

The Parable of the Persistent Widow

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[0 : 00] The parable of the persistent widow. Well, as I announced at the start of the service this Wednesday, the Lord's people are, well, the Lord's people across the country are going to be gathering in our, well, different homes, individually, of course, but we're going to be together praying on that day, praying on that day that's been set aside as a day of prayer and, well, particularly, but not exclusively, particularly in relation to the current pandemic.

And we pray because, well, we pray because we pray to God. We pray because we believe that God is sovereign. We pray to Him because we believe that God is, He has ultimate control over even this current crisis.

God has the power. He's got the power to suppress this terrible virus. And God has the power to use the virus, really, in many ways.

Surely one way to bring His people back to Himself, even to call upon Him in prayer. Yes, we absolutely believe that God has given skilled people, clever people, if you like, to have the skills to enable, to deal with the virus, to produce solutions that are going to suppress the virus.

But we know ultimately it's by God's decree and God's timing that these solutions are going to be effective. You cannot leave God out of the picture, cannot leave God out of the equation.

[1 : 41] And we certainly can't support the statement of our first minister last Tuesday when she said these very words. We do have real reasons to be optimistic that science will get us out of this pandemic and soon.

Now, yes, science has the tools, has the expertise, but it's not ultimately science that's going to get us out of this pandemic. It's God. God's in control.

God determines the times and the seasons for all things. And so it's for the Lord's people then, for you who call upon His name, for you to be persistent, to be continually before Him, calling upon God for His mercy, for His intervention, to enable those who are experts in these particular fields, yes, to find the solutions, to find the vaccinations, to adopt all the various measures needed, to slow down and remove the virus.

And so we've got this call, or this renewed call, for a national day of prayer. And surely it's got to be a motivation, not just to be found in one day in prayer, but to be the more prayer-giving people, prayer-offering people.

Because we're not just to pray when we're asked to. We don't just pray in one day and then forget every other day. We're called to pray continually.

[3 : 12] Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 17, pray without ceasing, to come before God with your petitions and come before Him constantly. So it's for you and for me to be persistent, to be continual, to pray without ceasing, to come before God who hears and answers prayer according to His perfect wisdom.

And so we've got this opportunity to call on God together, collectively. And I pray sincerely even this coming Wednesday. Remember, even this national day of prayer is a link.

It's a link in the chain. It's a link, even that chain, for the Lord's people to be persistent, to be persevering in prayer before God.

And we pray, yes, we look forward to that day of prayer. The time of prayer, as we've been told, that we're going to be praying throughout the day, calling on God for His mercy.

Not just, of course, in relation to the pandemic, but in relation to so many of the injustices that we're seeing in society at the moment. The injustices of poverty, homelessness, abuse, and injustices against God's church, against God's law.

[4 : 39] And so even this week and beyond, if we pray continually and persistently as we cry out to the Lord for mercy, to have mercy upon us as a people, as a land, as a nation, because we've

wandered so far from the truth.

So in being called to pray continually, I pray that this week, even this coming day of prayer, that it's going to be a reminder, it's going to be a catalyst for the Lord's people to pay that call to pray without ceasing.

And to help us to see the necessity of that truth to be persistent in prayer, that's why we're going to turn to this parable this morning, this parable that Jesus taught about persevering in prayer.

It's only recorded in Luke's Gospel here, but let's look again at the parable. As we said, we've got to look at the background, why Jesus mentioned all that He did about His return as the Son of Man to earth.

We're going to look at the background to the parable before we look at the parable itself. So, Jesus is teaching this parable, this story. But of course, this parable wasn't just given in isolation.

[5 : 58] So if you look at the first words of verse 18, you'll see there's a little word there at the beginning. And He told them a parable. And when you see and, it means that there's a connection with what Jesus has said before.

In chapter 17, verse 22, Jesus has been telling His disciples about His return from heaven to earth. Listen to the words again.

And He said to the disciples, The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you'll not see it. See, Jesus is foreseeing a time when Christians will just long for Jesus to return.

And particularly long for Jesus to return during particular times of testing and suffering and trial. And we'll be looking for deliverance in Christ's return.

But not find that immediate deliverance and maybe become downhearted and disappointed. But isn't this precisely the time when Christians are to be constant in prayer?

[7 : 11] That you're praying people and praying people, that the Lord's people are praying people until the Lord Jesus returns and He returns to bring justice to His people.

And so we've already seen that Jesus refers to Himself as Son of Man. He's referred to Himself in that context in chapter 17. And He says it again at the end of the parable that we read, Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth.

So the parable is spoken in relation to His return from heaven to earth when He brings justice to the Lord's people. And so, even in this parable, Jesus is encouraging you.

He's encouraging His people to keep praying even in these present times of trouble because you're absolutely assured that there's a glorious future that awaits God's people when Jesus, when the Son of Man, returns in all His glory and when He comes to judge the world.

So, when we come to this parable at the start of chapter 18, He's continuing to speak to His disciples on the whole matter of His return. Coming again of the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man.

[8 : 31] Well, let's look at the parable itself. So, Luke, the author here of this Gospel, he's explained right at the start of chapter 18, the start of telling the story that Jesus tells.

Luke is explaining that, well, that Jesus' disciples have to pray continually. He's bringing out the truth that believers are not to despair, or not to lose heart, not to lose heart even these difficult and dangerous days.

And Jesus is saying it's an absolute necessity. He's saying you must pray. And pray continually and don't give up. Don't become discouraged. Don't lose heart.

Don't let your faith grow weak. Because you know, as we all know, that there's that temptation, that temptation to be discouraged when it appears that God isn't intervening to put right the injustices and troubles that we're facing.

There can be that temptation to be discouraged when it appears that Jesus is delaying His return to earth. But Jesus is saying, don't be discouraged.

[9 : 46] Keep praying. Be constant in prayer so that you'll regain your strength. And yes, have your faith strengthened. Have your faith strengthened in your fellowship, even in prayer with your Lord and your God.

And as you come before Him in prayer, your faith is strengthened. Do you have that assurance? Yes, Jesus is coming again. And so are to watch and pray.

As Jesus said on another occasion, watch and pray. And so Jesus is commanding you. He's commanding all who are His to be constant in prayer.

And so that's where we come to look at the details of the parable here. There are two characters. The first character, this judge, this magistrate, he's not a very nice person. You might say he's repulsive. And then there's a widow who's so persistent in demanding justice for herself, even from this unjust man, this unjust judge.

[10:50] So Jesus mentions this man, this judge. And there's something really not very good about this man. We're told he doesn't fear God.

He doesn't respect people. He's so utterly absorbed in himself. He's got no time for God. God, who's the author of justice, he's got no time for God.

And there's no time for other people, even though he's supposed to give justice as a judge. He doesn't care for other people. He doesn't care for those who come to him who are looking for justice.

He's corrupt. He's contemptible. He looks at others with scorn. So Jesus is giving us a picture here of someone who's really the lowest of the low.

He's not really wanting to be what he's supposed to be, this judge. He's just totally unsuited for his work. We'll come back to him in a moment.

[11:50] And then there's this widow. Because the judge, even though he doesn't fear God and he doesn't respect people, he still has a status in that local society.

But there's a widow. There's a widow. She's got no status. In these days, women were regarded as second-class citizens. But still, she comes to court. She's coming by herself, so she's on her own.

She wants to bring something that's happened to her, to bring this to the judge, to get justice. She's obviously a very vulnerable person, poor woman even, coming to court.

And she's coming to this very man who's so corrupt. Is she going to get justice? Her circumstances seem utterly against her. But she keeps coming to the court.

She keeps coming to the court day after day. She's got the same plea that she has every day. Give me justice against my adversary. So she's persistent.

[12:55] She's coming back again and again to the judge. Even though every time she comes to the judge, she wants nothing to do with her. And for a while, the judge refuses.

He refuses to have anything to do with her. But eventually, he's so worn down by her persistence, that he says to himself, Well, I've got no regard for God, and I don't even have regard for other people.

But because of this widow's persistence, I'm going to give this woman justice. And the way that it's written in the original is really quite humorous. He's saying something like this, I'll give her justice so that she won't come and give me a black eye next time she comes.

And yes, believe it or not, the language is very much in the language of aggression, if you like.

Here's this judge, this man, and he doesn't want to be cornered by this little fearless lady.

He doesn't want to be given a punch in the face and a black eye. And so he's going to save himself from embarrassment. So he gives in. The woman's persistence has paid off.

[14:04] And that's the parable. That's the parable. The unjust judge who eventually gives justice to this woman, even though he had no desire in his heart to do that. But because of her persistence, he gives way.

But then you might ask, well, what about the meaning of this parable, this teaching? Because obviously the parable has a teaching beyond the immediate story. It's got a teaching, an application for ourselves that tells us about who God is, tells us to encourage us to come before our Lord and God.

But what about the application? What about the lessons? Particularly in relation to being constant in prayer. Well, the first thing we have to say is this. Unlike other parables, this isn't a sort of a like for like in all the characters.

Because the unjust judge doesn't represent God. It doesn't represent God. But the lesson is it's from the how much more way of Jesus teaching.

In other words, if a mere human judge, a repulsive individual, this man who's so selfish, if he can agree to the persistence of this widow, if he can give to this widow because of her persistence, how much more will God, how much more will our good, righteous, just God, how much more will God listen to the pleas of his people for mercy and respond in grace and in love.

[15:39] So, if you like, Jesus is arguing from the lesser to the greater. In other words, if a person with no grace can dispense justice out of selfish reasons, how much more will our great God give

justice to his people, his people whom he's loved from all eternity.

Notice in verse 7, if your Bible's with you, notice in verse 7 how Jesus describes God's people. He calls them, verse 7, his elect, his chosen ones.

God who's given special affection and love on those whom he's given his saving love from all eternity. You who are precious to him, you whose names are written in that book of life that will never be erased, you in whom the love of the Father has been set from all eternity.

God's elect, God's chosen ones, chosen in Christ, chosen to enjoy everlasting life and to know that all your needs are met through the Lord Jesus.

And this is the amazing truth, the amazing love of God, the amazing grace of God, the faithfulness of God who meets all your needs in the Lord Jesus. And so we've got to examine our hearts and ask yourself this, am I being faithful in following Jesus?

[17:11] Am I being faithful even in my prayer life? God's people here as Jesus describes the Lord's people, God's people are described here as those who cry out to him day and night.

The widow was pleading, continually pleading for justice, for mercy. And Jesus is saying here for you who are in Christ, be earnest, be earnest because the coming of the Lord Jesus, the coming of the kingdom is near and be continual in prayer.

And so you see the connection in the parable. If that widow, that persistent widow got mercy from the unjust judge, how much more certain will God give justice to his own people?

Jesus says in verse 8, God's not an unjust judge. He's not going to delay sending his mercy to his people. You'll receive it. And it's for you to continue to pray even as, even the words that were given in the very last book of the Bible where Jesus says, yes, I'm coming soon.

And so, as the author of the last book of the Bible says, even so, come Lord Jesus. And that's your responsibility if you're a Christian, if you're a believer.

[18:34] you're to be faithful in all things, faithful in your service, faithful in your commitment to the Lord. And one aspect of that faithfulness and service is prayer.

It's what Jesus says at the end of verse 8, nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith in earth? None of us knows when Jesus will return.

And even for that very reason, we're to be persistent in prayer, to be faithful as those who are faithfully calling upon God. And yes, we've got to be faithful in every aspect of our lives.

This woman was faithful, this widow was faithful in her drive for justice. She was a victim of wrongdoing. She valued righteousness above sinfulness.

And she persevered until her wrong was made right. And as you're waiting for the Lord's return, you're to be faithful. Yes, even now, pray that righteousness will prevail even in our own land.

[19:38] Pray that all the wrongs of life, all the sins of humanity will be removed forever when Jesus returns. And so Jesus asks a question there at the end about his return.

will those who are his be those who are watching and praying for that return? Will those who are his be faithful in constant prayer?

Because even the very question suggests that the Lord's people are going to find, are going to face times of testing, times of trial, and it may well be in these times of testing that you're tempted to give up because your prayers aren't being answered.

But this parable is teaching us that we've never to give up praying, even in the midst of trouble and affliction. It's the time when you ought to be praying most when the trouble seems to be most, especially when so many of us are to be honest or so weak in prayer.

So we keep praying as we keep waiting for the Lord's return. You know, all through history, all through the history of the world, there have been times, there have been events, there have been occasions, there have been wars and rumors of war, there have been disasters that have brought the Lord's people to their knees in prayer.

[21:04] And even at this time, our national and international crisis, it's no exception. And we have to say this, until Jesus returns, there are going to be more of these such crises, there are going to be more of these times that will draw the Lord's people even to the very throne of grace itself.

That's the Lord's people calling God to strengthen us even in these days, so that we might have that growing faith in our sovereign, our true, our one true God.

So let's never stop praying, never stop praying, even though there's that temptation to be resigned to the works of evil.

But let's not stop praying, even when there is so much injustice against the Lord's people on earth. Don't stop praying because it's your work, one aspect of your work as one of the Lord's people to be in constant prayer, constant communion with God as you're waiting for the Lord's return.

And when Jesus returns, he'll right every wrong, he'll heal every heart that's been hurt with injustice, he's going to bring in a new heaven and a new earth, and there'll be no more pain, the former things will have passed away.

[22 : 30] So we won't lose faith, even when your prayers aren't answered immediately, because God is perfect in his timing and his wisdom.

he's not going to delay the coming of Jesus. He is true, and he's not going to delay the coming of Jesus as the righteous judge, because Jesus is coming to judge the world in righteousness.

All injustice will be destroyed, and every tear will be wiped away. So yes, we'll pray for that return, and yes, we'll continue to pray even in relation to the immediate events that we're living through.

But we have to see even these events in the light of Christ's return. So we will pray. We will commit to prayer. The Lord's church, the Lord's people will pray, and pray without ceasing until the Lord's return.

We will pray. Make that your resolution. I will pray, and continue to pray, and be with the Lord's people as they continue to pray, until the Lord Jesus returns.

[23 : 43] Amen. Let us pray. Lord, forgive us for our weakness in coming before you in prayer. Forgive us, Lord, for the times when we would rather not come before you, and so many things distract us.

But Lord, even may this teaching that you have given to us through the parable, may this be that incentive to come before you, to call upon you, and to be constant in our persistence in prayer. Hear us, Lord, as even we pray now for this nation. Return us to you, we pray, our God. Bless us, keep us.

May your face shine upon us, and keep us safe. Lord, we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.