

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 28TH FEBRUARY 2021

THE PARABLES OF JESUS; THE PERSISTENT WIDOW (LUKE 18:1-8)

Welcome

"Hello and welcome to our 'Church at Home' service transcript for Sunday 28th February 2021. How do you respond to being treated unfairly? In today's sermon on the Parable of the Persistent Widow from Luke 18:1-8, we see that we should persistently and confidently pray for justice. I pray that this transcript will be uplifting to you today." - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 22:23-31

You who fear the Lord, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;

stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;

my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied;

those who seek him shall praise the Lord.

May your hearts live for ever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember

and turn to the Lord;

and all the families of the nations

shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord,

and he rules over the nations.

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in[f] the earth bow down;

before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,

and I shall live for him.

Posterity will serve him;

future generations will be told about the Lord,

and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,

saying that he has done it.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
your Son was revealed in majesty
Before he suffered death upon the cross.
Give us faith to perceive his glory,
that being strengthened by his grace
we may be changed into his likeness,
from glory to glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reading Luke 18:1-8

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' "
Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Sermon - 'Parables of Jesus; the Prodigal Son'

Life can seem pretty unfair sometimes. I'm sure at some stage over the last 12 months you've said to yourself, 'It's so unfair!' What do you do when you feel like that? Do you shout with anger, cry softly, take your frustration out on somebody else? Do you organise a protest? Write a letter of complaint? There are many people in our world today who are being treated very unfairly, and they find themselves powerless to do anything about it.

We are doing a series on the parables of Jesus. Today we are looking at a parable that Jesus told to show his disciples what they should do when they

are facing opposition and are being treated unfairly. *“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 a 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 her justice, so she won't eventually come and attack me!”’”* (Luke 18:1-8)

In the verses before this, Jesus has been talking about the coming of the kingdom of God. (17:20-37) And he explains to his disciples that after his death, resurrection, and ascension, they will live in a period of time where they are waiting for his return. It is the same period of time that we live in too, between his first coming and his second coming. In this period of time while we are waiting, Christians will face opposition. Followers of Jesus in this world will at times experience great difficulties, but they do so with the hope and the knowledge that when Jesus returns he will fix everything, and they will receive healing, salvation, and an eternity with him. But in this time when we are waiting for him, life can be unfair, and it could be tempting to give up and lose heart. So that is why Jesus tells this parable, to encourage the disciples to keep their faith and to always pray.

There are two characters in this parable. First, there is the judge who has no respect for God or love for people. And he seems to have no interest in actually doing what is right. Secondly, at the other end of the power spectrum, we have this widow, and in that society, widows were among the most vulnerable. Life had been pretty unfair to her, she has lost her husband, and by the fact that she is having to go to the judge herself, it would imply that she has no family, no money, and no one to help her. The people of

Israel were commanded to care for people like her, but it seems to be that the community has failed her. And on top of all this, she is now being oppressed. Life is unfair and so she goes to the judge looking to find justice, but justice is refused to her. It seems like she has no options left, and that she has reached a dead end and will never get the justice that she seeks. She has no power or influence, what can she do to change her situation?

What happens next is inspiring. She goes back and asks again, and again, and again. She doesn't quit! Even though there are no signs of any progress, she keeps on persisting, until eventually, like the way a drop of water can over time shatter stone, the judge gives her justice. She wouldn't give up and he eventually gave in. The widow is an example of persistence, and shows us how we should always pray and never give up. But the judge in this story is not an illustration of what God is like. Jesus here is not teaching that God is uninterested in helping us, but if we keep on annoying him with our prayers then he'll eventually give us whatever we want. No. That is not what Jesus is saying here. That is not what God is like, and that is not how prayer works. So we need to be careful with this parable and make sure we see what Jesus says next in verse 6-8, *"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.'"*

The whole point of this parable is that God is not like the judge. God is good, God is just, and God always does what is right. He is our loving heavenly Father who longs to give us good things, and invites us into relationship with him through prayer. What Jesus is teaching here, is that if the judge in the story eventually did what was right, how much more will God do what is right. And if the widow kept on asking, then how much more should we keep on praying.

There are two aspects of prayer that this parable highlights. One has to do with the content of our prayers, and the other has to do with the confidence in which we pray. The content of our prayers should be about justice, that is what these verses are about, they are about justice. When we say the Lord's prayer and we ask for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done, that is a prayer for justice, for equality, and for everyone to be treated fairly. It is praying for evil to be defeated, and for love to reign.

Maybe you feel like the widow in this story, perhaps you have been a victim of injustice. You feel powerless, like there is nobody to help you, and that you have reached a dead end. These verses encourage you to pray, to cry out to God for justice, and you will receive what you are looking for. But for most of us reading this we are not like the widow. Yes the last 12 months have been difficult, but we have been able to endure it generally in comfort, especially compared to so many other people. We do not need to cry out for our own justice, but we can be interceding for the weak, the powerless, and the vulnerable of our world. There are 700 million people on our planet who do not have enough food to eat, that's not fair. There are 1 billion people who do not have access to clean safe drinking water, that is not fair. There are 10 million children trapped in modern slavery, that is not fair. There are 260 million Christians facing persecution because of their faith, that's not fair. There are 8,200 people in our own country who are homeless, that is not fair. We need to be praying for justice and never give up.

The content of our prayers should be focused on justice, and the confidence of our prayers should be sourced on Jesus's return. In that story when the widow was praying she did not know what the outcome was going to be, but when we pray for justice, we know what the result will be, because God has promised to bring justice to this world. In the context in which this parable

comes Jesus is teaching about the coming of the kingdom of God, when he will return. A day is coming when Jesus will return and when the wicked will be judged, and the innocent will receive justice. We pray into that certainty.

Jesus is coming back, and he will bring justice with him. Listen how he finishes off this parable in Luke chapter 18 verse 8, *“However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”* When Jesus returns, the world will see his justice, but will he see our perseverance? We live in a world that can be extremely unfair, so we need to be faithful in our prayers, and persistent in our desire for justice. We need to always pray and never give up.

Prayer

*God of justice,
We pray for your kingdom to come
and your will to be done.*

*Lord, we cry out for cause of the weak, the vulnerable, and the oppressed.
In your justice act quickly;
to feed the hungry,
to give water to the thirsty,
to free the captives,
to release the persecuted,
and to give shelter to the homeless.*

*Help us to be faithful in our prayers,
and persistent in doing good
as we wait with hope for return of your Son.*

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen