

Parable of the Persistent Widow

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 August 2004

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, we do praise you and we worship you. We give you thanks for your great benefits that you have given to us in Jesus. We ask that the gifts that we have given will be used to bring others to know you and be a token of the giving of ourselves back to you.

And we pray, Father, today that you will give us humbleness of heart as we worship you in listening to your word. Open your word to us through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please be seated. Thank you. Well, it's very inspiring. You should all sit up here when the whole congregation is singing like that.

It's very good to hear God being praised with such gusto and heart. And it helps encourage one another to give our lives to him.

I want to have you turn to Luke 18, 1 through 8, which was just read. We're continuing our series on parables that Jesus has told in the book of Luke. And it's really important when we look at those few verses to know that this little section is in the context of a teaching of Jesus about when he will come again, when the Son of Man will be revealed as he puts it.

[1 : 1 5] It is a teaching that is very sobering but also very hopeful as well. And it's a subject that has a great deal of fascination for people today in our society.

The idea of the end of the world comes to people's minds when they see the political situation and all the different events that the news shows us in the world. Maybe it's coming to an end soon is what we all inevitably think.

The best-selling series of any type is a series that is Christian called the Left Behind series. There are 12 books that have been written on this series.

Over 40 million copies have been sold to date. And they are very exciting in their plot lines, an interesting read, but also very loose in their interpretation of the book of Revelation.

I think it's fair to say that David Short will not be reading these for his sabbatical edification. But you'll have to ask him about the Left Behind books. The problem with them is that they give us sort of a Hollywood action film understanding of the end of the world.

[2 : 3 0] All kinds of spectacular things happen as a sign of Jesus coming very soon. And so it can actually seem like a fantasy, something unreal.

But the Bible teaches us, and the last chapter has taught us, that life will be business as usual when Jesus comes back. Jesus will be revealed suddenly, he says.

It'll be like a thief in the night. And people will continue on with their normal life. As Jesus put it in chapter 17, eating and drinking and buying and selling and marrying and building and planting.

When Jesus comes to bring his new creation and the old earth passes away, everyday life will just be happening. And so Jesus, in this section of Luke, teaches us how we really ought to prepare for that day when he comes.

And he says, don't prepare by looking for certain spectacular events and timetables. No, he says, prepare instead by always praying and never losing heart.

- [3 : 41] It's a very helpful thing what Jesus did here in this passage for the preacher. You know, we struggle often to figure out what the point of the passage is.
- It's a lot of work. But Jesus tells us right up front what the point of the parable is. It is to pray always and to never lose heart.
- That's his point. This means that as we wait for Jesus to come, there is actually a temptation not to pray. There is a temptation to lose heart.
- And it means that Jesus knew that followers of him, which include you and I, would at times get down. We would feel hopeless at times.
- And that may be a surprise to us when we look around us. Because if you look around this congregation, you may think, those are relatively good-looking people around me.
- [4 : 36] They're people who are looking pretty successful. They are people who look happy and talented. But Jesus says there's something else going on inside of people.
- There is a temptation to lose heart. And many of us gathered here today may be going through that right now. And unfortunately, with that temptation comes the temptation to stop praying.
- And that's why Jesus tells us this parable. He's telling us personally, do not lose heart. Continue being persistent in your prayers. And he gives the reason that we should do that.
- He gives us the encouragement to follow through with that. And he does it through this parable. Now, this parable is a unique parable. It has, again, two figures who are unlikely sorts of main characters.
- One of them is a widow. Somebody that the society at that time knew had no power and no influence. Was somebody who was completely dependent upon the goodwill of other people.
- [5 : 46] And she was somebody who was very vulnerable to the world around her. She needed people to protect and provide for her. But not only that, in this story, the widow is somebody who is facing an enemy.
- Somebody who is trying to take away what little she had. And the only recourse that society offered to her was for a local judge to make the exploitation stop.
- But, of course, as we see in this parable, the local judge, the second character, is corrupt. He neither fears God nor fears his fellow human being.
- And this means he doesn't respect this widow who has a very low social standing. And so you get to that point in the parable and you think, this is a lost cause for the widow.
- But she has a very powerful attribute. She is determined. And so she comes to this judge saying, vindicate me. And that word has the sense of, protect me from my enemy.
- [6 : 52] Deliver me from him. Deliver me from him. And she says this over and over again. And we hear in this story that Jesus says the judge just kept on refusing over and over again.
- And I'm wondering if you've ever had that experience in your life, where you need something from an authority. And that person is very slow or unwilling to give to you what you need.
- Probably all of us have experienced that. In the greeting time, I was reminded that we, about 13 years ago at St. John's, went through a big renovation process.
- And one thing that slowed up the renovation was the need for a permit that came from the city of Vancouver. Apparently there was somebody in the Vancouver City office who didn't respect God nor man and was not willing to be speedy about giving this slip of paper.
- And so what happened was a member of our buildings and grounds committee, we'll call him Don Bennett, decided that times were desperate.

[8 : 04] And he went to City Hall and he found that man who didn't respect God nor man. And he sat in his office and he said, I'm not going to leave until I get that piece of paper.

And that was a heroic thing to do because I don't think there was a washroom nearby. And thankfully this man finally relented and gave the piece of paper to us.

That's why we have a beautiful place now. And that's why Don Bennett is with us in the congregation today as well. And I think he deserves a thought. And this is really the point of what happens with the woman as well.

There's a point of urgency. There is desperation. She doesn't have money to bribe the judge. She has no advocate to influence him. Her life is put on hold.

Very uncertain unless she comes to him with her need and is so persistent that he has no choice but to give in to her persistence. And that persistence is powerful as we saw with what Don Bennett did.

[9 : 10] It had a powerful effect on that judge. He changed his mind. He said to him, though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her.

I will protect her against the attacks. Otherwise she's going to wear me out by her constant coming. And Jesus tells us why he tells that story.

He says, look at the unrighteous judge. What does he say? He says, I will vindicate. And he says, look at your heavenly father.

How much more will he vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily.

And what Jesus is giving to us here is the reason to not lose heart. The reason to pray always. He is saying God will vindicate us.

[10 : 07] He says that in the terms of he will protect us and save us. And it's important for us to know that this is what God's will is for each of us and for his church as well.

And the reason we know this is because when Jesus prayed for his disciples, his last prayer, he said this. He said, Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name.

That's a prayer that he leaves with us. Protect them, Father, by the power of your name. And when Jesus talked about himself, he said, I am the good shepherd.

I am the one who protects my flock. And the point there is that we are people who are in need of defense. We are the widow in this story, according to Jesus.

Spiritually, we are vulnerable. We are people who don't have the resources we need. And it is important that we know this because the great enemy of prayer is our own sense of self-sufficiency.

[11 : 11] We need to know we are that widow. Because if we say, I don't want to bother God with this, I can handle it. Or if we say, you know, I've made it spiritually and I don't need further help.

What we are saying is that we don't need the God who has come to protect us. I find it is when I recognize my own deep need for God that I end up praying.

Very simply. That's when I particularly pray. On Friday, in the funeral that many of us were at for Fran Robinson, David Short preached.

And he mentioned that the hard part of a loved one dying is that people ask you, Is there anything else I can do for you? Is there anything I can do? But of course, the thing that you need most is for that person to be back with you.

And so in death, our deepest vulnerability and helplessness is revealed to us. But it's at that moment that we also see the gospel of Jesus as well.

[12 : 13] That into that situation of deep need, he brings the powerful hope of the resurrection to eternal life. And we see that we have nothing in ourselves, but in Jesus, we have everything.

He brings vindication. He brings protection. He carries us even through death. And when we know this, we will pray. We will pray.

The other way that we're similar to the widow is that we have an adversary. And Peter, the apostle, talks about the fact that we have an adversary, the devil, who prowls around like a lion seeking somebody to devour.

And this is something that's true for all of us. In the baptism service, in the Book of Common Prayer, we have a prayer for the newly baptized. And that is that she or he will fight under Jesus' banner against sin, the world, and the devil.

And we can only do that under God's protection, under the banner of Jesus Christ. I wonder if you notice, when we go through and say colics in the prayer book, many of those prayers have to do with protection or defense.

[13 : 28] And so we pray things like, keep us, Lord, from things hurtful. Protect us from our enemies. Defend the church. Every morning prayer, and we said it this morning as well, we pray to God, who has safely brought us to the beginning of this day, defend us in the same with thy mighty power.

And it's a defense to keep us away from sin, to keep us out of danger, and to keep us as followers of Jesus Christ. And this makes sense, to have all these prayers.

You see them in the Psalms as well. Because if God is our Heavenly Father, it is His nature to protect us and defend us. That's what good parents do.

One of the things that I experienced when my son Alexander was born was a very powerful sense that I, almost an overwhelming desire to protect him and to defend him in everything that happened throughout his life.

And I'm sure that this is a sense that is common for all parents, this desire to protect their children. For us to call God Father means that He is that for us, one who protects us and defends us.

[14 : 45] In fact, you see it at the heart of the Gospel, don't you? You see the fact that Jesus died on the cross so that we might be protected from our enemies, from death, from sin, and from the devil.

It's the Father's love that sends His Son to protect us. And so in our prayers, we are actually asking God to do what He has decided to do, what His purposes are as well.

Now we are also like the widow in that the God's protection comes to us through our prayers. And this is the thing that we can do. This is the action. This is the part that we can actually cooperate with God in His defense of us.

Often, the world looks on prayer as a therapeutic exercise, something that makes you feel good and sort of at one with God. But Jesus talks about it very differently.

He talks about prayer as something that brings about real change, real protection, real salvation. You know, if this woman's petitions made that judge change, how much more does God bring about His perfect will through our prayers in this world?

[16 : 00] Every day, the powerful protection and saving work of God blesses us as we pray to Him. But I want to close by saying that there is one way in which we are not like the widow.

And that is that the widow was unknown to the judge. But we are known to God. In fact, the way that Jesus puts it is that we are God's elect in verse 7.

What that means is that if you have faith in Jesus, it is because God has chosen you from before the foundation of time to be His child. God has elected you to know Him forever and to receive His protection here on earth, right through to heaven.

And this is a very good thing to keep in mind for us to dwell on as we leave this passage. Because the Book of Common Prayer tells us that the godly consideration of predestination and our election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons.

There is something sweet and pleasant about knowing the truth that God has chosen us. And this parable can be summed up by saying that if we can imagine an immoral judge vindicating a widow he doesn't respect, then we must believe that the holy God who has loved us and elected us in Jesus will hear our cries.

[17 : 32] And He will vindicate us much more powerfully and much more quickly. So we need to take heart. We need to cry out to God and never stop believing that He is Lord with all authority, but also He is our loving Heavenly Father.

Ask Him for His protection. Ask Him for His help. And cling to this promise to vindicate you, to protect you from any lasting harm. Jesus challenges us to do this because, as He says right at the end of this parable, prayer is the evidence of our faith.

It is the evidence that your faith is alive and well. Because if you're not praying to God for protection and help, you don't really know His loving power and His authority.

It's very likely that your heart and your mind are drifting away from God. And that's why Jesus' last question is a great wake-up call for our life of prayer.

And it's a good question to leave with. He says this, When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?

[18 : 44] Our great motivation to pray is that. It is the expression of our faith. It is the expression of the fact that God has elected us, that He listens to us, that He will vindicate us.

May we take heart in the glorious gospel that Jesus has given to us. Amen. and will Heôn In the glorious gospel and how He joins to know if He would lips of many of the people as we have seen haveructor and want hangs or be with the French of men.

Portuguese of man was a blessing. Godined the derivative of al Spirituals And the latter are warriors of all families who are living