

“Be Persistent in Prayer”

February 14, 2021

Luke 18:1-8

I. Introduction

According to the dictionary, a parable is usually a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle. The word parable itself means to “cast alongside.” Jesus’ parables were stories that were “cast alongside” a truth in order to illustrate that truth. His parables were teaching aids and can be thought of as extended analogies or inspired comparisons. A common description of a Biblical parable is that it is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

For a time in His ministry, Jesus relied heavily on parables. He told many of them; in fact, according to [Mark 4:34](#), “He, i.e., Jesus, did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.” Sometimes Jesus’ explanation is included in the Gospel record, sometimes it isn’t. Some of Jesus’ parables are recorded in just one of the Gospels, some in two, and some in three of the Gospels. John doesn’t record any parables in his Gospel. There are about 35 different parables of Jesus recorded in the Synoptic Gospels.

Today’s parable of the persistent widow is a parable of contrasts not of comparisons. Jesus contrasts the worst in man to the best in God and a helpless widow with the children of God. In this story of contrasts, Jesus is saying that if a wicked man will sometimes do good, even if from bad motives, how much more will righteous God do right.

II. The Scene

In Jesus’ day, 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 in question was a paid magistrate appointed either by Herod or by the Romans. 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 that particular case.

In this parable, the widow had three obstacles to overcome. First, being a woman, she had little standing before civil law. In the Palestinian society of the day, women did not go to court. Second, since she was a widow, she had no husband or representative to stand with her in court. Finally, she was poor and could not pay a bribe even if she wanted to. This widow represents those who are alone, destitute, powerless, helpless, unloved, uncared for, and desperate. Using this sad situation, Jesus encouraged His disciples to pray using three different contrasts, beginning with ...

III. Three Contrasts

A. Praying contrasted with giving up (or as the King Version puts it, “fainting”) That’s really the choice, pray or give up. A believer gives up when he loses heart and gets so discouraged that he or she wants to quit—“*What’s the use.*” But [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#) says, “**Pray continually**” or as other translations put it, “**Pray without ceasing.**” This doesn’t mean that one should continue to repeat the same prayers over and over as other religions do—in [Matthew 6:5](#) Jesus said, “**And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.**” Rather, to *pray continually* means to make prayer as much a part of one’s life as breathing. Unless we are sick or smothering or drowning, we rarely think about breathing, we just do it. Similarly, with prayer, talking to God should just be part of our way of life. Prayer should be part of a Christian’s way of life.

Prayer is more than the words on our lips; it is the desires of our hearts, and our hearts should be constantly desiring to be with God, even if we don’t speak a word. To pray without ceasing means to have such holy desires in our hearts that we are constantly in loving communion with the Father, sharing our thanks and asking for His blessings for the big things and the little things that come our way. It’s every Christian’s choice: pray or give up.

B. The widow contrasted with Christians Then Jesus contrasted the widow with Christians. Jesus didn’t say that Christians are like this poor widow, actually they are just the opposite. Because Christians are not like her, we should be encouraged to pray. Arguing from the lesser to the greater, Jesus was saying, “*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.” There are at least 4 different comparisons or contrasts here beginning with ...

1. The woman was a stranger; Christians are God’s children. In [Luke 11:13](#) Jesus said, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” The widow didn’t have access to the judge, she didn’t even know him. On the other hand, God’s children have an open access into His presence and may come at any time to get the help they need. [Turn to Hebrews 4:14-16.](#)

2. The woman had no one to stand up for her; Christians have an Advocate The woman had no friend at court to help her get her case tried. All she could do was walk around outside the tent and make a nuisance of herself as she shouted at the judge. But when Christians pray, they have in heaven a Savior who as we just read in [Hebrews 4:14](#) is our High Priest who constantly represents us before the throne of God. He is also our Advocate—[1 John 2:1](#) says, “We have an advocate with the Father-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” The woman had no one to stand up for her; Christians have an Advocate.

3. The woman had no promises from the judge; Christians have many promises from God. The woman had no promises from the judge—he didn’t know her, and he wanted nothing to do with her. But for Christians, the Bible has many promises from God. In [Matthew 11:28](#) Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” [1 Peter 5:7](#) says, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” Christians not only have God’s unfailing promises, but we also have the Holy Spirit, who assists us in our praying—[turn to Romans 8:26-27.](#)

4. The woman came to a court of law; Christians come to God’s throne of grace. The widow came in her poverty to a court of law. She is a picture of all those who are alone, powerless, helpless, unloved, uncared for, desperate with nowhere to turn. But Christians have all of God’s riches available to meet their every need—[Philippians 4:19](#) says, “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” If we fail to pray, our conditions, physically and spiritually, will be

just as hopeless and desperate as the poor widow—with that in mind, Christians “**should always pray and not give up.**” The woman came to a court of law; Christians come to God’s throne of grace.

C. The judge contrasted with God the Father There is praying without ceasing versus giving up; there is a poor widow contrasted with rich Christians, and finally there is the judge contrasted with God the Father. The judge “**neither feared God nor cared about men.**” This was an immoral man. He wasn’t moved by reverence or worship; by compassion or sympathy. He had no interest in the first commandment to love God or the second commandment to love his neighbor. Not only was he wicked, but he was comfortable with his corruption, he boasted in **verse 4**, “**I do not fear God or care about men.**” Because he had no reverence for God and because he could never do anything that would cause him to feel shame in his behavior before people, he was unmoved by any appeal for justice or righteousness. No one could move him to do what was right. The only reason the judge helped the widow was because he was afraid, she would “**wear me out,**” which literally means “*give me a black eye*”—i.e., ruin his reputation.

Unlike the unrighteous judge, the true God is holy, just, and righteous—**1 Peter 2:23** says, “**When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**” **Revelation 19:1-2** says, “**Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments.**” God, our heavenly Father, is attentive to our every cry, generous in His gifts, concerned about our needs, and ready to answer when we call. Unlike the uncaring, merciless judge, **Psalm 103:8** says, “**The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.**” **Turn to Exodus 34:5-7.** God answers prayer for His glory and for our good, and He is not annoyed when we come to Him in prayer.

Jesus said, “**Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.**” Sometimes Christians are tempted to stop praying, they don’t “**get justice and quickly.**” But we must remember that God’s delays are not delays of inactivity, but of preparation. God is always answering

prayer, that's what [Romans 8:28](#) means, “**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**” 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, God begins to work—[turn to 1 John 5:14-15](#). We may not see it in the next instant--God may have to adjust or tweak many things—but one day, at the right time, the answer will come. Peter reminds us in [2 Peter 3:9](#), “**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**”

Jesus closed this section asking a question, “**However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?**” This question ties in with what Jesus taught in [Luke 17:22-37](#). Jesus is coming back. The end times will not be days of great faith. Only eight people were saved in Noah's day and only four came out of Sodom (and one of them perished on the way). The last days are going to be dark days—[turn to 1 Timothy 4:1-3](#). Because they know the end of the story, Jesus is calling for true Christians to remain faithful. Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 15:58](#), “**Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**” True Christians live in hope, waiting expectantly and praying for the promise of Christ's return to be fulfilled.

IV. Conclusions

In this parable, Jesus was saying, “*If, in the end, an unjust and shameless judge can be wearied into giving a destitute widow justice, how much more will God, who is a loving Father, give his endowed children what they need?*” But this is no reason for us to expect to get whatever we pray for. Often a father has to refuse the request of a child because he knows that what the child asks for would hurt rather than help. God is like that; sometimes His answer is, “Yes,” sometimes, “No,” and sometimes, “Not yet.” We do not know what will happen in the next hour, let alone the next week or month or year. Only God sees time as a whole, and, therefore, only God knows what is good for us in the long run. That is why Jesus said we must never be discouraged in prayer; we must never give up. We will never grow weary in

prayer and our faith will never falter if, after we have offered our prayers and requests to God, we add from the heart, “Thy will be done.” Be persistent in prayer.

A second application of this parable is a reminder to keep our eyes focused on the hope that is yet to come. We must wait for Jesus’ return with expectation, like children waiting for Christmas. But while we wait, we need to serve God—Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Though the struggle of this life is sometimes hard and even unfair to Christians as they seek to honor God in a world that often does not honor Him, we must not lose heart—we must pray without ceasing as we wait for Christ’s return. Sometimes the persecution or the rejection may make us wonder if it is worth it all. Other times we may be tempted to become frustrated because those unfaithful to God look as if they have everything going for them. But we need to remember that this life is the only “heaven” they will get. There will come a time when they will stand before God and be judged for what they have done with Jesus—Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

James 5:8 says, “You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.” As was said earlier, we need to live in hope, waiting expectantly for the promise of Christ’s return to be fulfilled. With that thought in mind we need to continue to have faith in Christ and continue to live as He would have us live. 1 John 3:2-3 says, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” How about your life, if Jesus were to come back right now, would you be embarrassed at how He would find you? Do you pray without ceasing? As Ephesians 5:15 & 16 say, are you “very careful, then, how you live-- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil?” What will Jesus say to you when you stand before Him in the last days? Remember in John 14:15 He said, “If you love me, keep my commands.”