

Luke 18:1-14

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Holy Trinity family. It's good to be in God's house. And I do know how to work computers, Dave.

Prayer, perseverance, and our posture before God. Prayer, things that those of us who are traveling through this life, even as we wait on our Lord.

Things that we need to know as disciples of Jesus. I pray that we would hear him well so that we can live well in this world. So, Lord, we look to you this morning.

And you are great and indeed greatly to be praised. So we come before you this morning asking for the help that only you can give.

In Christ's name, amen. I think my first exposure to this particular text could have well been in my early Christian experience.

[1 : 16] As a part of the Church of God in Christ. One of the dynamics of Pentecostal worship, if you will, is a call and response kind of dynamic.

With this particular text, the worship leader would begin with the words, I know prayer. The congregation would come back and say, I know prayer.

And then the worship leader would sing again, changes things. And of course, the congregation would respond, changes things. The leader would confidently, then confidently assert, as well as the congregation together, would say something like this.

Men ought to always pray and never faint, King James. I know prayer. I know prayer changes things.

Other verses could have been added as the worship leader was inclined. There would be singing and the music would play. And there would be even shouting in the aisles.

[2 : 36] But when all of that was finished, the biblical truth, as far as our being, persevere in prayer, that was embedded into the hearts and the minds of God's people.

Reinforcement of Scripture through Psalm. And my prayer today is that through the teaching of this particular text, you too would be encouraged to press on in prayer and trust in Christ's righteousness alone before God for your own salvation.

The text divides very nicely, doesn't it? Verses 1 through 8, prayer persistence. Verses 9 through 14, pride resistance.

Prayer persistence in verses 1 through 8, pride resistance. That's the encouragement, ultimately, that Jesus wanted to get a cross.

What about persistence in prayer or prayer persistence in verses 1 through 8? Luke is quite clear, isn't he, as to why Jesus told this story.

[3 : 53] You see that in verse 1? And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart, not to faint.

Why this particular story? So that people would not lose heart. They would not faint when things happen on earth, even as they await the Lord's coming.

We've seen that in chapter 17. When things didn't happen in a manner or within a time frame that was expected.

Has that ever happened to you? You've asked the Lord for something and you've got your clock out. You've got the timer on. And that time comes and it goes and still what you were anticipating may not happen.

Tough, uncertain times were on the way, as noted in the previous verses. And when such time came, would come, the disciples of Jesus were to press on in faith, trusting God, who to eventually do the right things and thereby prove to all that their faith had not been misplaced.

[5 : 15] Because God would come through on behalf of his faithful people. What do you think when the Lord doesn't show up with what we want or what we think we need when we need it?

It can be rather disheartening. It can distort our view of God. It can distort our understanding of God. Because God doesn't play by your rules and mine.

Oh, he's God. And we like to think perhaps otherwise or that he works in different ways and manners.

How does one survive in the world when the complete manifestation of God's kingdom in between or while they await the manifestation of God's kingdom when the Son of Man comes?

Verse 8. Huh? Perseverance and prayer to God so we don't lose heart. That's the response. When God doesn't come, when times are tough, when things don't work out well the way that we want them to, perseverance and prayer is the order of the day.

[6 : 35] So that you and I do not lose heart that we don't give up. Now, the purpose of the parable, verse 1. But then we see the people in the parable in verses 2 and 3.

He tells the story. He said, In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.

How would you like to go before this particular judge? And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, Give me justice against my adversary.

Here you have the one who was appointed to ensure that justice would in fact be the lot of all.

And in ancient Israel, such persons, they were the Lord's representatives. And they were to be clothed with a most important garment, if you will, the fear of God.

[7 : 43] The fear, respect, and honor for God was to be the compass for that person's living and that person's working. The fear of God was to be the compass for God. The fear of God was to be at the center, as we see that in 2 Chronicles chapter 19, verses 5 through 7.

But not this particular judge. He had no respect for God or people. He was known for his hard-heartedness, his hard-core demeanor and manner.

He was in it, if you will, for himself. But the tough judge one day met a tough widow. Ever meet any hand on your hip, neck-rolling kind of people?

Tough judge met a tough woman on that day. Huh? The widow on the other end of the social spectrum.

She's vulnerable and needy and powerless, if you will. She's without the provision and the protection of a husband.

[9 : 00] Huh? And the fact that she came alone indicates that she had no one to advocate for her on that particular day. Understanding this dear lady takes her case to someone who would render judgment.

Huh? That's what she does, huh? On her behalf. We don't know exactly the wrong that she suffered. But she was a woman, if you will, in pursuit of justice.

Now, while this was a personal case for her, we've seen women in this world, particularly people of African-American descent, who were people in pursuit of justice.

Think of people like Rosa Parks, a woman in pursuit of justice. I think of a lady in particular, and I am touched deeply by the story of Fannie Lou Hamer.

Huh? In the South, 60s and 70s, beat to a pulp, but took a stand because she was in pursuit of justice in this world.

[10 : 11] Huh? Huh? Huh? Huh? Pursuing what is right on behalf of different ones who were oppressed, and sometimes the person who's pursuing it is oppressed, as was in this case.

And sometimes because of God implants in the hearts of certain ones to be pursuers of justice, of right causes for people.

This woman here in our text was one of those kinds. She was in pursuit of justice for herself. Huh? Give me justice against my adversary, her words.

And initially, the response of this hard-hearted judge was no. Huh? Notice verse 4. For a while he refused, but afterwards he said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor respect men.

Huh? We don't know how many times this particular woman returned, but it was enough to make the judge think along the lines of what we see here.

[11 : 18] Huh? In verses 4 and 5. Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this woman keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not, and I love this word, beat me down.

She will not beat me down. It's the same word that we see elsewhere, where there's a physical dimension to it, where one is either bruised.

This is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, I believe. It says, I beat my body. Huh? I beat myself down. He said, This woman, lest she beat me down.

Not talking in a physical sense, but speaking more in an emotional sense. Ever felt that from somebody? Gonna wear them down.

Sometimes it's what children do to parents. Hey, mom. Hey, mom, mom, mom, mom, mom, mom, mom. Would you do this? Mom, mom. Boy, if you don't get out of here, huh?

[12 : 22] Go on about your business. Mom, mom. All right, all right. Just go ahead. Do it. Yeah. Well, huh? The initial denial of justice did not stop.

She did not stop at no, huh? One might imagine her coming and pestering the judge again and again and again. She didn't give up.

He did not give in at that point. But then he begins to reason. Boy, she keeps on coming here. What am I going to do, huh? The reason for the reversal of this decision was not a change of heart on this hard-hearted man.

The game changer, friends, was the persistence of the widow. Tough judge had met tough widow, huh? Now, what about the point that he points out in verse 1, huh?

Notice what he says in verse 6. The Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to, notice this, His elect, His chosen ones, who cry to Him day and night, will He delay long over them?

[13 : 43] Huh? The needy woman goes to the powerful judge and get what she wanted from Him. The judge acted not on the basis of internal principle, but on the basis of external pressure.

Pressure. Pressure. The dogged persistence of the lady who wanted what was right for her. Are we then, on the basis of this parable, then to put pressure on God?

As if our persistent coming would sort of say, Well, I got you. Get on out of my face, huh? No. Of wearing Him down?

That's not the point. Jesus says, Hear what the unjust or the unrighteous judge says. Again, the point is he is looking at the character of the judge.

This unrighteous judge responds to this woman in need. How much more will the righteous God respond to the prayers of those He has chosen from the very foundation of the world?

[14 : 57] It's actually a lesson in contrast, if you will. God is not like this judge. Huh? God enters the picture, huh? In verses 7 and 8.

He will do what is right on behalf of His chosen ones. He does not, like the judge, ignore the cries of His beloved ones.

Huh? Unlike the unjust judge, the Lord hears the cries of those who call out to Him. Does not the psalmist remind us that the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and that His ears are opening to their cries, huh?

God, if you have a picture of a God with His fingers and His ears because He doesn't want to hear you, that is a false caricature, a caricature of God that is not true.

Huh? He gives justice to His chosen ones who call unto Him day and night.

[16 : 11] Listen to the psalmist's prayer in Psalm 88 and 1. Oh, Lord, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.

Let my prayer come before you. Incline your ear to my cry. And if you would see Psalm 88 is a lament. And the psalmist was in the thicket of it in life.

And were ways in which he could not see his way out. But in the midst of that, he called unto the God of His deliverance. And he called in day and night.

I'm reminded of the martyrs in Revelation chapter 6 who cried out, How long, oh God, how long before we will be avenged or the avengement of those who are suffering and the martyrs that have been martyred because of their faith in Christ?

How long? Here's the point. God can be trusted to do what is right with His children. Don't lose heart.

[17 : 23] God will do His part. Our role, our part is to trust Him. Don't lose heart. Our appeal is not to an unrighteous judge, but to the righteous God of the universe, the just God.

Will not the judge of all the earth, Genesis chapter 18, do what is right? He will. Don't lose heart. In the grand scheme of things, in keeping with His own timing, and we in the midst of rough and tough times, until He returns, God has every...

And so He will... Don't lose heart in the big picture, but also in the smaller picture of things, in the everyday matters of life, things that, and from an eternal perspective, may seem rather mundane, but they are things that can be very, very heavy on our hearts.

Don't lose heart. Don't lose heart, because the cries of God's children fall on the heart of a loving, righteous God. And when time for justice comes, it will be ushered in, in a speedy kind of way, without delay.

Vindication will come. Do not lose heart. When the time for God to act comes, it will be done, and it will be done without delay.

[18 : 54] Having contrasted the character of the unjust judge with that of the righteous judge of all, our Lord issued then a challenge to His disciples, huh?

You see that there in verse 8? I tell you, He will give justice speedily. Here it is. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?

God's role to act as a righteous, loving God that cares for His children, our role is persistent faith as we await His coming.

And again, we've seen the various aspects of His coming in chapter 17. As a matter of fact, this is the back end of what we see beginning in chapter 17, verse 20.

As a matter of fact, take a look right quick back there, chapter 17, verse 20. being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God, here it is, would come, He answered them, the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed and on and on.

[20 : 03] And He begins, continues in that section and gives various aspects, dimensions, dimensions of the coming of the Son of Man. So, as He ends that, or bookends that, with here, nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith?

Faith like this woman has. The faith, like this persistent faith that you've seen in the story. Will He find that kind of faith? And friends, that's the legacy of God's people through the ages.

It's not something that should characterize those of old. Huh? It is the legacy of God's people because the character of God does not change.

Jesus Christ is saying yesterday, today, and forever. And our faith in Him, who He is, a righteous, loving God that cares for His own and responds to them, our faith, the faith of God's people throughout the ages, then, is to be constant.

And therefore, we are to not lose heart. Will He find the kind of faith demonstrated by this woman when He comes in the end?

[21 : 23] Persistent prayer is needed, but according to verses 9 through 14, humble prayers are in order. Prayer persistence, verses 1 through 8, pride resistance, in verses 9 through 14.

Once again, the purpose of the parable comes through rather clearly, does it not? the first story He told to encourage faith and persevering prayer. This parable is to discourage pride and self-reliance in His followers.

Persistent prayer. But resist the attitudes and actions of self-sufficiency. The purpose of the parable was to challenge those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others disrespectfully.

That's very clear. We see that, do we not, in verse 9. But did you notice also the people in the parable? Two people. Their opposite ends also.

But guess what? Both of them came to Holy Trinity Church on any given day. They both go up to pray. They're in the same place.

[22 : 43] But differences come into the picture after we see them going up into the temple to pray in verse 10. Same place.

But different posture before God. You've got a religious conservative, this kind of person who knew how to dot I's and cross T's as it related to the law.

And they were quick to challenge Jesus when he did things that they thought that were against the law. Notice the first four words of the Pharisees' prayer.

God, I thank you. It's downhill after that. I mean, he's right on in the first four words.

I mean, those are right. But it goes downhill after that. I mean, it's a checklist for what he doesn't do. Did you notice that? Huh?

[23 : 44] I mean, this guy is special, if you will. Huh? You see that there? Huh? I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this guy over here, this guy that walked into the door with me this morning.

I'm not even like him. Huh? Huh? He's hot stuff. He's summa cum laude. He's graduating with highest honors in his own mind.

Huh? And he starts out with what he doesn't do. Then he picks up as far as what he does. does. Huh?

As you look at the acts of Jewish piety, giving, and prayer, and fasting. He does those things.

Huh? He fasts twice a week, weekly. Huh? Tuesdays and Thursdays. He's pushing his plate back. Huh? And the law, Day of Atonement, was the only prescribed day of fasting.

[24 : 46] I mean, he's fasting 100 times a year. I mean, he doesn't have to worry about weight control. I mean, he's good to go. Huh? He's a self-satisfied man.

Huh? Can't you see him putting his fingers in his suspenders, rocking back on the balls of his feet? He says, what a good boy I am. Huh? He's okay.

If anybody deserved the smile of God, it was him. It was because of those who saw themselves in this vein. That's why Jesus said what he did here.

Those who had feelings of spiritual superiority. Isn't it easy to see oneself in the rare air of, oh, what a good boy I am.

Hmm? I never smoked, never fooled around. I respect my parents and elders. I'm faithful to my spouse. I had an envelope when the basket passed this morning.

[25 : 52] I put my envelope in just like I do every month. Huh? You got a checklist of your own this morning? You got a list of what you've never done?

as well as what you always do? Feeling pretty spiritually smug and secure this morning?

Jesus has a word for us, doesn't he? For those who they look down on the other person.

Two men. One, he feels like he's okay. He can, he's got it going on so much that God, you know, God needs it.

The other. He's on the other end of the spectrum. Despised by his own country because he was an employee of the Roman government to take taxes from them.

[27 : 15] The Pharisee is full of himself. His prayers are self-congratulatory. Yeah? But this tax collector's standing in a stance and his words that we see are in stark contrast with the other person who came to church on that Sunday morning.

His words reflected his sense of need. He had nothing to commend himself before the God of heaven. You see his words there? verse 13.

The tax collector standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast saying, God, have mercy.

Be merciful to me. A sinner. The sinner. If you will. Huh? His bank account was overdrawn.

Broke. Busted. Bankrupt. Any way you slice it. Insufficient funds.

[28 : 31] And guess what? He knew it. Huh? His life was in the red. And his posture and his words reflect that. There he is.

He's standing afar off. He didn't make his way to the front this morning. He may still be in the vestibule out there. Huh? The shame.

He doesn't lift up his eyes to heaven but he beats his breast. It's a sign of mourning and grief and repentance. Huh? And finally his words.

Not self-congratulatory. Just seven of them in our English text. Or they acknowledge his need. God. Huh? Be merciful to me.

Huh? He needs mercy. He needs favor. It's personal. No comparison with others. Not my sister. Not my brother.

[29 : 30] It's me oh Lord. Standing in the need of prayer. Huh? Don't you love our Lord's words? Who gets the approval?

Huh? Heaven's smile. Is it the self-reliance, self-approved, never done this, never done that, Pharisee?

Well, the sinful task collector who knows his spiritual need for the almighty God. Huh? Then this needy person who knew it went down justified before God.

Huh? Approved, stamped, as right with God. Not on the basis of what he had achieved, but on the basis of what he had received. Huh? Undeserving, needy, right for what God had to give.

Huh? It's for such reasons that Jesus told his audience then and he speaks, friends, the same thing to us today. this is a word for those who trust in the sufficiency of their own righteousness to gain status or hearing or favor with God.

[30 : 46] I love Augustus Toplady's song, Rock of Ages, Clef for me.

I need you to open up and I need you to hide me. Let me hide myself in you. Let the water and the blood from your wounded or riven side which flowed be of sin the double cure.

Cleanses me from its guilt and power, but oh, listen to these words. Not the labors of my hands can fulfill the law's demands.

Could my zeal, no respite, no, could my tears forever flow, all for sin, could not atone. thou must save, thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to your cross I claim, naked, come to thee for dress, helpless, look to thee for grace.

[31 : 49] I love these words, foul. Self-righteousness is foul. Foul I to the fountain fly.

Wash me, save you, or I die. Point of the parable, verse 14. The one who lifts himself up like the Pharisee would be brought down by God.

The one who recognizes his need and positions himself to receive would be lifted up by God. The person full of himself has no room to receive anything from God.

Don't you know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked? Jesus' words to the church of Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3.

I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire that you may be writs and anoint your eyes with eyes that you may see. I got some clothes for you because you're naked.

[32 : 59] The person who is empty is in a position to receive from God. What's the order of the day for Jesus' followers even as they wait for the return of the Son of Man?

The passage helps us, doesn't it? Huh? Persevering prayer and humble God-centered dependence are to characterize Jesus' disciples until he comes.

Oh, that was a good word for Jesus' disciples back there in first century and it is an appropriate fitting word for you and me today. Persevering prayer to a God, the righteous God of all the universe who cares for his own, those he has chosen from the foundation of the world.

And humble God-centered dependence characterize you and me as we make our journey in this life. But did you know what?

The Lord has also given us a means by which our souls can be strengthened and nourished even as we make our way through this world. Prayer persistence, pride resistance, but here friends is for our soul subsistence.

[34 : 29] The table. The table. And our invitation, the invitation today is to come and be strengthened.

Communion is for those who have acknowledged that they are needy and they have received what Christ has provided. His death and resurrection for you and for me.

As not our Lord himself said, I'm the bread of life and whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Come this morning. For soul subsistence even as you make your way, even perhaps in the midst of unanswered prayer. In the midst of the fact that you feel that what you have coming has not come.

Come and be strengthened that you may persist in prayer. Come and be strengthened that you may resist feelings of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness.

[35 : 44] Listen to the words of institution even as we prepare our hearts. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11 and 23, I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night which he when he was betrayed he took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it.

and said this is my body which is for you. Do this he says in remembrance of me.

Jesus is not here physically but in his wisdom he's given us emblems that symbolize his body and his blood.

And when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this and remember to me. In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. So father we come and you've commanded us to do this until you come.

[37 : 02] And I pray that our souls would be strengthened and helped even Lord as we await you Lord as we offer our prayers to a loving heavenly father who in his own time will answer prayers as it relates to full justice but justice in the meantime also.

Encourage our hearts strengthen us as we come to the table in Christ's name. Amen.