

LUKE 18:1–8. (EHV)

Jesus told them a parable about the need to always pray and not lose heart:

“There was a judge in a certain town who did not fear God and did not care about people. There was a widow in that town, and she kept going to him, saying, ‘Give me justice from my adversary!’ For some time he refused, but after a while he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God or care about people, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not wear me out with her endless pleading.’” The Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. Will not God give justice to his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night? Will he put off helping them? I tell you that he will give them justice quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

In one of my former congregations, there was a man on the church membership roster who hadn’t been to church in years, but his sister was a regular attendee of another local Wisconsin Synod church. So I went to see him, and I managed to schedule a more proper pastoral visit with him, where I would come over and have a devotion with him. But before the day came, he called me up and cancelled, saying that he didn’t believe in the existence of the devil or in heaven or hell. He only believed in the Ten Commandments. He didn’t want me to visit.

I talked to his sister later and shared with her the conversation her brother and I had had over the phone. She went and talked with him about it, and then reported back to me. If I recall correctly, he was a Vietnam veteran, and at some point during his service, he had prayed to God and asked him for something. God didn’t answer his prayer, at least, not in any way that he could see, so that was that.

Now this man also had some mental issues—if I recall, he even had a mild form of schizophrenia—so the reality may have been more complicated than what he actually told me and what he told his sister. Nevertheless, what he told his sister has stuck with me, because I don’t think he is the only one to have had an experience like that. How many of you have prayed to God and asked for something, something that would have meant a lot to you, something more than just a toy or an article of clothing or a sunny day, and God didn’t give it?

Today, Jesus tells us a parable to show us how we should always pray and not lose heart, not give up.

Here’s the parable: “There was a judge in a certain town who did not fear God and did not care about people.” There are certainly plenty of people in positions of authority and power like that, aren’t there? They don’t fear God, and so they’re also not interested in actually serving. They seek respectable positions and occupy them simply for the prestige that comes with that position and for the financial security they get from that position.

“There was a widow in that town, and she kept going to him, saying, ‘Give me justice from my adversary!’ For some time he refused.” This woman was a widow. She was not a woman of means. As is often the case with those who are more vulnerable, there was someone who was trying to take advantage of her. The “adversary” mentioned here could either be someone who was trying to sue her unjustly, or it could mean an enemy in general, perhaps someone who had scammed her out of a good chunk of what she had to live on. Whatever the

case, she wanted justice. But the judge would not benefit financially or gain important connections by giving this woman justice, and he would not risk his position by refusing her justice, since she was on the margins of society. So he just ignored her.

“But after a while he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God or care about people, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not wear me out with her endless pleading.’” Last month, I used the 1994 movie *The Shawshank Redemption* to illustrate shrewd financial dealings in connection with Jesus’s encouragement to us to use our worldly wealth to make friends for ourselves for the sake of his kingdom. It’s not exactly a family movie, but it is a good movie for illustrations. Here’s another illustration from that movie: The main character, prisoner Andy Dufresne, is assigned to the prison library and writes a letter to the state legislature once a week asking for funds to improve the decaying library. After six years, he finally receives a check for \$200 and a single box of used books. His reaction? “It only took six years; from now on I’ll write two letters a week.” Cut to the next scene: The prison has a healthy library.

Say what you want about those who keep on pestering; they might be impertinent, but they usually get what they’re after. That’s what happened with this widow in Jesus’s story. The judge had nothing to gain by helping her, nothing that he valued anyway...except that after a while, he realized that he valued peace and quiet, and he was only going to get it if he took her case. In fact, this woman was so persistent, what the original Greek has the judge saying is that he decides to give her justice so that she doesn’t end up coming up to him and giving him a black eye. Now he may have been exaggerating. And even if he wasn’t, it’s debatable whether the widow in Jesus’s story would have actually done that. The point is that the woman was so intent and persistent that he feared it. So he gave her justice and punished the man who was doing her wrong.

Now Jesus tells us, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. Will not God give justice to his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night? Will he put off helping them?”

Jesus wants us to take two things away from this woman in his story. On the one hand, she was determined and persistent. She was never going to give up, so much so that the judge perhaps thought she might end up slapping him in the face. On the other hand, what she desired was justice. She desired what was right. She wasn’t just being a winner or engaging in trivial pursuits or making mountains out of molehills or being selfish. Wrong was being done to her, and if it was left unpunished, evil would flourish and wrong would more easily be done to others like her.

So if in a case like the widow’s, even the unjust judge grants justice, won’t God, who is perfectly just, who is justice itself, give justice to his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night? Will he put off helping them? Jesus says, “I tell you that he will give them justice quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Jesus is encouraging us to make sure of three things. First, let’s make sure that we are praying for things that matter, matters of right and wrong, matters that don’t just affect us, but that also affect others. Let’s especially pray for wrong being done to the Church, to believers, to those God has chosen in Christ Jesus. Let’s pray for the Christians who are being persecuted, whose lives are in danger, and who are in some cases actually losing their lives for the sake of

the gospel, especially in Muslim-dominated countries. Let's pray about the ways the devil and the world seek to wrong us and all Christians every day, seek to tempt and belittle us, seek to rob the faithful sheep from Christ's sheep pen. I've heard many of you, I've heard myself, talk about the godless trends in our nation and the negative effects those trends are having on the church. Let's not just talk about them. Let's pray about them.

Second, let's make sure we keep praying about such matters and don't give up or lose heart. Let's barrage God's throne with our prayers day and night, as regularly and continuously as we would have to do to get the attention of a godless, unjust judge. Let's not just pray once or twice, and then say, "Well, I guess prayer doesn't work. I guess God doesn't listen." If we pray for something just once or twice, then God can rightly question how sincere our prayer really was, how important we really thought it was for him to answer, or how much we trusted that he would answer, that he really cared.

Finally, let's not let the Son of Man return on Judgment Day and have to really search to find faith on the earth. Let's trust that we are not dealing with an unjust judge, but with God. Let's trust in the one who has chosen us to be his own, to be his special people. Paul says in Romans if we have been called by the good news of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus, then we can also be sure that God has chosen us from eternity to be his own. If God had us in his mind and heart from eternity, is it even possible that he could ignore our prayers? Let's trust that he will in fact deliver us from every evil that threatens body and soul, property and reputation, if not in this life, then when he grants a blessed end to our short lives on earth and graciously takes us from his world of sorrow and injustice to himself in heaven for eternity.

Keep on praying for justice against the enemies of God's people. Don't lose heart. Your God is just and he hears you, for the sake of his Son, your Savior Jesus. Amen.