is a term found throughout the Old and New Testament. Some of us probably struggle with this word, but to me this word is one of the most comforting words in the Scriptures. This word actually travels back to the Old Testament, speaking to the Israelites that they are God's chosen nation. And, because they are God's chosen nation, God was holding and caring for them. In the New Testament, this word is brought forth for all believers in Jesus – Jews and Gentiles alike. In 1 Peter 1:1, Peter uses it this way by calling his entire audience "those who are elect exiles."¹⁵

The idea of being "elect" in the Old and New Testament brings confidence, hope and love! Being the "elect" of God means that God's love isn't based on my love. Instead, my love is based in his. He loves me first. As a result, being elect means that we have the confidence that we are under his secure care. We may falter. We may fail. But God will always be faithful. No one will pluck the elect out of His hand because God is our loving Father who guarantees our eternal security. These truths and more are communicated with this word elect.

Therefore, let this word elect cause awe. Jesus here says "won't God avenge his elect?!" If God loved me before the foundation of the world, how can I ever doubt that he loves me *right now*? If God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to the world, and if his only Son was torn and beaten in my place, how will I think God will now think, "I'm tired. I'm done with this justice stuff?" He can't think that way! It's against himself to do that, and we know God cannot deny himself!

Think of this parable again with me, the judge is unjust and concerned only for himself and that leads to injustice. But what about God? God is the eternally just because he thinks of himself! This is almost staggering, but hear me out. God is the definer of *everything*. God is concerned for *his glory* because without him, there's no glory. And, let me ask you, will God ever deny himself? No. Therefore, if you are God's elect. If you are God's child. If you are in God's hands, God *must* vindicate you because in doing so, he vindicates himself and his own glory. Therefore, Christian, you are secure in his love even though he might be saying to you "wait." He's bearing with you while also promising to vindicate! And verse 8 says that he will answer speedily!

By the way, that doesn't mean that he's going to answer immediately. That idea goes back to chapter 17 when Jesus says that his return will be like the days of Noah when everyone was doing their own thing and then all of a sudden, judgment came. So here, I believe Jesus is saying that our prayers will not go unheard. They will be answered, and one day, justice will come in a moment!

¹⁴ *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Lk 18:7.

¹⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), 1 Pe 1:1.

So we have a God who loves us. We have a God who is GOD. We have a God who hears and *answers* prayer. Now, on the basis of these truths, let's get to the application Jesus wants us to have.

Application for Us

1. Pray.

Do we remember the point of the parable? Verse 1: And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.¹⁶ Since God is God. And since God is just. And since God loves us, we ought to pray.

This might seem somewhat confusing to us because we could say, "But God can see the problems. Why should we have to pray?!" Well, last week we saw that prayer is the voice of faith. And, apart from faith it is impossible to please God. In other words, Christians are always depending on God, and since we are depending on him, we are always to be vocalizing that dependence on him. That's what prayer is – the voice of faith. Therefore, it actually makes sense that Jesus would say that in the midst of trials and difficulties until he comes again, we ought to pray and not give up. If we trust God today, we ought to trust him tomorrow. So, let's pray.

But still, you could say, "But why?!" I have one illustration to give and then the point Jesus gives in verse 8. I may be getting into an illustration that can feel trite, but I hope it doesn't come across that way. With five children though, I learn a lot of biblical lessons, and my children have given me another one on prayer: the fact that humility is displayed when we ask. You may have experienced this as well, but how often have you had a son or daughter simply state what they want: Milk! Or maybe they don't sound so bossy. Maybe they say hint around with a little bit of that victim voice that says, "I sure wish I had a piece of that. . . ." Or maybe they say "No fair." Or they don't say anything and walk away.

In any of these scenarios, you could say to your child, "If you just asked me, I probably would have given it to you. Or, even if I wasn't going to give it to you, we could have talked about it. Or, I could explain more. In any of these situations though, we understand that our kids are not believing we love them and they're not being humble. The mere fact that they refused to ask exhibits pride.

Similarly in our lives. When we don't ask, the apostle James says we don't receive. Why? Because God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. And God's goal for his children is that their trust in him would be tried and would increase. So, in the midst of confusion and pain and difficulties, we should cling *all the more* to him.

And, by the way, the example here of this woman is utter persistence. It's zeal. It's like the song sung earlier this morning, "More than watchmen for the morning, I will wait." But this waiting is not a sit-back-and-give-up kind of waiting. It's a waiting that yearns! One man by the name of Neil Lightfoot says of prayer that it "demands every effort of cooperation on our part" (Lightfoot, p. 65). There's a yearning for God's glory and God's justice. And there's an understanding that *only God* can do all of this and we need to depend on him! Therefore, we pray, and we do not give up praying. We persist.

This is the point Jesus is making. Don't give up praying. Keep on keeping on. Never give up. Are there different ways to say that we need to be ceaseless in prayer?!

¹⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Lk 18:1.

Yet still, some could say, “But why?” Well, I’m not sure I’m going to be able to satiate your question, but at least hear the final words of Jesus in this parable. Look at verse 8 again: ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”¹⁷

Here’s something that grabs my attention. Throughout these seven verses, we have not heard the word “faith” mentioned *at all*. The parable even begins with the point: always pray and don’t give up. But the conclusion is “when the Son of Man comes, will he find *faith*. . . ?” What does faith have anything to do with this?!

Here’s the point you’ve heard over and over again: faith is intricately connected to prayer. The first expression of faith *is* prayer. And Scripturally, we even see that there is no faith where there is no prayer. A prayerless person is the same as an airless person – dead.

So what Jesus does here with this parable is he brings it together with his previous teaching on the days when he comes again. And when he comes again, those are going to be difficult times. Christians are going to yearn for his return and long for his justice. The world will be wicked, but Jesus here says “What about you? Will you be trusting me?” Now, keep in mind that Jesus is talking to his disciples *plural*! And he’s asking if there will be faith among his disciples *plural* when he comes again.

We don’t see this in the English, but in the Greek, there’s actually the word “the” before faith. In other words, when Jesus comes will he find *the faith* on the earth? Commentators have chosen to either say the “the” doesn’t matter while one I read believes the “the” matters. And I tend to agree with this commentator. Let me explain why this matters. He writes, “Because of the delay in the consummation of the kingdom, it is especially important for persistent prayer to characterize the Christian life. This will insure that a community of faith will exist when the Son of Man comes (18:8).”¹⁸

Did you hear this? When believers persist in prayer, they leave a heritage of faith so that faith will continue throughout the following generations. When the Son of Man comes, will he find *the faith* on this earth? Through the means of prayer, God will answer prayers, and God will save people and if those people are saved, they will have faith, and they will pray. Prayer will pass down from one generation to another to another to another until we reach the final generation when Jesus returns! Let’s pray *until he comes!*

But the question is, **The questions are, “Will we pray?” “Do we have faith?” “Do we want to grow in our assurance and perseverance in the midst of trials?” “Do we long for our children to know and love the Lord?” “Do we want God’s fame to be known around the globe – not only in 2016, but in 2050 or 2200 (if the Lord were to tarry)?” Let’s pray!**

We have an adversary worse than the widows – an adversary that is like a roaring lion. We have temptations from without and temptations within, but we know that Jesus himself crushed that adversary at the cross. Now we are declared righteous in the sight of God, and are given complete access to the Father to ask and receive what is absolutely best for us. Even the trials will not separate us from God, but they will be put together in his good plan for us! Let’s pray!

¹⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Lk 18:8.

¹⁸ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 444.

So, let's pray. Let's cast our burdens at his feet. Our risen Savior, defeated every enemy of ours. And he purchased the ability for God to hear and answer *our* prayers. We have the confidence that the God of peace will soon crush Satan underneath our feet! Pray. Remind your heart and soul and mind who God is and who you are as his child. Let's not stop praying. God wants to hear them, and he promises to answer. Will he find faith on this earth when he returns? Ventura, I pray that we will be a praying people that gives evidence to our desperate dependence on him and also his great goodness and complete control.

Now let's express this dependence together even as we move into our time of communion this morning.

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