

THE WIDOW AND THE UNJUST JUDGE
LUKE 18:1-8

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Psalms 78 v. 9 (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 78:9) contains this brief indictment: **“The Ephraimites, armed with the bow, turned back on the day of battle.”** This band of Israelites had skill, and they had equipment, but in the face of battle they turned and ran.

In the conflicts that we face within ourselves, within our families, within our churches, within our workplaces, and within the country at large it is all too common to see people turn back in the day of battle when they ought to stand.

Commenting on this verse pastor, author, and former seminary president Charles Swindoll writes, **“Contrary to our great American heritage, many of today’s citizens would rather switch than fight... or, quite honestly, quit than stick. That which was once not even an option is now standard operating procedure--- the preferred plan to follow. Homes and churches across the country are haunted by ghosts of the Ephraimites.**

“The quitting habit creates a strange undertow which complicates rather than corrects our difficulties. The ability to ‘turn off’ responsibilities is now in vogue. There was a time when the going got tough, the tough got going. No longer! Now it’s, ‘If you start to sink, *jump*, don’t bail.’ It’s, ‘If it gets hard, quit, don’t bother.’

“‘Let’s just quit’ are household words. A marriage gets shaky and hits a few hard jolts--- ‘Let’s just quit.’ When a personal dream or goal in life is met with hurdles and hardship--- both goal and dream are soon forgotten. Before long we begin to resemble Rome in its last days--- a magnificent mask of outward, impressive stature ... devoid of inner strength ... soft and mushy at the core, desperately lacking in discipline and determination.” (*Come Before Winter*, p. 180)

(PROJECTOR OFF)

What the people of God need is perseverance--- perseverance rooted in reality and truth. Jesus Christ realized that His followers would face conflicts of many types. They would face injustice and discouragement. They would deal with governments that were hostile to their interests. They would long for the coming of God’s kingdom, but that kingdom would seem slow to come. So in the passage before us this morning He told them, and He told us, what we need to know.

In Luke #17 Jesus was approaching the end of His earthly ministry, and He was teaching His disciples that the establishment of His kingdom upon the earth under His personal, visible rule was going to be delayed. He warned His disciples that until He

returns to earth, they will experience opposition and persecution. Life will be difficult at times. They will face a temptation to be discouraged. So He told them a parable, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

I.

Thus we come to THE PARABLE (I. THE PARABLE). We read in v. 1 of Luke #18, **“And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”** It is unusual for the gospel writers to be so direct in explaining the meaning of a parable of Jesus. Usually the interpretation was left to the readers or the audience, although occasionally Jesus explained the meaning to His own disciples. Luke wanted his readers to be very clear about the meaning of this story. Jesus was teaching His followers that they should be persistent in prayer. The danger posed to persistent prayer is discouragement. Discouragement may lead to prayerlessness.

A.

To illustrate this spiritual truth Jesus tells a parable. The parable involves two characters. The first is THE JUDGE (I. A. THE JUDGE). We are told in v. 2 that this judge lived in a certain city and that he did not fear God and did not respect man. We know from the first century historian Josephus and from the ancient Jewish writings called the Talmud that there were local judges in Judea and Galilee who were appointed by the Romans and by the ruling Herodians. The Talmud says that these judges were often corrupt and unjust.

This particular judge was not a godly man. He was not a humanitarian either. He cared only about himself. Such was the case with the rich man in the parable we looked at a couple of weeks ago. On a couple of occasions Jesus talked to His disciples about the two greatest commandments: to love God with all of one's being and to love one's neighbor as himself. This judge did not do either one. He had no vertical relationship with God, and on the horizontal plane he did not care about other people. In v. 4 he says, **“I neither fear God nor respect man.”** This man is unlikely to be a reliable source for dispensing justice.

B.

The second character in this brief parable is THE WIDOW (I. A. B. THE WIDOW) She lived in the same town as this judge. She had no Social Security, no Medicare, no money to hire a lawyer or to pay off the judge. It seems that she also had no family that would intercede for her. She didn't have connections with any influential people in the community.

This widow had a need. Apparently someone was trying to rip her off. Perhaps somebody was trying to take her land. Perhaps the local garage was overcharging her for repair work on her chariot. Perhaps she had done work for someone who refused to pay her. We don't know.

Widows at times are dependent upon government for assistance or protection or at least for justice. The Old Testament made it clear that leaders in Israel had a special

responsibility to widows. In Exodus #22 vv. 22-24 (EXODUS 22:22-23) God said to the nation as a whole, **“You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. 23 If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, (EXODUS 22:24) and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.”** God’s warning to the people of God is: Don’t mistreat widows and orphans!

This judge, however, didn’t care about God or about His law. So the only resource that this widow had was persistence. (PROJECTOR OFF) She kept coming to this judge and asking for justice. She sent him letters. She left notes with his secretary. She left messages on his answering machine. She sent emails. She sent text messages. At first the judge was resistant. But after a while he got exasperated. He said to himself, **“Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.”**

Literally the text says, **“...otherwise by continually coming she give me a black eye.”** The Greek term here originally was a boxing word that meant to be hit under the eye. That was an expression used in the Ancient Near East to refer to “suffering shame.” The concern for the judge is that this widow is going to make him look bad. The secretaries are going to wonder why he doesn’t help this poor woman. Perhaps the widow has approached him when he has been present with other colleagues. These colleagues may wonder why the judge doesn’t help the woman. He is getting bothered by her persistence, and it is beginning to look like the easier course of action is to just meet her need and be rid of her.

Persistence can often accomplish much. A few of you older timers remember Lillian Morrison, who was a member of our church for decades. In the midst of the Great Depression her husband left their home in Iowa in 1937 to come out here to find work at the dam. Lillian had a baby, and Lloyd wanted to be together with his family. So he was persistent. He came to the employment office every day for a number of weeks. According to Lillian, the person in charge finally gave him a job to get rid of him. Soon he was able to bring his family out here to Boulder City. Their family ended up being one of the pillars of our church. Lillian was the first woman to serve as a uniformed park ranger at Lake Mead. She died at age 99. She and another woman from the church and Lee Tillman, the last of the Thirty-oners who lived here in town, ate meals together at the Homestead. I used to enjoy showing up at mealtimes there to hear some of their stories.

In vv. 6-8 Jesus interprets the parable and the significance of the widow’s persistence. He says, **“Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”** God is just. He will intervene for His children because He loves them. The issue is: Will God’s people maintain their faith, especially as evidenced in persistent prayer?

The background, remember, in #17 is Jesus' discussion of His return at the Second Coming. At this return God will establish His earthly kingdom, and He will vindicate His people. Justice will be accomplished. Will His people maintain their faith in the promise of His return?

II.

We come then to THE LESSON FOR US (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE LESSONS FOR US). The basic lesson is that God's people should be persistent in prayer. According to v. 1 Jesus told the disciples that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart. The example for us is Jesus. He did not spend His public ministry living as a hermit in the desert and devoting every waking moment to prayer. He was involved with people. He was active in preaching and teaching and living a busy life. Yet we read in the gospels that He regularly went apart to pray. Occasionally He spent all night in prayer.

A.

There are three things that Jesus teaches us about why we should be persistent in prayer, why we should not get discouraged. First, we should be persistent in prayer because of WHAT GOD IS LIKE (II. A. WHAT GOD IS LIKE). Jesus makes His point here by means of contrast. God is not like the unjust judge. If persistence pays off even with an unjust judge, how much more we should persevere in prayer to a God who is perfectly just.

Jesus in #17 envisions times of suffering that will come for His followers in the future, especially times of suffering that involve persecution for their Christian faith. In some of these cases people will pray and it will seem like God is not answering. He is not protecting them. He is not coming back like He said that He would. Why does He seem to be silent? Anglican minister John Stott writes, "**The real sting of suffering is not misfortune itself, nor even the pain of it, but the apparent God-forsakenness of it. Pain is endurable, but the seeming indifference of God is not.**" (*Christianity Today*, 1/16/1987)

King David experienced times when God seemed to be indifferent. In Psalm 13 he described his feelings when God seemed not to be answering his prayers for justice in the face of persecution. (PSALM 13:1-2) In vv. 1-4 of Psalm 13 he wrote, "**How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"** (PSALM 13:3-4) **Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, 4 lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him,' lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken."**

"Where are you, God? Why won't you answer my prayers?" What enabled David to persevere in the midst of those difficult times? It was the reminder about who God is and what He had done in the past. David finishes Psalm 13 (PSALM 13:5-6) with these

words: **“But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. 6 I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”**

Sometimes our suffering is related to mistreatment and injustice, as was the case with this widow. Sometimes our suffering will be related to persecution for our Christian faith, as Jesus anticipated in the context of this parable. Sometimes our suffering will be related to health problems or the basic difficulties of life in this world. (PROJECTOR OFF)

But when times of suffering like this come, we need to remember who God is and what He has done for us in the past. The God of the Bible, the God who is there, is the God who created us and redeemed us. He is not like the unjust judge. Therefore we should not give up. We should continue to pray.

B.

The second reason for why we should persist in prayer is because of WHO WE ARE (II. A. B. WHO WE ARE). Not only should we persist in prayer because of who God is but also because of who we are. Look at what Jesus says about us in v. 7 **“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?”** The clearly implied answer is “Yes, He will bring about justice,” and “No, He will not delay long over them.”

The term that Jesus uses to describe His followers is “His elect,” or “chosen ones.” The doctrine of eternal salvation has two aspects. First, there is the Godward side. The Bible teaches that God the Father is responsible for choosing us who are born again to be followers of Jesus. (PROJECTOR ON--- EPHESIANS 1:4-5) In Ephesians #1 vv. 4 & 5 we are told, **“[God the Father] chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...”** We are special because God chose us to be part of His family.

The human aspect of salvation is that each person is responsible and accountable for the choice that he or she makes about his or her relationship with God. We can choose to accept or reject Jesus Christ as our Savior. (PROJECTOR OFF) Our responsibility is to make an individual choice to place our trust in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. It is only when we truly believe that and put our trust in Christ that we become Christians and receive eternal life and forgiveness of sins.

The aspect that Jesus is stressing here is the Godward aspect. Christians are God's chosen ones. If God has chosen us before the foundation of the world, certainly He cares about us, and He cares about our suffering. A God who created us and redeemed us and somehow determined before we were born and the world was even made that we would one day become part of His spiritual family is not going to forget about us.

So again we see contrast at work in this parable. The widow had no relationship with the judge. She was destitute. The judge did not care about the widow. Yet because of

the widow's persistence, she received justice from the judge. How much more certain it is that our loving God will ultimately intervene for us whom He has chosen.

C.

The third lesson here is that we should persist in prayer because of WHAT GOD WILL DO (PROJECTOR ON--- II. A. B. C. WHAT GOD WILL DO). The assurance from Jesus is that God will not delay long in bringing about justice for His elect. We do not always look at time the way that God looks at it. We are impatient creatures. We live in a culture that has been taught by TV that problems and mysteries should be solved within the space of a half hour or an hour.

God does not necessarily have our same perspective on time. Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers when he was 17 years old. In Egypt he worked in the household of the captain of the bodyguard of Pharaoh. Some years later he was falsely accused and thrown into prison. This righteous young man spent at least several more years in that situation. But when he was 30 he became prime minister of Egypt. It took 13 years before he was vindicated.

Alexander Ogorodnikov (ALEXANDER OGORODNIKOV) is a Christian who comes from a Russian Orthodox background. In 1971 he and a friend founded a group in the Soviet Union that they called the Christian Seminar. They attracted a number of young intellectuals from several Russian cities. During the next several years Alexander was followed and harassed by the KGB. Finally in 1978 he was arrested and sent to prison in Siberia.

In one of the prisons in which Alexander lived a prison official during the morning roll call noticed the cross that he wore inside his prison uniform. Alexander was ordered to remove it. He refused. The official began to yell at him. Alexander responded, **"I am a Christian. I must heed the Lord more than man."**

"Take it off!" the official shouted again. **"I will never take it from my neck,"** Alexander said firmly. **"You must understand that this is my belief. I confess it before these people. I want to warn you that the Lord will never be humiliated. I am nothing, but I am a son of the Lord. If you are against me, you are against him. I warn you."**

Alexander was then dragged off to another part of the prison. Before the guards tried to pull the cross off of him, Alexander put it in his mouth. They had to beat him until he was unconscious before they could get it from him. When he regained consciousness, he found himself alone in solitary confinement. But in the next cell another prisoner, aware of what had happened, took off his sock, unraveled the yarn and used it to fashion a crude cross. He managed to pass it to Alexander. He now had another cross. He had been without one for only three hours.

The prison official who had abused Alexander disappeared two days after that. Later, guards came to Alexander and told him what had happened. The official had been a

strong, athletic man. But shortly after the incident with Alexander he developed a liver problem. The prison doctor couldn't help him, and neither could medical experts in Moscow. Two months later the official was buried in the prison cemetery. "**After that,**" says Alexander, "**the prison officials were afraid to touch me.**"

After 8 ½ years Alexander was finally freed from prison. He found that his wife had deserted him, and his son had been turned against him. But Alexander went on to begin several Christian charitable programs to serve the poor and homeless. At last report he leads a large orphanage for girls in Moscow and still deals with opposition from the government. (*Candles Behind the Wall*, Barbara Von Der Heydt)

Another leading Russian dissident is Alexei Navalny (ALEXEI NAVALNY). He is a lawyer by training. He has organized protests and demonstrations against the Russian government. He has produced a documentary detailing the corruption of Russian leaders, including Vladimir Putin. As a result he has been imprisoned on trumped up charges. In 2020 he was poisoned. He was flown to Germany where he managed to recover. He returned to Russia, where he was immediately imprisoned on charges of violating his parole by leaving the country. He has been imprisoned on other charges. In a hearing last year this former atheist said that he had become a Christian and quoted the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount about hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

God looks out for His chosen ones. The issue is: Will we persevere in faith? Will we keep praying? (PROJECTOR OFF)

Most of us have experienced situations where we have felt that we were victims of injustice, and we have prayed. Sometimes it has seemed that God has not been listening to us. Sometimes it has seemed to us that God has been slow to answer our prayer. Why is this? Part of it is that we are influenced by a culture that wants instant solutions and answers. Sometimes God seems slow to answer because He is developing our character in the midst of difficult situations. During the 17 years that Joseph was a slave and a prisoner, he was learning humility and trust in God and management skills. All of these things would help him to be effective and useful for God when he became prime minister of Egypt.

Sometimes God seems slow to respond because there are things going on in the spiritual realm that we just do not know about. Job is a classic example of this. He suffered terrible personal losses. He had physical problems, and He had to deal with supposed friends who kept accusing him of wrongdoing. In reality there was a spiritual conflict going on in the heavenly realm that he did not know about at the time. Eventually the Lord intervened and provided relief and justice.

Sometimes God may be slow to respond because there are problems in our own lives. (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 66:18) In Psalm 66 v. 18 the author says, "**If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.**" Sometimes we

may not have recognized our own wrongdoing. Sometimes we may not have forgiven others that we need to forgive. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Sometimes in our difficult situations God is accomplishing important purposes that we don't immediately recognize. In Europe in the early 1700s there were different groups of evangelical Christians who were severely persecuted for their faith. One such group was the Moravians, who traced their spiritual heritage back to a Czech reformer by the name of Jan Hus (PROJECTOR ON--- JAN HUS). Hus rebelled against the authority of Rome fifty years before Martin Luther did. Eventually Jan Hus was burned at the stake for his commitment to Biblical truths. His spiritual descendants were often persecuted for their faith in the next 300 years.

In 1722 ten of these Moravians asked if they might settle on the large estate of a young Lutheran nobleman by the name of Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf. (NIKOLAUS VON ZINZENDORF) He welcomed these fellow Christians. The Moravians established a small town called Herrnhut, which means "the Lord's Watch." (HERRNHUT GERMANY) It is located in Germany near the Czech and Polish borders.

Soon other groups of persecuted Christians joined them--- Anabaptists and Reformed Christians and German Lutherans and more Moravians. As you might imagine, there were challenges that they had in getting along with each other. There were different languages represented. There were different religious traditions represented. There were different ethnic groups represented. But Zinzendorf went among them and pushed for unity. He pushed them to pray for each other.

In August of 1727 the residents of Herrnhut and surrounding area came together for a joint worship service where they celebrated the Lord's Supper and confessed their failures in getting along with each other. They had an emotional service. They sensed that they had a visitation of the Holy Spirit. Out of this service they determined to have a renewed commitment to prayer. They decided that in the midst of the often hostile world in which they lived they would seek to have a round the clock prayer ministry. And they persevered in this for several months. That commitment to prayer extended into a year-- - and then two years--- and then five years--- and then ten years--- and then twenty years and then fifty years. That commitment to prayer around the clock 365 days a year lasted for one hundred years.

What was accomplished out of that commitment to prayer in the midst of an often hostile world? This Christian community expanded its influence and advanced the kingdom of God considerably. In the next thirty years that Moravian community centered in Herrnhut sent out 226 missionaries throughout the world from Greenland to South Africa and from Romania to Georgia and to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. They sent missionaries to slaves and American Indians. These were the first Protestant missionaries in church history. Among the people they influenced was a guy by the name of John Wesley, who encountered them on a boat to Georgia. They helped him to realize that he did not yet have a personal relationship with Christ. John Wesley

became the founder of the Methodist Church and was instrumental in revivals in the US and Great Britain. (PROJECTOR OFF)

This significant impact for God came out of a situation of persecution and adversity. But rather than producing discouragement and disillusionment it led to prayer. Out of that the world was changed for the better.

Whatever your situation of injustice or personal challenge might be, don't give up. God is not asleep. We can have hope and confidence because of who He is. He is not like that unjust judge. He is a righteous and loving Father. We can have hope and confidence also because of who we are. We are not destitute widows. We are elect ones, chosen by the King of the universe before the foundation of the world. This God has promised us a speedy delivery. Will we keep the faith? Will we keep praying?

The example of Jesus teaches us that a commitment to prayer begins at home and in our personal lives. The example of church history, including early Christian communities in the New Testament, teaches us that a genuine commitment to prayer also involves corporate prayer, Christians regularly meeting together for prayer. We offer several opportunities to do that. On Wednesday mornings at 11 AM we meet via Zoom for about an hour. In our various Bible studies we have a time of prayer. Perhaps an advance in your Christian life might mean participating in one of these groups.

The question that Jesus asks is: **“When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”** God is faithful. There is no doubt about that. The question is: When He comes back, will He find that we have not given up but are persevering in prayer and in obedience? When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith among us?