

The Widow and the Unjust Judge

Luke 18:1-8

SS Lesson for 07/15/2018

Devotional Scripture: Ps 145:13-20

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches us to understand that God desires for us to pray frequently as suggested in the parable of **The Widow and the Unjust Judge**. The **study's aim** is to recognize that every word from the Lord Jesus Christ is of vital importance to our spiritual lives today. The **study's application** is to pray consistently and persistently knowing that God knows us and will act faithfully on our behalf.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Luke 18:7-8

7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

These verses include two of Jesus' parables about prayer. One was addressed to the disciples (vv. 1-8), and the other (vv. 9-14) to "some who were confident of their own righteousness."

18:1-8. Jesus told the **Parable** of the Unjust Judge to teach persistence in prayer: **that they**, His disciples, **should always pray and not give up**. Verses 2-5 contain the parable itself. A **widow** continued to go before an unjust **judge** to plead for **justice** in her case. **He** continually **refused** to "hear" her case, **but finally he** decided to give her **justice so that she** would not **wear him out with her** complaining. Jesus interpreted the parable (vv. 6-8), pointing out that if **the unjust judge** would give **justice**, then imagine how **God** (the just Judge) **will see that they get justice, and quickly**. Jesus' question, **When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?** was not spoken out of ignorance. Nor was He questioning whether all believers would be gone when He returns. Instead, He asked the question to spur the disciples on to faithfulness in prayer, to encourage them to keep on in their praying. This is another good lesson from a bad example (cf. 16:1-13).

18:9-14. The purposes of the **Parable** of the Prayers of the **Pharisee** and the **Tax Collector** were to show that one cannot trust in himself for **righteousness** and should not view others with contempt (v. 9). The Pharisee's prayer was concerned with telling **God** what a good man he was, for not only did he keep the Law by fasting and tithing (v. 12), but also he considered himself better than other people (v. 11). He was using other people as his standard for measuring righteousness. On the other hand **the tax collector** used **God** as his standard for measuring righteousness. He realized that he had to throw himself on the **mercy of God** for forgiveness. Jesus' application of the parable echoed His teaching in 13:30. It is necessary for people to humble themselves before God to gain forgiveness, and those who are proud (**everyone who exalts himself**) will be brought low (**humbled**) by God.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

The point of the parable of the widow and the unjust judge is made plain by the Lord in Luke 18:1. It is an exhortation to keep praying in faith. Do we not often give up too soon in prayer? We pray for a while about something, and maybe, if the truth be told, we pray somewhat halfheartedly. Then, when something does not happen immediately, we forget about it and give up. Can that be called faith? The Lord wants us to realize that He is looking for persevering faith in the lives of His people. This is a parable about faithful praying and praying in faith. The parable itself (Luke 18:2-5) has a simple and obvious story line. A widow had a problem, and she petitioned a judge about it. The judge had no place for God in his life and no respect for people. He was rotten to the core. However, he eventually relented in regard to the widow's concern and granted her justice simply because of her persistence. This judge is implicitly contrasted and compared to God, who is a loving and merciful Father. He is not aloof, cold, and uncaring. God is disposed to act on behalf of His children, promising to "avenge his own elect" (Luke 18:7). This judge acted only out of petty frustration. If such a coldhearted judge responded to persistence, how much more will God our loving Father respond to the faithful praying of His children? It is true, as our text indicates, that it often does seem that a long time elapses before God acts on our petitions. He bears "long with" us. Unanswered prayer is often a problem of patience. In delaying, God is developing our faith, challenging us to go deeper, exhorting us to grow more fervent and devoted—just like the widow in the story. This overarching promise of the parable stands: God answers the prayers of His children much more readily than we may think. And after He answers, we agree that He was actually right on time. He comes "speedily." In the life of prayer, we live in this tension of God's willingness to answer prayer, His concern that we come to Him in faith, and His lofty and superior understanding of timing. Prayer can truly be an adventure of faith. And what is it to pray in faith? Our text has a couple of hints. Notice the language of prayer used in this text. First of all, prayer is crying out to God. It is coming from a place of deep need and desire. It is not perfunctory. It is not "easy come, easy go." Prayers of faith cry out to God in deep desperation. True prayer comes when we realize our great need and dependence on God. Notice also that the prayer of faith cries out "day and night." Do we really pray this way? Are we so intent to have something from God that we will not let go of Him, day or night? This does not mean running to God for five minutes and reading our list. It is a deep and urgent action, laying hold of God and not letting go until He responds to us. The Lord calls us to grow toward such faith.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

As of the time of this writing, there were at least a dozen "judge shows" airing on North American television. Their popularity is traced to the launch of *The People's Court* in 1981. The formats are often the same: judges preside over certain types of cases, listen to evidence presented by each side, and issue rulings. Usually these programs last a half hour and feature two cases; thus each case is wrapped up in a little under 15 minutes. Not so the legal drama of today's lesson! Our lesson text features instead a drawn-out process in which two people having entrenched viewpoints engage in a contest of wills. It may remind us of the old conundrum "What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object?" Jesus used this parable to call attention to important truths concerning our relationship with the ultimate judge, the judge of judges: Almighty God.

Whereas last week's lesson was drawn from an incident that occurred during Passion Week, this week's study actually moves back a bit on the time line, to perhaps a couple of months before Passion Week. The text comes from a portion of Luke's Gospel that covers the ministry of Jesus in Perea. The designation Perea is not found in the Gospels, but it is used in records of the time to describe the territory east of the Jordan River, opposite the southern part of Samaria and most of Judea. John 10:39-42 may indicate the beginning of Jesus' Perea ministry. Following his presence in Jerusalem at "the Festival of Dedication" (10:22), he "went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days" (10:40). Luke 13:22-19:27 is that Gospel's record of Jesus' Perea ministry. Immediately before giving the parable of today's lesson, Jesus had been addressing a question of the Pharisees concerning when the kingdom of God would come (Luke 17:20). In doing so, he issued some very solemn warnings about the future, most of them tied to his second coming. The suddenness of Jesus' return will catch many people off guard; they will be engaged in ordinary, routine activities "on the day the Son of man is revealed" (17:30). His return will not be a time for looking back and attempting to save anything of value, as indicated by the ominous warning, "Remember Lot's wife!" (17:32). After the time frame of Jesus' teaching shifts from the future (17:20-25) to analogies between past and future (17:26-33) to the future again (17:34-37), Jesus puts the spotlight on the present with the parable that follows.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Pray and Never Give Up (Luke 18:1)

1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

Never give up because of God's faithfulness (1)

Never give up because God never forsakes those who seek Him (Ps 9:10)

10 Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Never give up because God's faithfulness is true (Rom 3:3-4)

3 What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? 4 Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar.

Never give up because God will not let us fail (1 Cor 10:13)

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Never give up because if we are unfaithful, God will always be faithful (2 Tim 2:13)

if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Never give up because God cannot lie (Heb 6:13-18)

13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." 15 And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. 16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

Never give up because what God promises, He will be faithful in fulfilling (Heb 10:22-23)

22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Never give up because God is faithful and just (1 John 1:9)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Results of Persistence (Luke 18:2-6)

2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.

3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'

4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, "Though I do not fear God nor regard man,

5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' "

6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said.

Knowing that God cares (2)

We know that God cares for us because we can cast our anxieties on God (1 Peter 5:7)

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

We know that God cares for us because He promises to be attentive to my prayers (Ps 34:15)

The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry;

We know that God cares for us because He takes care of all of His creations (Matt 6:26)

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

We know that God cares for us because God's goodness will not allow anything else (Ps 27:13)

I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

We know that God cares for us because He promises justice and protection (Ps 37:5-7)

5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. 7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

We know that God cares for us because He sustains us and does not let us fall (Ps 55:22)

22 Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

We know that God cares for us because He asks us to come to Him for everything (Phil 4:6)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

We know that God cares for us therefore we will not be afraid of what man can do to us (Heb 13:5-6)

5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." 6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Getting justice (3)

Justice from God who is perfect (Deut 32:4)

4 He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

Justice that God dispenses every day (Zeph 3:5)

5 The Lord within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame.

Justice through belief in Jesus (Acts 13:38-39)

38 "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

God has promised He will bring justice to His chosen ones (Luke 18:7)

7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

God Himself works justice for all the oppressed (Ps 103:6)

6 The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

Getting vindication (4-6)

Vindication because God desires to vindicate His people (Ps 135:14)

14 For the Lord will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.

Vindication because God will handle the vengeance (Rom 12:17-19)

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Vindication because it is God who repays (Deut 32:35)

35 It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."

Vindication because it is God who avenges (Ps 94:1)

94 O Lord, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth.

Vindication because we are commanded to not repay evil for evil (1 Peter 3:9)

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Persistent Faith (Luke 18:7-8)

7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?
8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Persistence faith is knowing that God is just and always on time (7)

God is just because He judges with righteousness (Ps 9:8-9)

8 He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. 9 The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

God is just because He provides revenge and relief (2 Thess 1:6-7)

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.

God is just because He knows how and what to give (Luke 11:13)

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!"

God is on time because He does things at the right appointed time (Hab 2:3)

3 For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

God is just because He is the only one who justifies (Rom 8:33)

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

God is on time because He is never slow (2 Peter 3:9)

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God is on time because God's timing is not like man's (2 Peter 3:8)

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

Persistence faith is having faith in God (8)

Persistence in faith provides a blessing (Gal 3:9)

So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Persistence in faith results in nothing being impossible (Matt 17:20)

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Persistence in faith provides answered prayers (Matt 21:21-22)

21 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. 22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Persistence in faith results in justification (Rom 3:28)

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Persistence in faith is a way of live for the Christian (2 Cor 5:7)

We live by faith, not by sight.

Persistence in faith provides an approach to God with freedom and confidence (Eph 3:12)

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Persistence in faith results in unity of the Church body (Phil 1:27)

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

Persistence in faith leads to reconciliation (Col 1:22-23)

22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation- 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Persistence in faith provides spiritual strength (Col 2:6-7)

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Persistence in faith is commanded for a Christian (1 Tim 6:11-12)

11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Persistence in faith pleases God (Heb 11:6)

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The Unjust Judge and the “Won’t Quit” Widow (18:1-8)

1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up [“lose heart,” NASB]. 2 He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about [“did not respect,” NASB] men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ 4 “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’ “ 6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

The rendering of the NIV above indicates that Jesus was still speaking to His disciples, and so it would seem, though the text literally says that Jesus “was telling them a parable...” The coming of the kingdom of God is still in view, and the disciples are Jesus’ primary audience. Before we consider the meaning of the parable, let us be clear in our minds what the telling of this parable and its message implies. Luke begins the parable, untypically, by telling us what its meaning will be: “to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart” (v. 1).

The parable of the “unjust judge,” so-called, is more accurately (so far as the emphasis of the parable is concerned) the parable of the undaunted widow, or as suggested in my title above, the “won’t quit widow.” The application which our Lord made was to unceasing prayer. But implied in this are several realities, realities already apparent at the time of the writing of this gospel. First, the coming of the kingdom was not going to be immediate as the disciples surely wished it would be (cf. Acts 1:6). There was little need for our Lord to teach His disciples persistence and perseverance in prayer if the kingdom were quickly coming. The implication here is that there will be some delay (humanly speaking) before the kingdom comes.

Second, there were to be some difficult days for the disciples prior to the coming of the kingdom. The reason the disciples might “lose heart” (v. 1) is that persecution and opposition and injustice would be intense, and thus they may be inclined to wonder (from outward appearances) whether justice will ever be established on the earth. The use of the term “lose heart” in the rest of the New Testament is often closely linked with adversity, and so it is here as well in my opinion (cf. 2 Cor. 4:1,16; Gal. 6:9 (note, “in due time”); Eph. 3:13 (“lose heart at my tribulation”); 2 Thess. 3:13 (“do not grow weary of doing good”).

The parable of the persistent widow is occasioned by the fact that Jesus’ coming will not be immediate but that it will occur later on in time. In addition, during this time of “delay” men will react to and resist Christians just as they did Christ. Thus, there is a real danger of Christ’s disciples losing heart and ceasing to pray for the coming of His kingdom as they ought. This is suggested at the beginning of the paragraph and at the end as well. The last words of our Lord in this paragraph are, “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

I believe Jesus is saying something like this: “You can count on the fact that I will return and that I will bring about justice on the earth when I come. The issue for you to concern yourselves about isn’t whether I will fulfill My promises, but whether you will be found faithful when I return.” We need not worry about our Lord’s faithfulness, but only our own.

There is another inference from this paragraph we need to note carefully. The words of our Lord indicate there will be no real, complete, and ultimate justice on the earth until He does return and establish it on the earth. The reason we must persistently pray for justice and not lose heart is that there will be much injustice until He comes again. There are some who seem to be saying these days that Christ will only come to the earth after we (the church) have established justice. That simply is not true, either to this text or to the rest of the Scriptures pertaining to the coming of His kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount speaks of present pain, mourning, persecution, and sorrow, and of ultimate blessing when He comes with His kingdom. Let us not be confused on this point.

One last introductory observation: Jesus did not draw the disciples’ attention to the words of the widow, but to the words of the unjust judge: “And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge said ... ’” (v. 6).

Why would Jesus draw attention to the words of the judge who was unrighteous, rather than to the woman whose example the disciples were to follow? Let us bear this question in mind as we study this parable.

Luke's account of the telling of the parable begins, quite untypically, with the interpretation already given (v. 1). The actual parable begins not with the widow but with the unrighteous judge. Given the attention focused on this judge both at the beginning of the parable and at the end, I take it Jesus wants us to view him as the central character. This judge, both by our Lord's analysis (v. 2) and by the man's own reckoning (v. 4), was not a very savory fellow; he neither feared God nor respected man. It is this dimension of the judge's character on which our Lord focuses.

That unrighteous, uncaring judge was continually pestered by a widow. It seems she was being unjustly dealt with by another, and she thus appealed to the judge for justice to be carried out. It was expected that the judge, in the name of justice, would pronounce in her favor and would compel the one who had wronged her to make things right.

The judge frankly did not care about God nor about men. He was thus moved neither out of fear for God nor out of any love for mankind. He could have "cared less," we would say. It seems that some time passed. The wrong done the widow was ignored by the judge, as well as her frequent petitions. If he could have gotten away with it, the judge would have ignored this woman. But she would not have it so. She persisted, and pressed, and persevered. She pled for justice.

The judge became weary of her frequent petitions. He also came to view her actions as potentially damaging to him. She was certainly a nuisance, and she may even have posed some kind of threat to him. The expression translated "wear me out" in verse 5 is literally rendered "hit me under the eye" in the marginal note of the NASB. I doubt that this woman actually posed a physical threat, but she did seem to pose some kind of threat. It was now to the best interest of the judge to give the woman what she wanted, so he granted her request, not out of a positive motivation but out of a selfish, defensive one.

Jesus, at the request of one of His disciples, has already taught them a lesson in persisting in prayer (cf. Luke 11:1-13, esp. vv. 5-9). The disciples were told the story of the friend, who by persisting at knocking at the door of a friend, would eventually get what he needed. Why then is He teaching this lesson here? The issue in our text is specifically prayer related to the coming of Christ's kingdom. I believe here it is not the persistence of the widow which is in focus, but rather the character of God which inspires and rewards persistence.

The unrighteous judge granted the widow justice, not because it was the right thing to do, not because the Old Testament law required it, and not because a helpless widow requested it, but simply because it served his interests best to do so. The unrighteous judge administered justice on the widow's behalf because he was selfish.

The focus of this parable is not on the widow but on the unrighteous judge, because his character is then used to teach us by contrast about God's character. The woman persisted in her petition because that judge was a wicked man who would act only out of self-interest, and she literally wore him down. She got what she wanted from him because he was evil and would put his ease and best interests above anything else.

In sharp contrast, the Christian is taught to persist in prayer because of the character of God, which is the opposite of that of the judge. God is righteous; the judge was unrighteous. God has chosen His disciples—they are called "His elect" (v. 7), and He cares about His disciples because He has chosen them. But the unrighteous judge has no feelings and no relationship to the widow. He has no compassion toward her, while God has great compassion on His elect. The unrighteous judge delayed because he didn't care about God or man; the Lord Jesus delays out of compassion on guilty men, giving them time to repent and be saved. The unrighteous judge only cared about reducing his "pain," while the righteous Judge came to suffer the greatest pain of all—the just wrath of God—in order to save fallen man. The unjust judge brought about justice slowly and reluctantly, but the Just Judge of all the earth will hastily bring about justice when He returns to the earth.

It is time to be realistic about why sinful men ever bring about justice. To be quite frank, they only do it for their own self-interests. It is not righteousness which prompts men to act in favor of justice, but self-interest. Government officials are looked upon as duty bound to promote justice, but if the justice they are obliged to administer is not in their own self-interest, don't plan on it taking place, at least quickly. If unjust men will not bring about justice because it promises them no pleasure or benefit, then persistence may force them to act in self-interest to reduce the pain of our persistence.

How very different with God. God is good. God is righteous and just. God does not need to be forced to bring about justice by His saints. God has promised to do so, and He will. His love of justice, His love for His own (and His compassion for the oppressed) predispose Him to act to bring about justice. It is this positive aspect of His character which promotes the perseverance of the saints in prayer, while it is the very wickedness of the unjust judge which required the same perseverance from the widow. The character of God is our motivation not to lose heart and to press on in prayer for His coming and for the establishment of justice on the earth.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/56-piety-persistence-penitence-and-prayer-luke-181-14>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

It is easy when reading this parable to forget, or at least fail to give attention to, the specific purpose for it. That purpose is stated in the opening verse: “that [people] should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1). We can get so caught up in the issues of God’s justice and the timing of his action on behalf of his people that we overlook the fact that this parable is meant to help us with our prayer life. Proper prayer will result in self-examination; this is much more useful than prayers of complaint regarding a perceived lack of action on God’s part. A vital ingredient in maintaining the faith that Jesus mentioned at the close of the parable is steadfast, refuse-to-faint prayer. At times prayer may seem ineffective in providing genuine solutions to the burning issues of our time. Some skeptics view prayer as a means of avoiding the hard work required to right or reverse some of the injustices in a terribly broken world. Those participating in various social programs and working hard to solve society’s ills are often presented as those who are really making a difference (and in many cases, they are). People who pray, by contrast, are seen as out of touch or unwilling to get their hands dirty and tackle the problems that exist. But that’s a false either-or distinction. Certainly prayer should not be a substitute for work. God does expect his people to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16), to penetrate the darkness and to give more of his “seasoning” to the world as salt does to food. Part of this includes acting “justly” as the prophet tells us (Micah 6:8).

We recognize that justice (or rather the lack of it) is a burning issue in contemporary society. But we take care to note that the justice specifically addressed by Jesus in today’s parable is that which concerns God’s “chosen ones” (Christians). The issue is their continuing to be persecuted in various ways while God does not intervene on their behalf. So, how are Christians to react to this kind of continuing injustice? As we read Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we see that we are not to take personal vengeance against wrongdoers; in fact, we are to seek the good of our enemies (Matthew 5:38-48). Paul’s counsel in Romans 12:19-21 is consistent with this: “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (12:19). For many Christians today, this requirement creates great tension. This is particularly so in parts of the world where places of Christian worship are being burned to the ground and followers of Jesus (including children) are being tortured, mutilated, and killed because of their allegiance to him. Christians see sin flourishing and wrongdoers enjoying life, apparently free to live under the radar of divine wrath. In the midst of this, the teaching that people “should always pray and not give up” can seem hollow, certainly much easier said than done.

The book of Revelation offers a proper perspective on this matter of maintaining faith under fire. As John describes the opening of the fifth of seven seals, he testifies, “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained” (Revelation 6:9). He then notes how they cry out as they ask, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (6:10). This language calls to mind the reality behind the imagery of our lesson’s parable: oppressed believers are crying out for God to judge their enemies and avenge them. They are in danger of giving up in the sense of wondering What’s the use in praying? Nothing changes, so we might as well spend the time doing something else. The “how long” question posed by both the dead and the living (see Psalm 35:17-28; Habakkuk 1:2-4; etc.) is felt profoundly. As we read through Revelation, we see vividly portrayed the intense conflict between good and evil, between the Lord and Satan. Finally as we draw near to the book’s conclusion, we read how John describes hearing “the roar of a great multitude in heaven” proclaiming the praises of the Lord (Revelation 19:1). A few verses later the great marriage supper of the Lamb is pictured, to which all the faithful are invited (19:7-9). As Revelation 19 progresses, a rider on a white horse appears. “[The horse’s] rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war” (19:11). The rider is called “the Word of God” (19:13) and “on his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords” (19:16). He has come to judge the nations and to carry out the wrath of God Almighty (19:15). There is no question who this rider is: he is Jesus, coming in glory as he promised to do in today’s parable. And he

comes quickly, to avenge the faithful and to carry out God's holy judgment on the wicked. The cry for vengeance will be answered, in the ultimate sense, when Satan is cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). He is the one whom Jesus came to destroy (Hebrews 2:14, 15; 1 John 3:8). Those who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior are equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome Satan's temptations and schemes (1 John 4:4). Even so, we still feel the impact of the broken, sin-cursed world that awaits redemption (Romans 8:22, 23). That full redemption will come with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). And when that takes place, it will happen quickly. May Jesus find us faithful when he comes.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Prayer should be both our first option and our last resort (Luke 18:1)
2. There are people in positions of authority who have no knowledge of God (vs. 2)
3. Persistence pays off. We should always persevere (vss. 3-5)
4. We can learn valuable lessons from individuals who do not share our beliefs (vs. 6)
5. God hears us when we cry out to Him. He will always respond to our cries for help (vs. 7)
6. We must always have faith in God, especially when He does not seem to be working on our behalf (vs. 8)