

**Luke 18:1-8**  
**April 19, 2020**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: All of us have prayers that we consistently take to God. What is **your reason** for repeating your prayer to God? [Let people engage]

**Background:** Let me remind us of the context for today's Scripture text. In last week's lesson, Jesus has been talking about His Second Coming. He's been talking about the fact that there will be a return for His establishment of the kingdom, so we have to understand He's saying to His disciples that there will be two comings. First, He comes to die and pay the penalty for sin. Second, He will come again to establish His glorious kingdom, to judge the ungodly as well. So that's what He's talking about in today's text. He's been talking about the end times, the Second Coming. And He is saying all of this to his circle of disciples. You will see in V.1 that He is teaching His disciples that they should always pray and not lose heart. Their tendency was to think that Jesus's return would be more immediate.

It's been approximately 2,020 years since Jesus spoke those words to His disciples. We are living between His first and Second Coming. Right now, there is the invisible kingdom the Lord is building through salvation as He comes to take up His royal throne in the hearts of those who put their trust in Christ. He is tarrying from coming again because His invisible kingdom is still being built with new believers. But the day is coming, i.e. the Second coming, in which the visible kingdom, the kingdom of righteousness, the destruction of the ungodly, the binding of Satan, the end of the reign of Satan and sin, the establishment of the glorious kingdom of righteousness, joy and peace and finally the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth will be **very visible!**

**Transition:** Though Jesus is prepping His disciples on the importance of praying about His Second Coming without losing heart, it's certainly important for us to internalize His teaching on prayer in the here and now while we await His Second Coming.

We all have our reasons as to why we are persistent with certain prayer requests. Let's look at our Scripture text and glean the truths in parable of the persistent widow as to why we should always pray and not lose heart in the process. Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

**The Parable of the Persistent Widow**

**18** Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. <sup>2</sup> He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

<sup>4</sup> "For some time he refused. But finally, he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> 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? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- God is more concerned with the *strength* of our prayers than the *length* of our prayers. We are not heard for our "many words," but for our sincere "cry."
- We should pray whenever and wherever. On every occasion. There are no exception clauses. Prayer is to be like breathing. We are to breathe at all times, or we suffocate. Similarly, we are to pray at all times lest we "suffocate spiritually," and specifically in context so that we do not lose heart.
- X-REF Eph 6:18 - With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.
- Jesus' teaching goes beyond that of the Jews, who tended to limit the times of prayer lest they weary God. Three times a day (Dan. 6:10) was accepted as the maximum.
- V.1 - The verb "**ought**" is in the present tense calling for prayer to be a lifestyle (cf "lifeline!"). Prayer is not "Plan B" but is God's "Plan A!" This means we give prayer priority. The word "**ought**" has the idea of necessity. Prayer is not an optional activity for the more committed. It is a necessity for every believer because it acknowledges our total dependence on God.

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

- V.1 - Why would a disciple lose heart? [Keeping the context in mind (the immediately preceding section Lk 17:20-37-note), they might lose heart because of the delay in the Lord's Second Coming. In the parable the widow is praying for justice and we as Jesus' disciples are to pray persistently for justice for God's people.]
- I didn't like that the widow had such obstacles to overcome in order to get justice! First, she was a woman, who was powerless in a male-dominated culture. She had little standing before the law. In Jesus's day, women did not go to court. Since she was a widow, she had no husband to stand with her in court. Finally, she was poor and could not pay a bribe even if she wanted to. No wonder poor widows did not always get the protection the law was supposed to afford them!

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

- God is *not* like this judge; for God is a loving Father, who is attentive to our every cry, generous in His gifts, concerned about our needs, and ready to answer when we call.
- God gives us direct access to His throne with our prayers.
- We have an advocate, a continual intercessor, our Chief Priest.
- God is righteous and just.
- God cannot be bribed

### **LOOK:**

The teaching of the parable is that we must continue in our prayers, even when there seems to be no answer, because God, unlike the unjust judge, is loving, good, and gracious. We persist in prayer not because we have not yet gotten God's attention, but because we know He cares and will hear us. [Offer the compare/contrast of the persistent widow, her standing with the Lord]

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 247-249)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### **A Demanding Widow (Luke 18:1-8)**

Luke mentions widows more than do all the other Gospel writers combined (Luke 2:37-38; 4:25-26; 7:11-17; 18:1-8; 20:45-47; 21:1-4). In that day, widows usually had a difficult time making ends meet, in spite of the care God instructed His people to give them (Ex. 22:22-24; Deut. 14:28-29; 16:9-15; Ps. 146:9; Isa. 1:17, 23; Jer. 7:6). The early church was serious about the care of Christian widows (Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:3-10; James 1:27), a good example for us to follow today.

As you study this parable, try to see it in its Eastern setting. The "courtroom" was not a fine building but a tent that was moved from place to place as the judge covered his circuit. The judge, not the law, set the agenda; and he sat regally in the tent, surrounded by his assistants. Anybody could watch the proceedings from the outside, but only those who were approved and accepted could have their cases tried. This usually meant bribing one of the assistants so that he would call the judge's attention to the case.

The widow had three obstacles to overcome. First, being a woman she, therefore, had little standing before the law. In the Palestinian society of our Lord's day, women did not go to court. Since she was a widow, she had no husband to stand with her in court. Finally, she was poor and could not pay a bribe even if she wanted to. No wonder poor widows did not always get the protection the law was supposed to afford them!

Now that we understand something of the setting of this parable, we can better understand what Jesus was teaching. Basically, He was encouraging His disciples to pray, and He did this by presenting three contrasts.

***Praying contrasted with fainting (v. 1).*** If we don't pray, we will faint; it's as simple as that! The word *faint* describes a believer who loses heart and gets so discouraged that he or she wants to quit. I can recall two occasions when I have fainted physically, and it is the most helpless feeling I have ever experienced. I felt myself "going," but I couldn't seem to do a thing about it!

There is a connection between what our Lord said in Luke 18:1 and His statement in Luke 17:37. If society is like a rotting corpse, then the "atmosphere" in which we live is being slowly polluted, and this is bound to affect our spiritual lives. But when we pray, we draw on the "pure air" of heaven, and this keeps us from fainting.

But what does it mean "always to pray" or to "pray without ceasing"? (1 Thes. 5:17) It certainly doesn't mean that we should constantly be repeating prayers, because Jesus warned against that kind of praying (Matt. 6:5–15). Rather, it means to make prayer as natural to us as our regular breathing. Unless we are sick or smothering, we rarely think about our breathing; we just do it. Likewise, with prayer—it should be the natural habit of our lives, the "atmosphere" in which we constantly live.

Prayer is much more than the words of our lips; it is the desires of our hearts, *and our hearts are constantly "desiring" before Him*, even if we never speak a word. So, to "pray without ceasing" means to have such holy desires in our hearts, in the will of God, that we are constantly in loving communion with the Father, petitioning Him for His blessing.

Take your choice: do you want to pray—or faint?

***The widow contrasted with God's elect (vv. 2–5).*** Jesus did not say that God's people are like this woman; in fact, He said just the opposite. Because we are *not* like her, we should be encouraged in our praying. He argued from the lesser to the greater: "If a poor widow got what she deserved from a selfish judge, how much more will God's children receive what is right from a loving Heavenly Father!"

Consider the contrasts. To begin with, the woman was a stranger, *but we are the children of God*, and God cares for His children (Luke 11:13). The widow had no access to the judge, but God's children have an open access into His presence and may come at any time to get the help they need (Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Heb. 4:14–16; 10:19–22).

The woman had no friend at court to help get her case on the docket. All she could do was walk around outside the tent and make a nuisance of herself as she shouted at the judge. But when Christian believers pray, they have in heaven a Saviour who is Advocate (1 John 2:1) and High Priest (Heb. 2:17–18), who constantly represents them before the throne of God.

When we pray, we can open the Word and claim the many promises of God, but the widow had no promises that she could claim as she tried to convince the judge to hear her case. We not only have God's unfailing promises, but we also have the Holy Spirit, who assists us in our praying (Rom. 8:26–27).

Perhaps the greatest contrast is that the widow came to a court of law, but God's children come to a throne of grace (Heb. 4:14–16). She pled out of her poverty, but we have all of God's riches available to us to meet our every need (Phil. 4:19). The point is clear: if we fail to pray, our condition spiritually will be just like that of the poor widow. That should encourage us to pray!

***The judge contrasted with the Father (vv. 6–8).*** Unless you see that Jesus is pointing out contrasts, you will get the idea that God must be "argued" or "bribed" into answering prayer! God is *not* like this judge; for God is a loving Father, who is attentive to our every cry, generous in His gifts, concerned about our needs, and ready to answer when we call. The only reason the judge helped the widow was because he was afraid she would "weary" him, which literally

means “give me a black eye”—i.e., ruin his reputation. God answers prayer for His glory and for our good, and He is not vexed when we come.

How, then, do we explain *delays* in answers to prayer, especially when Jesus said that God would “avenge [give them justice] speedily”? (Luke 18:8) Remember that God’s delays are not the delays of inactivity but of preparation. God is always answering prayer, otherwise Romans 8:28 could not be in the Bible. God works in all things at all times, causing all things to work together to accomplish His purposes. The moment we send Him a request that is in His will (see 1 John 5:14–15), God begins to work. We may not see it now, but one day the answer will come.

The question in Luke 18:8 ties in with what Jesus taught in Luke 17:22–37: “Shall He find [that kind of] faith on the earth?” The end times will not be days of great faith. Eight people were saved in Noah’s day, and only four out of Sodom (and one of them perished on the way). Passages like 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3 paint a dark picture of the last days.

**Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 249-250)**

*c. Jesus’ teaching about prayer (18:1–14)*

These verses include two of Jesus’ parables about prayer. One was addressed to the disciples (vv. 1–8), and the other (vv. 9–14) to “some who were confident of their own righteousness.”

18:1–8. **Jesus told the Parable of the Unjust Judge** to teach persistence in prayer: **that they, His disciples, should always pray and not give up.** Verses 2–5 contain the parable itself. **A widow** continued to go before an unjust **judge** to plead for **justice** in her case. **He** continually **refused** to “hear” her case, **but finally he** decided to give her **justice so that she** would not **wear him out with her** complaining. Jesus interpreted the parable (vv. 6–8), pointing out that if **the unjust judge** would give **justice**, then imagine how **God** (the just Judge) **will see that they get justice, and quickly.** Jesus’ question, **When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?** was not spoken out of ignorance. Nor was He questioning whether all believers would be gone when He returns. Instead, He asked the question to spur the disciples on to faithfulness in prayer, to encourage them to keep on in their praying. This is another good lesson from a bad example (cf. 16:1–13).

**Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1549). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**18:7–8** The vindication that God will bring for His saints is judgment of their enemies at the end times. It comes “swiftly,” either in the sense that God justifies and condemns even before the judgment day (see Jn 3:18) or in the sense that time is relative in relation to eternity. Verse 8 seems to imply that a perceived delay on God’s part may cause some to lose faith, indicating that the promise of immediate vindication probably depends on a relative sense of time. The NT gives only scant evidence that a “delay” in the second coming caused some concern for the early church (2 Pt 3:1–13). The provision of the Spirit and subsequent participation in the life of the risen Christ seems to have satisfied doubts and sustained hopes.

**Butler, T. C. (2000). Luke (Vol. 3, pp. 296–298). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

## A. Dedication in Prayer: Trust to the Last (18:1–8)

**SUPPORTING IDEA:** *Dedicated kingdom living includes persistent prayer that trusts God to supply our needs.*

**18:1.** In spite of interruptions from the crowds and his opponents, Jesus consistently turned back to his disciples to teach them new truths about the kingdom. This time he augmented his teaching on prayer (see 3:21; 5:16; 6:12, 28; 9:18, 28–29; 11:1–13; 20:47; 22:40–46). Prayer is not one quick session of listing needs and expecting immediate results. Prayer is continuing to talk to God with persistence. Prayer is based on absolute faith in God, so it never gives up, knowing God will answer when and where he chooses. Prayer also knows that God expects us to keep on praying until the answer comes.

**18:2–5.** Another parable illustrates Jesus' teaching on persistent prayer. An emotionally passive judge settled cases in one town. He did so without passion, not caring for either party. He did so on the basis of his own wisdom and power, never looking to God for help, since he did not fear or believe in God. In an Israelite community where the judge was to be impartial and judgment ultimately belonged to God (Deut. 1:16–17), this judge was unfit for his job.

The judge met his match when a local widow pled for justice in a dispute with a neighbor. The nature of her grievance is of no concern for the story. The point is that she was a widow who never gave up. As a widow she should have received special protection and care from the justice system (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 24:17–21; 27:19; cf. Jas. 1:27). No matter how long the judge ignored her or denied her plea, she returned to his court asking for justice. The judge finally threw up his hands in disgust and frustration. Religious grounds did not cause him to act. He had no religion. Social justice grounds did not cause him to act. He cared nothing for people. He simply had a job as a judge and he did it. He did have limits to his patience. So he finally gave in to the woman just to get rid of her.

**18:6–8a.** Jesus applied the story for his disciples. If an uncaring human judge acts like this, how much more does a loving heavenly Father care for his children. He will never put you off. He does care for you. You will get a quick answer. You will receive justice. But remember, this involves continuing to pray day and night. Your definition of quick may not equal God's definition.

**18:8b.** The problem is not with God. He will answer when you need it. You can count on that. The problem is with us. When Christ returns, will there be anyone here who calls out in faith day and night? Will we become so lackadaisical in our faith that we allow people of persistent prayer to become extinct? Will the second coming of Jesus find us persisting in prayer that his kingdom will come? Or will it find us trapped on the housetop trying desperately to get back into the house to find the possessions that we rely on more than we do on God? Persistent prayer, the work of the person of faith, continues on, no matter what the answer. When Christ returns, the person of persistent prayer will still be praying. Will you?

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 18:1-14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**