

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **The Parable of the Persistent Widow**

*Luke 18:1-8*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

June 21, 2015

# The Parable of the Persistent Widow

## Scripture

I read a story when I was a student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, IL. You will be appalled by the story I am about to relate to you. Appalled, that is, if you have any kind of social conscience.

A poor black, living on Chicago's South Side, sought to have her apartment properly heated during the frigid winter months. Despite city law on the matter, her unscrupulous landlord refused. The woman was a widow, desperately poor, and ignorant of the legal system; but she took her case to court on her own behalf. Justice, she declared, ought to be done. It was her ill fortune, however, to appear repeatedly before the same judge who, as it turned out, was an atheist and a bigot. The only principle by which he lived was, as he put it, that "blacks should be kept in their place." The possibilities of a ruling favorable to the widow were, therefore, bleak. They became even bleaker as she realized she lacked the indispensable ingredient necessary for favorable rulings in cases like these – namely, a satisfactory bribe. Nevertheless, she persisted.

At first, the judge did not so much as even look up from reading the novel on his lap before dismissing her. But then he began to notice her. Just another black, he thought, stupid enough to think she could get justice. Then her persistence made him self-conscious. This turned to guilt and anger. Finally, raging and embarrassed, he granted her petition and enforced the law. Here was a massive victory over "the system" – at least as it functioned in his corrupted courtroom.

In telling you this story I have not, of course, been quite honest. For this never really happened in Chicago (at least, as far as I know!), nor is it even my "story." It is a story I have bor-

rowed from David F. Wells<sup>1</sup>, who in turn borrowed it from Jesus in a parable he told in Luke 18:1-8 to illustrate persevering in prayer.

Let's read the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8:

**<sup>1</sup>And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. <sup>2</sup>He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. <sup>3</sup>And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' <sup>4</sup>For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' " <sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. <sup>7</sup>And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"** (Luke 18:1-8)

## Introduction

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He was most likely in the final few weeks of his life before his crucifixion. While traveling to Jerusalem Jesus taught many important truths that he wanted his disciples to understand and apply to their lives.

The context of the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) is the previous pericope, which we studied last time. The previous pericope had Jesus answering the Pharisees' question about when the kingdom of God would come (17:20). Jesus told them that the kingdom of God was in their midst

---

<sup>1</sup> David F. Wells, "Prayer: Rebelling Against the Status Quo" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981), 123.

(17:21). He was the king and his presence indicated that the kingdom of God was “now” here. He is the king, and he rules and reigns in the hearts and lives of his disciples *spiritually*.

Then Jesus immediately went on to tell his disciples that the kingdom of God was “not yet” here (17:22-37). By that he meant that the establishment of his kingdom *physically* would only take place when he returned again. Jesus’ second coming would consummate his kingdom on earth.

But what should Jesus’ disciples do until he comes back again? That was the reason for the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8. Norval Geldenhuys elaborates:

In 17:20-37 the Savior emphasized the fact that no one will be able to determine in advance the time of His second coming. He now teaches in this parable that when His coming is apparently slow in taking place believers are not to become discouraged, but should persist in prayer, knowing that He will indeed come at the right time and will answer their supplication by destroying the powers of evil and by causing His chosen ones to triumph. The parable has, however, also a more general meaning, namely, that the faithful should persevere in prayer with regard to all other matters when the answer is not immediately granted.<sup>2</sup>

## **Lesson**

The parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 teaches us about persevering in prayer.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Duty Regarding Persevering in Prayer (18:1)
2. The Illustration for Persevering in Prayer (18:2-5)
3. The Lesson on Persevering in Prayer (18:6-8a)
4. The Question about Persevering in Prayer (18:8b)

---

<sup>2</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 446.

## I. The Duty Regarding Persevering in Prayer (18:1)

First, look at the duty regarding persevering in prayer.

Luke said in verse 1 that Jesus **told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.**

As I said, this **parable** follows Jesus' teaching about his second coming. Jesus instructed his disciples what to do until he returned. Jesus' disciples **ought always to pray and not lose heart.** This is an interesting statement, for a number of reasons.

First, it is interesting because Jesus told his disciples the point of the parable. Most of Jesus' parables don't state the point of the parable. But in this parable Jesus told his disciples the point of the parable. He did so because he did not want any misunderstanding or confusion about what he was saying. Until he returns, Jesus said, his disciples **ought always to pray and not lose heart.**

Second, it is interesting because the word "**ought**" (*dein*) carries the idea of necessity or obligation. It is "something which should be done as the result of compulsion, whether internal (as a matter of duty) or external (law or custom)."<sup>3</sup>

Third, it is interesting because the word "**always**" (*pan-tote*) is a call "to continued prayer, not in the sense of praying at all times, but in praying again and again."<sup>4</sup>

And fourth, it is interesting because the phrase "**not lose heart**" (*me enkakeo*) means not to be "faint" nor "weary."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 669–670.

<sup>4</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1447.

<sup>5</sup> James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 26.

So, the duty of Jesus' disciples is to persevere in prayer.

## II. The Illustration for Persevering in Prayer (18:2-5)

Second, look at the illustration for persevering in prayer.

Having told his disciples the point of the parable, Jesus went on to tell the parable itself.

**He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man" (18:2).** There is some question among Bible scholars whether this judge was Jewish or a paid magistrate appointed by Herod or the Romans. Regardless, this **judge** was utterly corrupt. He was godless and he had no regard for people. Most likely, he was open to taking bribes and gave favors to people in authority.

Jesus continued in verse 3, **"And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' "** This poor **widow** need not have been very old. In those days women married at age thirteen or fourteen, and some widows were quite young. She was probably facing some financial difficulty, but in a patriarchal society found it difficult to find anyone to plead her case. She had no money for a bribe, and held no position of authority. So, she took it upon herself to get **justice against her adversary.**

Jesus said that **for a while** the corrupt judge **refused** to help her. **But** she persisted by going to him again and again, because **afterward 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" (18:4-5).**

Why did the judge **give her justice**? Because he could not get rid of her. She kept coming and coming. She would not accept his silence or take "no" for answer. The phrase **"beat me down"** means "to hit under the eye,"<sup>6</sup> which is to give a black

---

<sup>6</sup> James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament*, 75.

eye! The judge felt like he was getting a black eye with the widow's perseverance!

### III. The Lesson on Persevering in Prayer (18:6-8a)

Third, notice the lesson on persevering in prayer.

**And the Lord said** in verse 6, **"Hear what the unrighteous judge says."** The corrupt judge gave justice to the widow. He did it because she was beating him down, she was persevering in her effort to get justice.

In complete contrast to **the unrighteous judge**, Jesus went on to ask two rhetorical questions in verse 7, **"And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?"** Yes, of course, God will **give justice to his elect!** That is why Jesus said in verse 8, **"I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily."**

So, what is the lesson on persevering in prayer? Commentator Kent Hughes answers:

This parable's lesson has often been greatly misunderstood, because most people think it teaches that feverish importunity (troublesome persistence) in prayer is a virtue. Untold numbers of sermons have wrongly used this text to teach that we must frantically beg God to answer our prayers. This is not the idea at all.<sup>7</sup>

He goes on to say:

The parable of the unjust judge and the pestering widow is a parable of *contrast*. The clear lesson of the parable is that God is not like the judge, for God is good and gracious. And we are not like the nameless widow, for we are his chosen ones. So a distressed bugging of God is in fact inadequate prayer.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 186.

<sup>8</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 186.

The judge in Jesus' parable was unrighteous, ungracious, unloving, unmerciful, unkind, and unjust. In contrast, our God is righteous, gracious, loving, merciful, kind, and just. He is our heavenly *Father*! He delights to answer the prayers of his children who come to him with praises and petitions.

The widow in Jesus' parable was unknown and insignificant. But Christians are known by God and have significance because we are his elect!

So, because of who God is and who we are, there is no need at all to beg God frantically for answers to our prayers. No, God is our loving heavenly Father who delights to answer the prayers of his elect children.

C. Samuel Storms poses some relevant questions in his book *Reaching God's Ear* that we can ask in our approach to God:

- Do we repeat a request because we think that the quality of a prayer is dependent on the quantity of words?
- Do we repeat a request because we think that God is ignorant and needs to be informed, or if not ignorant at least he is unconcerned and therefore needs to be aroused?
- Do we repeat our prayers because we believe that God is unwilling to answer and we must prevail upon him, somehow transforming a hard-hearted God into a compassionate and loving one?
- Do we repeat a petition because we think that God will be swayed in his decision by our putting on a show of zeal and piety, as if God cannot see through the thin veil of hypocrisy?<sup>9</sup>

But does that mean we should never persevere in prayer? No, not at all. Jesus himself taught in this parable that our duty is always to pray. That is, we are to persevere in prayer.

---

<sup>9</sup> C. Samuel Storms, *Reaching God's Ear* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), 145.



Why? Because our God, unlike the unrighteous judge in the parable, is righteous, gracious, loving, merciful, kind, and just, and he delights to answer the prayers of his elect. We persevere in prayer not because we think we need many words to get his attention, but because we know that he cares for us as a father cares for his children, and he will hear us.

God always answers every prayer of his elect. Did you know that? God answers every prayer in one of four ways.

First, sometimes God says, "No!" He knows that our prayer is not his will for us, even though we may think it is. And so his answer is, "No!"

Second, sometimes God says, "Slow!" The timing for our prayer is not right, and God seems to slow us down. He will grant our petition, but not yet. And so his answer is, "Slow!"

Third, sometimes God says, "Grow!" We ask God for something, and he knows that we need to mature in Christ before he answers our petition. And so his answer is, "Grow!"

And, finally, sometimes God says, "Go!" Our petition is in line with God's will for us at that time, and so his answer is, "Go!"

God answers every single petition of his elect with either "No!" "Slow!" "Grow!" or "Go!" One of the great challenges for every Christian is to discern God's answer to each one of our petitions. Nevertheless, that is what Christian maturity produces: an increasing conformity to praying in accordance with the will of God.

So, the lesson of the parable is that God is not like the judge, for God is good and gracious. And we are not like the nameless widow, for we are his elect.

#### **IV. The Question about Persevering in Prayer (18:8b)**

And fourth, look at the question about persevering in prayer.

Jesus ended the parable with a question in verse 8b, **“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”** Jesus asked his disciples what he would find when he returned to earth. Would he find his disciples praying for his return? Kent Hughes sums it up well, “Jesus was saying that continual prayer until he comes is not only the evidence of faith, but the means of building faith until his return.”<sup>10</sup>

### Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8, we ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Lee Eclov was the Senior Pastor under whom I served after graduating from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. I recently read where he said that he was surprised to read a Facebook post from a friend in South Dakota named Diane. She wrote, “Had a nice surprise last night. At about 10:30 p.m. the phone rang. It was Governor Mike Rounds checking in with us to see how the road repair was going.” There had been a lot of flooding in the area where Diane lives, and the roads were a mess – *and the governor actually called her to see how she felt about the repair progress.*

When Lee wrote Diane to express his surprise, she said it wasn’t the first time a governor had called her. Another time, some years ago, one of South Dakota’s previous governors called about some FEMA money for the area. She told Lee that when the governor called she was in the middle of a home perm, but couldn’t very well tell the governor to hold while she rinsed her hair. She added: “That frizzy hair haunted me for weeks.”

Lee noted that he knew that South Dakota is a small state, but this was incredible to him. He asked Diane if she was in

---

<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 189.

county government or something, and she said she wasn't. Sensing he was blown away by her interactions with the government, she had this to say: "I have found that shaking the tree from the top gets the fastest results. When there is a problem, I usually become the 'squeaky wheel,' and I think they just want to get me off their case!"

Lee's conversation with Diane made him think of the parable Jesus told in Luke 18:1-8 – the one about the persistent widow and the judge who finally relented and granted her request.<sup>11</sup>

The good news is that when we pray we don't have to become the "squeaky wheel." We can go straight to the top and petition God for the consummation of Jesus' kingdom. God delights to answer his elect because he is righteous, gracious, loving, merciful, kind, and just.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has come. He has lived and died to pay the penalty for the sin of his elect. His kingdom has "now" come, but it is "not yet" consummated. One day Jesus will return to set up his visible kingdom on earth.

The question he asked his disciples in Luke 18:8 is the same question he still asks today, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Yes, he will, if we have turned to him in faith and repentance, and have learned to live a life of prayer in the not yet. Amen.

---

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/august/4083010.html>.



# **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz)

## **Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)**

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for Jesus' parable of the persistent widow. He taught that we ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Father, we know that there are two aspects of the kingdom. It is "now" here and it is also "not yet" here.

It is now here in the sense that Jesus has come. He has established the spiritual nature of his kingdom, and he calls men and women, boys and girls to enter his kingdom by repenting of our sin and believing in the person and work of Jesus.

But Jesus' kingdom is not yet here in the sense that he has not returned to earth to set up his kingdom in a visible and physical manner. Until Jesus returns, enable all of us who are his disciples always to pray and not lose heart.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!