

“THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE.”

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard
First Christian Reformed Church
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Scripture Texts: Luke 18:1-8

Luke 18:1-5.

This parable is different from many of the others. Jesus lets the cat out of the bag and gives the meaning before the beginning. To borrow an old saying, “He hangs the key by the door.”

Jesus wants to stress the importance of prayer and the importance of perseverance in prayer. So rather than just saying it, He again resorts to that powerful teaching tool, a parable.

This parable is sometimes called the parable of the unjust judge and sometimes the parable of the importunate or persistent widow. Importunate, now there’s a word you don’t hear much anymore. Importunate doesn’t just mean persistent but persistent to the point of annoyance or intrusion. Stubbornly tenacious in the face of obstacles and opposition.

Persistent like an unrelenting bill collector or a telemarketer caller. Persistent like a mosquito or a woodpecker. Persistent like a hungry baby at 3AM or a child full of why questions. Persistent like that pile driver on the Main Street bridge yesterday, relentless pounding.

Jesus tells a parable in which a widow woman gets what she wants from an unfair, cruel judge because she refused to stop asking and persisted in her unrelenting request.

It’s about as simple as a parable can get, and yet this parable is a challenging one and it takes some care to glean from it the truth Jesus teaches. There are several dangers in interpreting this parable.

Jesus intends this parable to be a contrast not a comparison. There’s a big difference between a wicked judge who unwillingly finally gives in and our merciful and loving Father in heaven who delights to hear our prayers and answer.

We need to remember our rule of Scripture interpreting Scripture so we stay out of some of the ditches of wrong interpretations.

Wrong interpretations like:

God is generally disinterested in us and our prayers and must be awakened by constant hounding.

God can be nagged or badgered into doing things or giving things even when He doesn’t want to.

God can be worn down by our pleadings the way a child wears down his parents sometimes.

Right understandings:

Here is Jesus' point. If this hopeless widow experienced success from such a hardhearted and wicked judge, then how much more can we expect our Father in heaven to hear and answer if we don't give up too quickly?

If persistence obtained so much from a godless man, how much more can the children of God expect from their Father in heaven? Is not God more just and more caring and more merciful than the unjust judge?

Jesus is urging us to be importunate or persistent in prayer. He's saying too many of us follow "the path of least persistence" in prayer and spiritual discipline.

I know some of us struggle with this concept. We think that if we ask, that should be enough. "God heard my prayer the first time and it's rude or pretentious to keep asking. If He wants to answer He will in His own good time, I don't need to keep reminding Him."

Sort of like that quip about husbands. "Wives, if you ask your husband to fix something, he'll fix it. There's no need to incessantly remind him about it every five or six months."

What about Jesus' strong words against vain repetition?

Right after Jesus gave that warning He taught us a prayer He expected us to pray at least 365 days a year, or a prayer similar to it, asking for our daily needs and confessing our sins.

There's a world of difference between vain repetitions and urgent repetitions. God is not impressed by volume or eloquence. But there's something about persistence and earnestness in prayer that's important otherwise Jesus wouldn't commend it to us and our Father wouldn't wait for us to practice it.

Why doesn't God answer our prayers right away? Why does He desire persistence?

There are lots of reasons, let me briefly list about seven.

First, God wants us to experience firsthand that prayer isn't magic or mechanical, like pushing a vending machine button and getting what we want. Prayer is personal, prayer is relational.

Second, God wants us to pray more often. Quick answers lead to prayerlessness. He wants us to come back, and keep coming back. He wants more frequent and deeper communion with us.

Third, God wants us to learn from delays and long silences. They expose our easy boredom, our impatience, our self-interest and self-absorption, our small mindedness and temporal perspectives. God's delays expose how easily we give up or get distracted.

In the words of that great prayer warrior, E.M. Bounds, "There is no place in prayer for feeble desires, listless efforts and lazy attitudes."

God answers no to thoughtless, hasty prayers; to tame, lukewarm prayers. You get what you pay for. You reap what you sow. Where there is sacrifice in time and thought and earnestness, there is reward.

Fourth, God wants to train us in endurance by exercising our faith. He wants us to tire ourselves out in spiritual endeavors as we do in physical endeavors. There are prayers God doesn't answer until they are asked with the sweat of persistence. This forces us to overcome laziness and impatience in our prayers.

Fifth, God wants us to grow in our insight and understanding of prayer and to improve our prayers. We will be dull and casual and sloppy if a quick little half sentence will get us our answer every time. God wants us to grow past children's prayers and past superficial, shallow prayers.

Sixth, God wants us to learn not just something about ourselves, He wants us to learn some things about Him. Foremost is that God is patient and His patience is always purposeful. He's patient in delaying His answer or response for good reasons. Even when Jesus uses the word speedily in the text be careful to understand speedily according to the providence of God and not according to our sinful and fleshly impatience.

If we could see into the heavenlies and see in advance His providential purposes we would see that His answer comes at exactly the right and best moment for us. Even the return of Christ, which seems very long delayed to us, is right on schedule and won't arrive a moment too late.

Seventh, Godly praying is hardwork, it takes practice and patience. It takes beating sinful and selfish desires out of our hearts and seeking first God and His will and His ways and His righteousness. In order for our prayers to be sincere and pleasing to God we must be trained in them and His delays aid us to that good end. God delays to test and try our faith in order to make it stronger.

Any practice in prayer that humbles and strengthens us and glorifies God is a very good prayer.

Brothers and sisters, let us learn the power and blessing of prevailing prayer. Of feeling our sin deeply and repenting deeply, of seeing our great needs and praying for daily bread, of weeping with others who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice, of seeing the needs of our church and world and calling out to God on their behalf. What a benefit and blessing to have frequent communion with the God of the universe.

What is your posture in prayer?

Just as what we pray for reveals our hearts, how we pray also reveals our hearts.

Are you often in a hurry and just make it quick? There are times and places for those kinds of prayers, but not if those are the only kind we ever pray.

Have you ever poured your heart out in lengthy prayers, prayers that last more than 15 minutes? Or do you get bored quickly or run out of things to say? Do you find you don't really have much to say? Just the usual small list?

How many times did Jesus pray all night? Can we even conceive of such a thing? With practice and working up to it, you could.

Do you ever get down on your knees by your bed or by your couch or chair? Do you ever bow your head, or hold your hands open, or raise your hands, or pray out loud, or even shed tears? How about writing out prayers to God in a notebook?

What is your attitude about prayer and what does your posture say about your attitude?

Luke 18:8, When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?

Why does Jesus ask this strange question at the end of His teaching about prayer?

The context in Luke 17 helps. There Jesus taught about the end times and His second coming. He compared it to the days of Noah when everyone was just going about business as usual.

Luke 17:27-32 They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, 29 but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all— 30 so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. 32 Remember Lot's wife.

How can we keep from becoming like Lot's wife or all the people before the flood?

Matthew 24:12-13 Because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

When the Son of Man comes will He find faith? Will most people be like Lot's wife, will their hearts grow cold, will there be any faith left? Only 8 entered the ark. Only 4 left Sodom.

How can we avoid this? Pray, pray, pray.

Faith and prayer are intimately linked. Without one we will lose the other. When faith fails, prayer dies. And in order for our faith not to fail us, we must pray.

Someone once said prayer is faith exhaling. Prayer stokes the fires of our faith. Keep that fire burning to the very end.

When the Son of Man returns will there be people of faith still praying earnestly and faithfully and believingly? Will we be found still praying when Jesus returns?

If you pray you will not end up like Lot's wife, you will not love the world more than you love God. You will keep your balance and your perspective.

Jesus knows that there will be a very long interval from the time He left to the time He returns. As the end approaches worldliness and sensuality will only increase, and faith will decrease. Watch and pray and don't grow weary and don't lose heart.

Application and conclusion.

Again and again Jesus calls us to persistent prayer.

Matthew 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Pray for your children for as long as you have breath.
Teach them to pray by praying with them and for them.
Pray for all the children baptized in this church.

Pray earnestly, with fervor, for your family, for your church, your nation and world.

I credit our nightly prayers more than anything else for the state of our marriage today. What a mercy that God humbled us and brought us to praying out loud together twenty years ago.

I commend to you the prayers of Scripture, the Psalms, and the prayers of Paul.
I commend to you again the very popular book, *The Valley of Vision*, a collection of Puritan prayers. It will teach you new and deeper ways to pray. Use them in family devotions.
I commend to you the writings of E. M. Bounds. You can get all eight of his books bound in one volume for ten dollars on Amazon (*The Complete Collection of E.M. Bounds on Prayer*). It will help you, I promise you.

Practice persevering in persistent prayer, do not grow weary or give up, and it will bear much fruit in this life, and will keep you strong in your faith for that day when Jesus comes.

Prayer:

Holy Father in Heaven, hear our prayer offered in faith. We have faith, strengthen our faith. We believe, help our unbelief, as indeed you are doing. While we wait on you, help our impatience. Apart from you we can do nothing, help us to depend on you. Jesus, teach us to pray and teach us to persist in pray for the glory of God and for our blessing and benefit.