

Luke Chapter 18 v 1 - 8

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. We're going to read together now from Luke and chapter 18 and the first eight verses. Luke 18 and the first eight verses.

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said in a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, grant me justice against my adversary. For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won't eventually come and attack me. And the Lord said, listen to what the unjust judge says. 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? 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?

Because of the lockdown that we're under at the moment, because of the coronavirus, many of us have much more time on our hands than we previously would do or normally would do.

People have been finding lots of different ways of putting this extra time to good use. You may have noticed around about me that we're having the hall here redecorated during this lockdown. And many other people, of course, have found things to do. People have volunteered and given their time to help and serve in the community, to look after those neighbours or those who are housebound, to give opportunity for frontline carers. Others have used their time to learn new skills, perhaps learning to play a musical instrument, learning to bake cakes and scones. Or some people have improved their health, keeping fit and active. And the rest of us have trimmed, weeded, tidied our gardens to within an inch of their lives. Everybody's going to have spotless houses and perfectly manicured lawns. What about you? What have you done with the extra time that you have on your hands? Have you simply sat from an Italian binged on boxes? Or have you done something else? Perhaps you may feel utterly helpless in this lockdown, helpless to help anybody, to do anything. You might even be very frustrated, feeling very impatient, longing for the lockdown to be over so that you can get back to a productive life.

See, all of us have been created to do. We've been made in the image of the doing God, the serving God, the creative God. Like him, we work best when we're working.

[3 : 33] In Luke 18 and verse 1, Jesus tells his disciples a parable. Now, a parable is a story from everyday life, which has a spiritual truth to teach us. And the spiritual truth behind this parable is made clear to us right at the very beginning the purpose for Jesus' parable. He says that they should always pray, that his disciples should always pray and not give up. Now, last week we looked at the very end of Luke 17 and we saw that the context in which Jesus is teaching at this time is to do with his return, his second coming, his second coming, as we call it. As he says there in chapter 17, verse 30, it will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. This day of which Jesus speaks of is going to be the culmination of all of history. It's when the world as we know it will come to its end, its conclusion. It's when all that spoils this world, sin and evil and sorrow, will be removed from God's kingdom. And those who belong to Jesus will enjoy everlasting peace and life with him.

And it's very clear from the very last verse of this parable, verse 8 of Luke 18, that Jesus is still thinking about the time of his coming. His teaching is still bearing in mind this reality, for he says, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth.

Jesus' parable is for all disciples, both those disciples in his day and us as well, because all of us are waiting, waiting that eventual day, that day that Paul tells us what will happen.

In Romans 8, we're told, it's the day that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay, its corruption, its pollution, and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

It's a day that we're waiting for, looking forward to, expecting at any time. As we thought last week, we do not know when it will be. But we're not good at waiting, are we?

[5 : 55] The disciples weren't good at waiting, and they found that out, didn't they, a little later on, when they got to the garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus said, watch and wait with me. Jesus came back and found them sleeping, and said those very apt words, which apply to us as well, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. It's not easy to wait and to pray. Our human nature too easily becomes disheartened.

We become discouraged and weary, waiting and praying. Therefore, this parable is for our encouragement. In these days in which we're waiting, as it were, to come through the lockdown, but particularly as we are waiting that glorious day, when Jesus comes again. Here's a tonic, as it were, for our frustration in these days.

Here's a pick-me-up to stir us to persevere in prayer. As Jesus says, to not give up. So let's look at this parable, this little story that Jesus brings.

I've always found it to be a humorous story, a little bit funny, as Jesus talks about these very odd characters in the parable. First of all, I'm going to start with the widow.

A widow in Jesus' day was potential prey for unscrupulous and greedy men. In Mark, in chapter 14, verse 12, Jesus condemns some of the religious leaders of his day because they devour widows' houses.

[7 : 30] To be a widow at that time was to be at the very bottom of society. Especially if you're a widow and had no children to care for you or to look after you. If you had no one to protect you or speak up for you.

If you're all on your own, then you were easy meat, as it were, for the con men of the day. Those who wanted to chisel you out of any money or home or land that perhaps had been left to you by your husband.

Clearly this widow had been cheated in some way. Somebody had conned her out of something that she owned. She speaks about this in her plea to the judge, Grant me justice against my adversary, my enemy, the one who is out to get me.

She wanted justice for herself. She wanted to get what was rightfully hers. That had somehow been taken away. She was in a very sad situation.

A pitiable situation. She was, as it were, empty. Then there's also the judge, isn't there, in the story. Jesus actually begins and talks about him.

[8 : 36] He describes him later on in the parable as the unjust judge or the unrighteous judge. Surely that's the one thing a judge must be is just. But this one wasn't. Far from it.

A judge in those days was somebody who, as it were, held court in a local area, region or a town for civil matters. Financial matters, perhaps.

This judge has no redeeming features at all. There's nothing to warm us to him in any way. He doesn't fear God, we're told. Which means he had no sense of conscience about doing what God wanted or what was right.

And, even more than that, which was particularly rare and rare today, is he did not care what other people thought about him as well. So he never did things to win popularity or to get on the side of others.

He was somebody who was solely consumed with what he wanted. His own pleasure, his own purposes, his own greed, his own decisions. And he has absolutely no interest in seeing justice being done for this widow.

[9 : 45] Why on earth should he? There's nothing in it for him. So this widow seems to be lost, helpless, powerless.

But she has one thing left. No money, that's true, so she can't bribe him. No friends in high places to put some pressure upon him. She has no influence.

She has one thing. She is stubborn. She is persistent. She is dogged and determined. Look at what it says there.

Verse 3. There was a widow in that town who kept coming to him, to the judge, with her plea. Grant me justice in my adversary. She is somebody who nags the judge into submission.

And for no other reason, apart from to give himself a bit of peace, the judge at last, we're told, finally, verse 4, says to himself that he'll give her justice.

[10:52] He takes her case. He sorts out the mess. She is recompensed from what she's been stolen. She gets what she deserves.

This is the humorous bit, I think. The picture of this widow constantly getting at the judge. Constantly wearing him down until at last, for no other reason, apart from the fact to get her off his back, he gives her justice.

But there's a strange word, perhaps, you've picked up in the NIV translation that we have here. He says, so that she won't, verse 5, eventually come and attack me. Now, many of the other translations talk about wear me out or wear me down.

But actually, the NIV translation is very accurate. The phrase that we have, come and attack me, literally means, come and black my eye. A bit like a phrase that you would use.

I don't think he really thought she was going to come and punch his lights out. But, when somebody annoys us, we might say, they're really rubbing me up the wrong way. It's a phrase that we use, even though they don't touch us.

[12:08] And there's fighting talk even a little early, because, again, when he says, because this widow keeps bothering me, the word bothering, again, from the original language, the Greek is beating me.

She's hammering at me. She's knocking at me. She's wearing me down. To me, it's humorous. That here is this, and she probably wasn't a little old lady. Though little old ladies can be pretty fierce. But here she is, this woman on her own.

And here is this great, almighty, authoritative judge. And she has the power to bring him down to her level. Now, why does Jesus tell this parable?

What's he got to do? What's he got to say to his disciples through it? What he has to say to us?

Well, it's clear, isn't it, that the parable is meant to be a comparison in the sense of, God is the very opposite of this unjust judge.

[13:12] In fact, there's only one thing that the two of them, the judge and the Lord God, have in common, and that is it, they both answer the requests of others. But they're very different in every other way.

And their reasons for answering those requests are very different as well. Listen to what the unjust judge says, Jesus, in verse 6.

And will not God. God is different. God is different to any man, any human being, any person. One of the great follies that we often fall into is comparing God to somebody we might have known.

Some of us, we might compare God to our father, our earthly father. He may have been unthoughtful or selfish or worked too hard or whatever he may be. And we find it very hard to think of a loving God as our father.

But he's not like any human father, even the very best of them. God is not like any human being because he does not lie. He does not cheat.

[14:14] And he does not fail. And he does not let us down. The first, there's two things particularly that come out here, I believe. Two simple things in this, in Jesus' explanation of the parable.

That tell us why God is different to the judge. First of all, it's they look differently. Or rather, they see those who cry out to them differently.

They have a viewpoint of people that is different. The judge, when he saw the widow, he just saw her as a pain in the neck. He saw her as a pain in the neck. Somebody not worth helping.

Somebody who was just a scammer. Unnecessary. Somebody who just got in the way and just should be ignored. He had no compassion, no concern, no interest in him.

It may be that you feel sometimes you've been treated that way. It may even feel, when you look at yourself, you say, Well, I'm not important. I'm not influential.

[15:16] I'm not significant. I really am at the bottom of the pile. But what does God say? Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones?

What does your Father God say about you, dear believer? Whatever you think of yourself, whatever the society has done to you, whatever people have treated you rightly or wrongly, this is what God says.

He says that you are my chosen one. We are those upon whom God has set his love. We are those who are uniquely special in the sight of Almighty God, our Heavenly Father.

We are his adopted children. Listen to how Paul describes what God has done for us in Ephesians in chapter 1.

For he, that's God, chose us in him, that's Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

[16 : 21] In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace.

God has chosen you because it pleased him to do so. It was his great pleasure to have you become part of his family. To bring you into the wonderful family of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

That you might indeed be brought into and be part of and enjoy what it is to be a child of God. For your sake, Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, took on our human nature.

For your sake, out of love for you, he came down into this broken world to live and to die. To take upon himself the punishment that your sins and mine deserve.

To rise again and give us eternal life with God. Do not think for a moment that God will ever turn a deaf ear to you when you pray.

[17 : 30] Don't think for a moment that God is somehow too busy when you call upon him. Or that he has other more important things to do. Or that he put you on answer phone for a later time.

No. You are his chosen one. You are his precious one. You are his delight and his joy. You are the one that he has gone to the ends of the earth to bring to himself.

Your silent prayers. Your secret prayers. That nobody else knows about. Those prayers, as Jesus puts it, that you give to him and cry out to him day and night.

Are the prayers that he hears. They are the prayers that make his heart leap. To come to your help. The judge saw a woman of no consequence.

God sees a child. Of great desire. Secondly, as well, Jesus says, not only is it different in the way that God views you and I as believers compared to how the judge viewed the widow.

[18 : 47] But also notice that they are different in the speed with which they answer those who cry to them. They are different in the speed as well as different in the sight.

We are told in verse 4, for some time the judge refused. That is the plea of the widow. But finally, he said. Finally.

We do not know how often the widow came to the judge. Maybe every day she would be there knocking on his door and calling out to him. And we do not know how long she did that.

It seems that we are told that it was for some time. Maybe in weeks, months.

Maybe even longer. Every day there she was knocking on his door. Calling out for his help. Looking to him for justice. And every time he would simply slam the door in her face.

[19 : 45] Go back to his breakfast. Go back to his glass of wine. And go back along with the rest of his life. He was in no hurry to help her.

Only eventually, as we have already thought. When he was so fed up to the back teeth of this woman at his door. That to give himself a bit of peace. To stop him getting indigestion every time he sat down from ill.

He gave her justice. I wonder how long have you been praying. For that specific person who you love to become a Christian. I wonder how long you have been pleading with God.

To soften their hearts and turn them to himself. How long have you been calling out to God. To deliver you from that pain. That pain that you feel physically.

Perhaps it's that pain that you feel emotionally. That heartbreak. That sorrow. That grief. How long have you been saying. Lord I can't take this much longer.

[20 : 48] Or any longer. Please heal. The sadness of my heart. And you might be thinking to yourself. I've been praying this prayer for years.

Peter you don't know how long I've been praying. For that dear loved one to be converted. You don't know how I've been pouring out my heart. How at times my pillow has been wet with tears.

Because I've been crying.

Lord please. Hear me. Answer me. And you may be thinking. Why is God taking so long? But notice what Jesus says here.

Please dear friend. Your father will see to it. That you his chosen one. We're told. Will get justice and quickly. Quickly.

God doesn't delay. God doesn't hang about. God doesn't hold back. As it were. Anything that's on his heart to do. For his dear ones. His children. Those he loves.

[21 : 45] 2 Peter 3.9 tells us. He is not slow in keeping his promises. He's not forgetful. He hasn't just put you on the list to do.

As it were. He's not put you in the in tray. Saying well. When I get round to it. I'll deal with that request. We're talking about the immortal. The infinite. The omnipotent.

God. The one who can do everything. The one who created the world. In just a matter of days. The one who is able to do the impossible. And it's easy peasy for him. Dear friends.

The troubles. The troubles. Of God's child. Are the troubles. Of his own hearts. Quickly.

You can. You can. You must keep on praying. And not give up. The whole of the Bible. Tells us.

[22 : 42] This is the way. We are to be. In every circumstance. And situation. To keep. On.

Romans 12. 12. Rejoice in hope.

Be patient in suffering. Persevere in prayer. 1 Thessalonians 5.17. Pray without ceasing.

Colossians chapter 4. Verse 2. Devote yourselves to prayer.

Ephesians 6.18. Always keep on praying. We can see it again. And again. And again. All the way through the scriptures. That we are to keep on praying.

Why? What's the point? You might say. Why should I pray? It feels as if. And Jesus uses the words. That God is putting me off.

Please not. Prayer is the ultimate work of faith. Prayer is taking God at his promises. Taking God at his word.

[23 : 42] And saying. I believe in you. On the basis of who you are. On the basis of what you've done. Yes it may seem to.

And feel. And I'm not poo-pooing or belittling this. That you are being delayed. That this answer to prayer is not coming. But we have it on good authority here.

From the lips of Jesus. And from the rest of the Bible. That God will give you what you ask. And quickly. God isn't on your timetable.

He's not on mine. As Peter says elsewhere in 2 Peter. A thousand years. A thousand years. A thousand years. As a day to the Lord. And a day as a thousand years.

That doesn't mean that God isn't aware of time and space. Doesn't mean that God is absent minded. And he's sort of. So. Out of time and space. That really. He's not affected by it. In the sense of doesn't care and understand.

[24 : 42] Of course he does. But the question that Jesus brings up. At the end of this parable. Is so poignant isn't it.

When Jesus returns again. The son of man comes. Will he find you and I still praying. Still living by faith. Still trusting him.

Or will we have been deceived. Into giving up. Will we have got so far. And then not finished. You see dear friends.

We have no evidence. To doubt God. We have no reason. To think that he will fail us. Rather we have every motivation. To keep on asking. To continue seeking.

To carry on knocking. All the days of our lives. Because Jesus has given us. The promise. We have it already there. But earlier in Luke 11 as well.

[25 : 43] And verse 9. I say to you. That's to the disciples. That's to you and to I. That's to us who are his chosen ones. Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone. You're not an exception. And neither am I. There's no exceptions. Where somebody can say. Well yes.

Well I can understand. That God would answer the prayer of this person. Because well they're so good. And they're so godly. And they're so important. And they're so significant. And I'm. I'm at the bottom of the barrel.

I'm not nobody. Everyone says Jesus. You included. And me included. Who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks.

The door will be opened. Jesus knows. That you're struggling. He knows that you're finding it hard to wait.

[26 : 41] And that's why he gave us this parable. To show that we should always pray. And never give up. Because God will never give up.

On you. We're going to close our worship this morning. Singing a wonderful modern hymn. Christ our hope.

In life. And death. But let's pray now. Father God we thank you.

That we are your chosen ones. We thank you. That we are your dearly. Bought. Children. Adopted into your family.
Who once were far. Who once were strangers. Who once were lost. But oh Lord we thank you. That that's all changed. That you are so.
[27 : 40] Earnest. And passionate. About hearing us pray. You want. And desire. To give to us. To give to us. Good things. And we are so silly.
We look here and there. To find them. We look here and there. For hope. Or peace. Contentment. Or comfort. We try to find them in other people. Or in possessions. Or money. Or job. Yet Lord. Everything that we need. And everything that satisfies. Is found only in you. Lord Jesus.
We pray that again. Each of us who listens to this message. May be stirred. Moved. Encouraged. Built up. To trust you.
To have faith in you. And to ask. Seek. And knock. So that in your perfect time. In your perfect way.
[28 : 44] We may be able to say. Just as David did. In Psalm 116. I love the Lord. Because he heard. My voice. Be with us Lord.
Watch over and protect us. We pray. Keep us safe. We ask. Help our nation. Our government. Be with those who work.
So tirelessly. In the NHS. And other care. Ministries. Oh Lord. Bring us through this time. As a nation. Who have been chastened.
Disciplined. To see that. We. Cannot cope. Without you. And that you are there. Waiting. Longing. For us to turn.
And be saved. We ask these things. And we bring to you. Our thanks. For all you do. In the name of Jesus Christ. Your son. Amen.
[29 : 44] May the Lord be with you. And bless you. This week. Again. I encourage you to. Tune in. Six tonight. Listen to Joel's ministry. Continue to pray for one another. In the days ahead.
Goodbye.