

Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge
Pastor John E. Dubler
Luke 18:1-8

Here is the Lord's second parable on persistence in prayer from Luke 18:



Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2 saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3 There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ 4 For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’ 6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 8 I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”¹

V. 1. Jesus told them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart. Thus the purpose is clearly outlined for us by the Lord Himself.

Two lessons on prayer: This parable, (appearing only in the Gospel of Luke), teaches us two vital lessons on prayer: Pray always. Never give up. Whereas the companion parable on persistence in prayer, the Parable of the Friend at Midnight, teaches us that God is not reluctant to hear and grant answers to prayer, this parable focuses on dogged persistence in prayer.



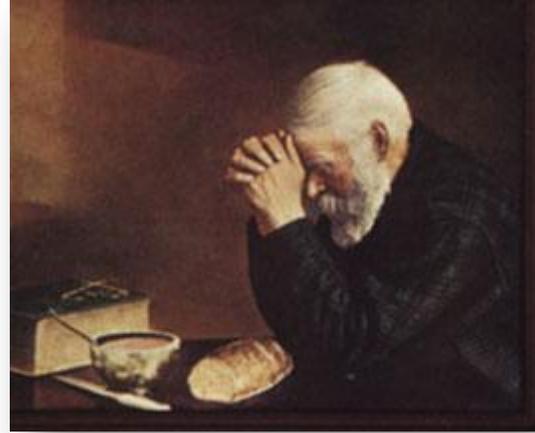
Praying at all times: We should pray on all occasions and in all circumstances. Prayer is a living, breathing relationship with someone we truly love—much the same as a lover's relationship. Your thoughts are never far away from the one you love. Everything they are doing is of interest to you. Just so we are to be absorbed in speaking with our Abba Father throughout the day. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 instructs us: “Pray without ceasing.” We are constantly aware that we are, in fact, in the presence of the Lord, and we have a conversation open with Him at all times—much like an instant messenger or “chat” window on our computer that stays open and we are typing back and forth as we work on other projects.

This sort of continual conversation with God does not exclude the need for a devoted time of prayer and listening each day. Some have told me that they don't have a regular time of prayer, they just pray all day. By this they mean that they are in a conversation with God, more or less under their breath, intermittently conversing with Him. I think that is certainly a valid way to “pray without ceasing.” However, something vital and wonderful is missed if believers do not

¹ All scripture references are to the New American Standard Updated version unless otherwise noted.

have a concentrated, individual time of prayer each day. This time should be set aside for prayer, both speaking with and listening to God, directly and through His Word. This is done *in addition* to the general and continuous conversation that is going on throughout the day.

Not to give up: The second lesson is that we should never give up in our prayers or on the concept of prayer itself. We are to become a church devoted to prayer. There is a mistaken idea among some believers that prayer is not necessary. They are hyper pre-destination believers who see no point in prayer when everything is pre-determined. Of course this is errant nonsense. Jesus prayed. Jesus taught us to pray, including “give us this day our daily bread.” Jesus is the teacher of this parable on persistence in prayer.



But concerning prayer, will we give up? Will prayer meetings succeed for a little while and then dwindle as more and more give up on the idea or find other reasons not to come to prayer meetings? Will we give up on personal prayer? Having made a start will we make a finish?

v. 2. The “Unjust Judge” is similar to the “unrighteous manager” which is the subject of another parable. Here is an entirely worldly man, typical of Gentile judges known throughout the Hellenistic world. The widow’s case was too insignificant to be taken to the religious courts and so she is resorting to the world’s system. She has no other court available but the Courts of Heaven. If she does not get earthly justice from this unrighteous judge who admits to not fearing God, she will simply continue to suffer injustice.

Gentile judges were typically corrupt, waiting for bribes to give them reason to decide their cases in favor of one party or the other. They remind us of the Governor Felix at Caesarea who used to call for Paul to come and appear frequently before him in order that he might receive some bribe from Paul.



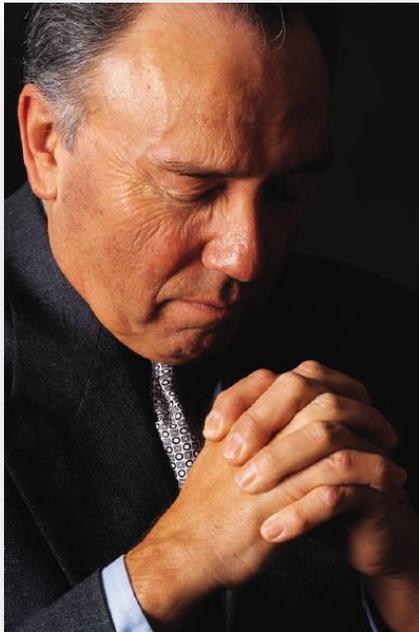
This judge is the same: He did not fear God nor respect man. Probably there is no worse combination than that. He is sensitive to himself, however, even though he does not respect man. This is an important factor in the judge’s personality and it affects the outcome. He is concerned about his reputation. We get this inference from the Greek concerning his statement about being worn out.

Vs. 3-5 A black eye.

3 There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection

from my opponent.’ 4 For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’

We note that he says, “she will wear me out.” The Greek phrase ὑποπιάζει με (*hupopiazē me*) (v. 5) means literally, “strike under the eye,” or “give a black eye to.” This is a common idiom in the Mideast similar to our own “he (or it) gave me a black eye,” where the black eye is symbolic and not literal. To get a black eye figuratively means that in some way our reputation is being damaged.



Several times a believer has appealed to God on the basis of his reputation. Abraham, in probably the most notable example, when appealing to God said, “Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Genesis 18:25). This was not a statement questioning whether God would actually do the right thing and act justly, but an appeal to His character which always manifest itself in God doing right and justly.

Truly He is a God of truth and without iniquity. Just and right is He.” Deuteronomy 32:4 KJV. (NASB: Righteous and upright).

Moses also appealed to God on the basis of his reputation when interceding for the nation. When God was about to destroy the nation and start over with Moses, he said in effect, “What will they say of You back in Egypt when they hear of this?”

“Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people.” Exodus 32:12.

Thus, there is a partial basis of comparison with God here in that God is concerned about vindicating Himself along with the righteous who are trusting in Him.

But in this case, the judge is concerned about looking bad. He is also getting extremely vexed with the persistence of the widow. He wants a calm and “business as usual” court where he can make decisions that look wise to the world, and yet receive bribes at the same time. How can he pull this off with this widow continually coming and making all that noise? He even says, “Even though I do not fear God or respect man, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.”

Can you identify with the part about a persistent person wearing you out? Remember when your children were young? “Dad, can we go out to eat tonight?” “No honey, we are spending too much money going out to eat.” Do the children say, “OK, fine, Dad. I’m sure you are right. Thanks for listening.” No, they go away and come back in five minutes with the same question.

But the judge, or even in our case a parent, is a contrast to and not a representative likeness of God. We see the unjust judge here much as we saw the reluctant friend at midnight. In that parable we learned that God is not like the man who was in bed with his children saying, “Do not



bother me, the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.” Rather, God, in contrast to the neighbor who must be compelled and will in the end cooperate, is ready to hear our request. If the reluctant neighbor will answer and give him what he needs, how much more will God come to the aid of the elect?

In the same way, if the unrighteous judge will hear the appeal of this widow, how much more will God hear us?

Going back to v. 3, The widow

There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’

Here is a poor woman. She might have paid the bribe money to get her case heard if she had money to throw around in such a way. But that she is very poor is indeed almost undeniable. Her only hope is to ask and keep on asking, just as Jesus tells us to do.

The widow is a picture of persistence. Do you look like that widow in prayer? Are you banging away at the door, being, *not obnoxious* with God, but very persistent? Are you doggedly persistent in prayer? Do you easily give up and quit praying? Do you look like a person who asks the judge once, does not get a discernable answer, and so fades away?

V. 6-8a The Lord explains why He is telling us this parable:

6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 8 I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly.

Of course our idea of a “delay” and God’s concept of what is a delay may vary considerably. After all, the apostle Peter instructs us concerning “slowness.” 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” Of course these comments are in relation to the

second coming. Nonetheless, “. . . do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” 2 Peter 3:8

V. 8b A final concern.

The Lord expresses a final concern:

“However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

Whew, now the concern is not persistence, but any kind of faithful prayer walk at all.

And where do we stand on this point? Are we praying only in emergencies? Are we really desiring to draw near to God so He will draw near to us? Do we pray?

Becoming a praying church will take time and effort.

The enemy does not want you to spend an hour in prayer each day. He may have you convinced that it is only for the super religious or retired people. Perhaps the enemy has told you, “Some people are so spiritually minded they are no earthly good.” Well, is that a true statement? Or is it that “some people are so earthly minded that they are powerless in prayer? Perhaps the one we think is so “spiritually minded” is actually very hungry for a real, living, relationship with God. A man who prays can be far more effective in this world than one who does not. The man who prays can ascertain the mind of God and know His will. The man who does not pray cannot know what He is saying and will spend much time on worthless things, spinning his wheels on pursuits that eventually prove to be vain.



It is dangerous to lead a prayer-less life.

Undertaking any venture, trying to do any project or work, forming any friendship, making any plan, taking any journey or making any pronouncement without prayer is hazardous, to say the very least. It is like walking blindfolded, barefoot and exhausted through a field filled with rocks, thorns, briars, loaded with poisonous snakes and trash.

If you are trying to live your life without prayer you will certainly wear out. If you are trying to minister to people in any way but without a prayer walk, you will certainly grow tired of the ministry and certainly grow weary of the people. You will need to meet with God.

You don't have time?

If you do not have time to pray, let me tell you what you are missing: You are missing your daily vacation. You are missing a time of real refreshment where you will receive the energy and wisdom for the day ahead and where you will be enlightened and encouraged by your Lord and Savior, Jesus. If you do not get this vacation time you will wear out, and you will be a huge burden to all those around you.

Therefore, I can really tell you this: If you don't have time to pray you are wasting time. That's right; you are wasting time because you will go down many wrong paths and do many wrong things that will have to be undone and re-done again then undone again and re-done again because you do not know what His will is for you. If you are thinking, "I don't have time to pray," I would like you to consider this question, "Do you have time not to pray?" Surely you will save hours, months, days, years and decades if you know the plan and can act in accordance with His will for you.

Take a break.

The very word for "be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46) in the St. Jerome's Vulgate translation is the Latin imperative "*vacate*," from which we get our word "vacation." Simon Tugwell puts it this way, "God invites us to take a holiday [vacation or *vacate*], to stop being God for a while, and let him be God."² Are you thinking prayer is some heavy stone to be hauled up the mountain each morning? Is it some task that should have been checked-off, wasn't and now dogs you like a bloodhound, giving you no rest? Is it an obligation, a nasty medicine, a pressing obligation to be stuffed into the bag with all the rest of what you have to do today? You need a break. Take a daily mini vacation and spend it with someone who can really bless you. Really!

If this makes absolutely no sense to you, wonderful. You will never figure out God. You will never fully understand how prayer works or even why God wants us to pray. Welcome to His world of divine mystery. You will be blessed as you obey, not as you understand.

Draw near to God. He will draw near to you. This is an adventure. Nothing could be more exciting.



² For a more complete discussion of this idea see Philip Yancey's book *Prayer, Does It Make Any Difference?* (Zondervan, 2006), pp. 25-26.