

The Persistent Seeker

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[0:00] This morning we are looking at another of Jesus' parables in Luke chapter 18 verses 1-8.

! That passage can be found in your pew Bible on page 1042. Might I ask that you have your Bibles open as we look together in God's Word.

If you don't have a Bible, a Bible can be found in your pew there. And turn to page 1042. First let us go to God in prayer. Eternal Father, who has spoken in various times and in various ways to your people in the past, but in these last days in your Son, the incarnate Word, we pray that you will open my mouth to proclaim that Word in the power of the Spirit.

And we pray that this same Spirit will open the hearts of all hearers gathered here to receive your Holy Gospel and write on their hearts your Holy Law.

Even as you have promised. All of this, gracious Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. Jesus makes it clear right there in verse 1 why He's telling this parable to His disciples.

[1:28] He told them, verse 1, a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart.

Now, why might the disciples lose heart in prayer? What might cause them to give up or to want to give up?

I think the answer to that question and the reason for Jesus' parable and Jesus' exhortation for them not to lose heart can be found in the previous chapter, chapter 17, verse 20, beginning in verse 20.

The Pharisees have come to Jesus and they asked Jesus when the kingdom of God will come. And He answered them, the kingdom of God is not coming with something observable.

Jesus continues in verse 21 of chapter 17. The kingdom of God is already in your midst, Jesus tells them. Now, Jesus now begins after telling them all of that and expounding on the kingdom of God, tells His disciples that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart.

[2:43] I think it's because Jesus knows that the problems of a world broken by sin will impact those who are His own. He knows that this world will impact those who call themselves followers of Jesus Christ.

not to talk of the fact that the world will also hate us just as they hated our Lord. And when all these trials and tribulations come, we will long, we will long for His return.

We will cry, the cry of God's people in every generation. Maranatha, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. And while He tarries, these difficult situations increase, will increase.

So we might be tempted as followers of God to lose heart. We might be tempted to stop praying when it seems like God is not answering our prayer. Or because our lives is full of pain and suffering.

Or maybe it's a loved one who's suffering from cancer, for example. And through all of this, it might just seem like life is unfair.

[3:58] After all, we see around us evil increasing and the wicked continually prospering. You might wonder why Jesus emphasizes to us a continual attitude and a continual posture of prayer.

It calls us to continue to pray, to persist in prayer. I think it's because our prayer, the prayer of the faithful, is a sign of our confidence.

It's a sign of our trust in God. If we are weak in prayer, perhaps it's because we've become lax in our discipleship.

It's often a sign that we've become lax in our discipleship. We've become lax in our commitment to our Lord. By the way, this is a good means of self-examination for all of us.

How's your prayer like? So Jesus tells them this parable about justice. He tells a parable here in these verses about a just God.

[5:09] And he tells a parable about the nature of God's justice. He warns us from becoming disenchanted. And he shows us that even through our suffering, he is bringing about his salvation and his justice.

Let's look at the parable. We see here a widow. A widow who cries out for justice in these verses. But a cry for justice is directed towards this judge in verse 2, who neither feared God nor respected man.

Now, as far as power and privilege go, these two characters occupy opposite spectrums in Jesus' world. The judge would have been a powerful magistrate, having the power to judge over business transactions, over contract and financial disputes.

And the widow, probably a woman without any sons to advocate for her. Because if she had a son, the son would have been the one coming before the judge to advocate on her behalf.

This widow, without anyone in the world to advocate for her, stands in the court of law by herself. There is no greater picture of vulnerability and helplessness in Jesus' day than a widow.

[6:41] But here is this widow, asking this judge to make things right, to give her justice. But we're told, this man neither fears God nor respect man.

The former leads to the latter, you see. A judge who neglects a widow in our distress is the judge who does not fear God.

Because if he had the fear of God in him, he would know of God's concern throughout the Bible that his people should take up the concerns of the widow and the fatherless.

But this judge does not fear God. So he doesn't care about God's concerns. That is the type of man this judge is.

He's likely, he's likely a bribe taker. And here you have a widow who has no money. No money to grease the will of justice so that she might be heard.

[7:47] Yet, she boldly persists in pestering this judge with a petition. And we're told, we're told there, that although the judge at first refused to take up the cause of this woman, because of her incessant badgering, he took up her case and gave her justice.

Note there, that it wasn't because the judge suddenly changed his ways. He's still a wicked man. He even confessed as much. There in verse 5, he says, I neither fear God nor respect man.

So why? Why does he take up the widow's cause? Look there in verse 5. He said, I will give her justice. Why? So that she will not beat me down by a continual coming, a continual badgering and petitioning.

Now, have you found yourself in a similar place as this widow? Jesus, in verse 7, compares this widow to God's people, the elect, who cried to him day and night.

Jesus here is making an argument from lesser to the greater. The widow corresponds to the chosen people of God. The chosen people of God who lives in a corrupt and perverse world.

[9:22] And how often have you cried out to God for help? Earlier I said, Maranatha means, come Lord.

It's the cry of God's people in every generation. But I wonder if that is the cry of the church today. Are we crying, people of God, that Jesus will return to set all things right?

I think that we don't pray that prayer as often as we should. We have a multitude of other things to pray for. Rightly so.

We have our family to pray for, our jobs to pray for, we have justice, seeking justice in the world, and end to violence and war.

We have our health and the health of our loved ones. We have deliverance from bondages of addiction and sin and all of those things to pray for, to intercede before God's throne for.

[10:28] All these things are right and good to pray for. They are. They are right and good to pray for. But turning to God and bringing the pains of your life, the struggles of your family and community to Him means that you recognize Him as a good Father.

Otherwise, you would not come to Him with all of those burdens. You recognize God as a good Father who loves you and cares for you. At least that's what it means when we go to Him in prayer. prayer. This is in keeping with what Jesus even teaches us in prayer. To begin our prayer with our Father in heaven. That's a wonderful thing.

When you go to God in prayer, you're not going to a removed, aloof, dispassionate God. You're coming to your Father in heaven who knows you and cares for you.

But what happens when it seems that those prayers that we bring before God go unanswered?

How can God let a loved one die? How can He let them be stricken with cancer?

[11:42] How can He let a family disintegrate? How can He let my children walk away from God, from the church? There are myriads of questions we can put to God as His people.

Why, God, is this happening? I am praying and beseeching you. I'm coming before your throne, asking you. And in all these questions, in all these questions that we have before God, in the face of the brokenness of our world, in the face of sin and death around us, we are faced with these questions.

We are forced to face the reality of the fact that our world is broken. Our world is fallen. We live in a world of disappointments.

We live in a world of pain and of suffering. And we are faced with a reality that we ourselves share in the brokenness of the world. We ourselves are fallen and broken.

But let's look at Jesus' argument here, from the lesser to the greater. Jesus says, in this parable, that if an unrighteous judge will give justice to an helpless widow, solely on the basis that she is a pest to him, how much more will your heavenly father, who has chosen you and call you his son, vindicate you, give you justice?

[13:14] Jesus asks us in this parable to see the heart of God as a just judge. He is the exact opposite of this uncaring and unrighteous judge.

He is not unaware of your suffering. He knows your pain. He is not aloof. And he wants you to cry out to him and not to lose heart even as you face all of these things, injustices and suffering and pain.

and turmoil and tribulations. He wants you to cry out to him. Now crying out to God shows we are concerned for justice. When we pray to God for justice, it shows the heart and our concern for it.

But I wonder if we are concerned for his justice more than ours. Now this is an important distinction. The justice of the world is often not just.

If we are honest with ourselves, we sometimes reflect the world in seeking retributive justice, which has little often to do with God's justice.

[14:34] We are like the unrighteous judge. We only seek justice when it is in our interest. But not so with God. God. Not so with God.

He is right and he is just. Now the root word for right and just or righteousness and justice are the same. In the original Greek, the root word for those two words are the same words.

It's because God does not separate his justice from his righteousness. righteousness. Both are characteristics which derive from his holiness. And he judges us by that standard.

So if that is true, if God does not separate his justice from his righteousness, we should then ask, what is the nature of God's justice?

Verse 7 to 8 tells us, And will not God give justice to his elect? Jesus says, His elect will cry to him day and night. Will it delay long over them?

[15:39] I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. So what does God justice look like? I think sometimes we think of justice in terms of fairness, in terms of retribution.

But if you look in the pages of the New Testament especially, you will find that God's justice is not like the code of Amorabi. It's not merely an eye for an eye.

And I don't know about you, but that does frustrate me sometimes. I would like God to go and take the hire of my enemies.

I would like God to exact retributive justice on the wicked. I would like God to go against those who offend me. I would like God to vindicate me in front of my enemies.

I would like God to vindicate me by making my enemies fall at my feet. Oh, wait, wait, I mean, at his feet. Or do I? Often when we cry out for justice, we are asking for God to damn and to destroy those who are against us.

[17:07] We're asking God to punish the evil. We're asking God to stand on our side against those who are not against us.

But we live in a fallen world. We ourselves, if we're honest with ourselves, are fallen and broken people. We cannot be the measure, we, brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot be the measure of what is right and just.

It must be the triune God, who is altogether just and altogether righteous, also altogether merciful and gracious. And this is the fact, there cannot be perfect justice outside of God.

There cannot be perfect justice outside of God. Because he alone can declare people right. I hope you see that if that is true, God's justice then must be focused particularly on salvation.

I want to say that again. If it is true that there cannot be perfect justice outside of God, then we ought to see that God's justice must be focused particularly on salvation.

[18 : 23] What does this mean for you and me as we cry out to God for justice? It means that we must be concerned primarily with the things that our Father in heaven is concerned with.

What is he concerned with? God is concerned, by the way, with income inequity in our world. He aids the greed in our world where people amass wealth and other people are left in poverty.

God is concerned about historical injustices of our societies. God is concerned with the lies of our culture, the lies that our culture tells about his created world, about the makeup of male and female in his image.

God is concerned about the lie that our culture tells about marriage and life. All of those things concern God and rightly it should concern us and we should come before him in prayer, seeking justice, asking God for justice in regards to all of this.

But, God is primarily concerned foremost with this greatest injustice of all.

[19 : 37] The injustice that we all have perpetrated in rejecting God, in rebellion against God. That is the primary injustice that God is concerned with.

Because that is the root of all the other injustices. We've rejected God as God. We've made ourselves God in our own minds. And he's most concerned about making that right.

That the root cause of injustices and righteousnesses in our world, which is rebellion against God's majesty, might be redressed. That is primarily what God is concerned with. Is that what we are concerned with?

That's why God's justice is focused primarily on salvation. Do you see that? All of us, if that is true, all of us then are guilty by that standard.

None of us can stand before God's majesty. It is only in Jesus that we can find an escape from the judgment of God. So we cry.

[20 : 40] We cry for justice, which means we cry for mercy and grace as well. we cry for justice as we long for the day of the Son of Man, when He comes back to judge the living and the dead, because we know the God to whom we pray.

So this is what our cry for justice ought to look like, that God will grip the heart of every man and woman, be they friend or foe, to surrender to Jesus, to be recipients of a saving grace, I wonder what it would look like if that's part of our cry for justice in the church.

How will that shape our thoughts and expectations as we await Christ's second coming? second Peter 3, 9 says this, the Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise, as some count slowness, but He is patient towards you, towards you, towards me, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

That is the heart of God towards all unrighteousness and wickedness of man. What seems like slowness in our eyes is God's patience, God's mercy, God's long suffering, that's how the Bible puts it, so that all whom the Father has given to the Son may come to Him.

Then what does this have to do with my prayer and your prayer? Jesus has given us the key to this verses, right there in the beginning of verse 1, the key to the parable is already there, in verse 1, to the effect that we ought always to pray and not to lose heart.

[22 : 39] If you have the mind of Christ, you will labor in prayer for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. Your faith and trust in God's purposes in this world will be Christ-centered, not me-centered.

the ground of our bold, persistent, faith-filled prayer is the character of God to whom we pray. It is this character to have mercy.

So take comfort. If you recognize that you are a sinner in need of mercy, take comfort in that. The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in great love, in faithful love.

His arms are open wide to all who come to him in repentance. So come. It is also God's character to vindicate, that means to avenge his chosen ones.

So take warning if you are here in rebellion against God and maybe like the unrighteous judge, having no fear of God in your heart.

[23:53] Take warning. His justice is right and good. He sees all wickedness and rebellion and he will judge them all. The only escape for you and for me is to run to Jesus.

Turn to him. There is mercy for you also at the cross. Now, what does this have to do with baptism? It seems very sober sermon to preach on a baptism on a Sunday. I think it has a lot to do with baptism. Here is the church for parents. Here is the church for the church.

We're bringing children to be baptized today and those who have in the past brought children to be baptized. Pray. Pray. Do not cease in prayer.

Pray. Do not lose heart in prayer. Bathe your children in prayer. And foremost in your prayer for your children should be this, that they may come to be known by God through Jesus Christ.

[25:09] That's the best and greatest legacy inheritance you can give to your children. They will come to know Jesus.

You cannot keep them from the travails and trials and tribulations of this world. But you can show them the way to Christ in your actions, in your faithfulness to God and in your prayer.

So this is a church for all of us. Do not lose heart. Some of you might have kids who have walked away to the fall country. Do not lose heart. Pray. Do not cease in prayer.

You know the heart of the God to whom you pray. Do not lose hope. Do not lose heart. And most so, it is God in his mercy and grace alone who saves.

That's why we pray. Because it is God alone who saves. this is important. The water of baptism is an outward sign of an inward and spiritual reality.

[26:19] Salvation is not in the water. It is in Christ alone. So as you bring these precious ones, parents, to God, to Jesus, today, be mindful of that reality.

Salvation is in Christ alone. you bring them to a God who was promised to save all those who come to him. You bring them to a God who loves little children and say, let all of them come unto me.

And you pray, and we pray along with you as the church of Christ, that God in his mercy will do that which he has promised to do in them through the sacrament of baptism. So let us pray.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you, Lord, for your encouragement to us that we ought not to cease in prayer.

And Lord, we pray that you may find faith on earth when you come. Pray, Lord, that you will help us to persevere in faith, to persevere in prayer.

[27:36] We cannot do it in our own strength. We know this. We cannot do it in our own power. But you promised the Holy Spirit to help us and hate us. So help us, Lord, to lean on you in the power of the Holy Spirit, to remember the one to whom we pray, the character of our God, that he is not a loop, he is not distant, he is present with us.

He is a God who cares and who knows. Help us, Lord, always to pray and not to lose heart. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.