

**THE PARABLE OF
THE PERSISTENT WIDOW**



IMPORTUNITY

THE PARABLE RECORD:

Luke 18:1-8

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Luke mentions ‘widows’ more than any of the other Gospels (Luke 2:37-38; 4:25-26; 7:11-17). This specific parable is found only in Luke 18:1-8; however, the main truth of the parable is found throughout the Scriptures.

The parable is preceded by a conversation regarding the kingdom of God with the Pharisees (Luke 17:20,21) and then a conversation with His disciples about His coming and of His judgement that will transpire at the close of the Tribulation.

The Parable is introduced with the reason for the parable in Luke 18:1 “And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” Therefore, the Lord knew that the descriptions used would clearly illustrate in the minds of the disciples what He meant by “men out always to pray, and not to faint”.



The setting is “a certain village” as He was passing through Samaria and Galilee. (Luke 17:11,12).

The audience is His disciples. Some say that, possibly, it was not only His disciples, for there were others there present, specifically Jews. However, at this point in time it seems He was still talking specifically to His disciples (Luke 17:22,37).

The illustration given is emphasize the “how much more” element of God’s character as illustrated in Matthew 7:7-11, Luke 11:5-13, Luke 12:22-34.

The parable of “The Persistent Widow” is given to encourage His disciples in this matter of ‘importunity,’ that is, persistent prayer. The exhortation is to not cease praying and to not cease waiting on the Lord, for there is a day coming, especially when it comes to the matter of vindication, that the Lord will administer justice and avenge His own elect...but not before the time! Nevertheless, we are to continue persisting before the throne of grace, exercising Philippians 4:6: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

VERSE BY VERSE

Luke 18:1 And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

- a. **Men:** Generic use referring to ‘mankind’. Meaning both men and women.
- b. **Ought:** Must; Should be bound to; Behoved. The idea that this is of necessity and/or not optional.

Examples: **Acts 5:29** Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We **ought** to obey God rather than men.

Luke 2:49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I **must** be about my Father's business?

2Corinthians 5:10 For we **must** all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

Luke 24:46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it **behoved** Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

- c. **Always:** Stressing Continual Action
- d. **To Pray:** To ask or beg for something earnestly or humbly; to supplicate; to worship
- e. **And not to Faint:** To be weary; weak; to lose heart; to turn coward; to give in

Examples: **Gal 6:9** And let us not be **weary** in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

2Co 4:16 For which cause we **faint** not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.

Luke 18:2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:

- a. **A Judge:** A minister of Justice and Judgement
- b. **Feared Not God:** No ‘phobia’ of God; doesn’t care what God says or thinks.
- c. **Neither Regarded Man:** No respect for man; Doesn’t care what man thinks. In that it was his duty to take particular care not to exclude any people group from hearing their case, especially the widows.

A judge was appointed to punish the evil-doer and vindicate the righteous in the fear of the LORD. Even the basic moral directive that was given to the people of God in the context of loving their neighbour was:

Lev 19:15 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: *but* in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

Also, when King Jehoshaphat appointed judges for every city in Judah, he charged them sharply to take heed in their office.

2Ch 19:4 And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again through the people from Beersheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the LORD God of their fathers.

2Ch 19:5 And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city,

2Ch 19:6 And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who *is* with you in the judgment.

2Ch 19:7 Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do *it*: for *there is* no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

(See also Moses choosing judges in Exodus 18:13-26. Particularly v20,21)

Luke 18:3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

- a. **A Widow:** Someone whose husband has died
- b. **She came unto him:** She came over, and over, again.
- c. **Avenge:** Take up my case; obtain Justice for the innocent
- d. **Adversary:** An opponent (comes from two words ‘anti/against + just/right’). The same word is used in 1 Peter 5:8 in describing the devil.

Both in the Old and New Testament, special provision and attention was made for the widow (Exodus 22:22-24), especially/specifically widows indeed (1 Timothy 5:3-16). It was culturally and biblically understood that the ‘man’ was the provider and protector of the home. He was the one that handled the official and legal affairs, hence why the Lord warns not to undermine them in any way.

Exo 22:22 Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.

Exo 22:23 If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry;

Exo 22:24 And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

However, the condition of the city of Jerusalem and their mandate as the people of God, to care for widows, amongst others, has deteriorated and deferred from its correct practice and become corrupt, even since the bible times.

Isa 1:21 How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

Isa 1:22 Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water:

Isa 1:23 Thy princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, **neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.**

Isa 1:24 Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies:

Isa 1:25 And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:

Isa 1:26 And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.

Luke 18:4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;

He would not for a while: Seasonal period of time; a fixed or special occasion(s); As long as she kept coming;

Examples: **2Timothy 3:1** This know also, that in the last days perilous **times** shall come.

1Corinthians 7:39 The wife is bound by the law **as long as** her husband liveth...

John 7:33 Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little **while** am I with you, and *then* I go unto him that sent me.

Revelation 2:21 And I gave her **space** to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Acts 7:23 And when he was full forty **years old**, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

The idea is that as long as she kept coming, he kept refusing her. The space of time is not specified neither is it important, its simply drawing out the emphasis that the Lord is wanting to make on the continual element of prayer as mentioned in the next verse.

Luke 18:5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

- a. **Continual:** Set out for a definite point or goal until achieved/complete (made up of two words: to/toward + conclusion/result)

Example: **Romans 10:4** For Christ *is* the **end** of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

- b. **Troubleth:** Intensely irritate and frustrate. Two words put together (to hold near + to cut/to beat the breast in grief)

Example: **Mark 14:6** And Jesus said, Let her alone; why **trouble** ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.

- c. **Weary me:** To keep under; To annoy; to hit under the eye; To give a black eye.

Paul used the same word to illustrate the extent of keeping control of his body. Although not intended in a literal sense, the point of the phrase is for emphasis.

1Corinthians 9:26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

1Corinthians 9:27 But I **keep under** my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Luke 18:6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

Did you hear?

Luke 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

The obvious answer to the rhetorical question is YES!

“God's own elect meet with a great deal of trouble and opposition in this world; there are *many adversaries* that fight against them; Satan is their great adversary.”

“We ought to concern ourselves for the persecuted and oppressed churches, and to pray that God would do them justice, and set them in safety. And herein we must be very urgent; we must *cry* with earnestness: we must *cry day and night*, as those that believe prayer will be heard at last; we must *wrestle with God*, as those that know how to value the blessing, and will have no nay. God's praying people are told to *give him no rest*, Isa 62:6, Isa 62:7.”

Luke 18:8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

The Lord not only answers yes to verse 7, but incorporates the seriousness of the justice to be administered in due time. And when that due time has come, there Lord will no longer withhold His wrath, but will execute vindication upon the adversaries and will execute it out ‘speedily’.

I believe this also draws our attention back to Luke 17:22-37. The topic of discussion pertaining to the kingdom of God, but more specifically to the coming of the Lord. He understands that His disciples want to see him in that day in all His glory, but He tells them “ye shall not see it”(v22). He goes on to tell them that He must first suffer and be rejected (v25 c.f. Isaiah 53), and the goes on to talk about the condition of ages in times past before the judgment of God came upon them ‘speedily’(v27-30). The He reminds them of Lot’s wife and uses that as an example to ‘flee the wrath to come’ while the opportunity is given and turn away from those things that are holding you in sin and condemnation, don’t turn to them and lose your soul (v31-33). Concerning verses 34-36, some say that this referring to the rapture that will be taking place prior to the Tribulation period (one shall be ‘raptured’ and the other left for the tribulation); others say that this

referring to the judgment that will take place (one shall be taken ‘for judgment’ and the other left for the Millennial Kingdom/glory with Christ).

Then the disciples ask a question: “Where, Lord?” They were either asking ‘where shall they be taken’, or ‘where shall this take place’.

“**The eagles** or vultures symbolize impending judgments. The answer therefore is that judgments would swoop down on every form of unbelief and rebellion against God, no matter where found.”

(William Mac Donald)

The idea is that the phrase that the Lord used in verse 37 is symbolic of Judgment administered and the carcass of his enemies given as food for the fowls of the air. Being eaten instead of buried was considered a shameful dishonour, just as Goliath threatened to do to David (1 Samuel 17:44).

As for the concluding Phrase: “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” There are three potential views.

VIEW 1: It is praying faith that persists like the persistent widow.

VIEW 2: It is faith in terms of faithfulness as a good and faithful servant.

VIEW 3: It is faith in terms of the ‘true Christian’ faith as opposed to apostasy.

CONCLUSION

God desires us to persist in prayer as He has invited us to do so persistently, and until the end. That end for us is when we will be with the Lord forevermore.

Rom 12:12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

Eph 6:18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

Col 4:2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;

1Th 5:17 Pray without ceasing.

1Pe 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

(See Luke 11:5-13 on Importunity)

APPLICATION/EXHORTATION

“What assurance they have that mercy will come at last, though it be delayed, and how it is supported by what the unjust judge saith: If this widow prevail by being importunate, much more shall God's elect prevail. For,

[1.] This widow was a *stranger*, nothing related to the judge; but God's praying people are his own elect, whom he knows, and loves, and delights in, and has always concerned himself for.

[2.] She was but *one*, but the praying people of God are *many*, all of whom come to him on the same errand, and agree to ask what they need. As the saints of heaven surround the throne of glory with their united praises, so saints on earth besiege the throne of grace with their united prayers.

[3.] She came to a *judge* that bade her *keep her distance*; we come to a *Father* that bids us *come boldly to him*, and teaches us to cry, *Abba, Father*.

[4.] She came to an *unjust judge*; we come to a *righteous Father* (John 17:25), one that regards his own glory and the comforts of his poor creatures, especially those in distress, as *widows* and *fatherless*.

[5.] She came to this judge purely upon her own account; but God is himself engaged in the cause which we are soliciting; and we can say, *Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause*; and *what wilt thou do to thy great name?*

[6.] She had no friend to speak for her, to add force to her petition, and to use interest for her more than her own; but we have an *Advocate with the Father*, his own Son, who *ever lives to make intercession* for us, and has a powerful prevailing interest in heaven.

[7.] She had no promise of speaking, no, nor any encouragement given her to ask; but we have the golden sceptre held out to us, are told to ask, with a promise that it shall be given to us.

[8.] She could have access to the judge only at some certain times; but we may cry to God *day and night*, at all hours, and therefore may the rather hope to prevail by importunity.

[9.] Her importunity was provoking to the judge, and she might fear lest it should set him more against her; but our importunity is pleasing to God; the prayer of the upright is *his delight*, and therefore, we may hope, shall avail much, if it be an effectual fervent prayer.”

MEMORY VERSE

Luk 18:1 And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;