



“Persistence and Humility in Prayer”

Luke 18: 1-14

November 10, 2019

Good morning, everybody. It is good to be together on this Lord’s Day. We are here to grow in our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. This morning we are going to be in the Gospel of Luke together once again as we study the Scriptures, having the Lord speaking into our hearts and lives through them.

We continue with our Lord Jesus on this path as He moved forward toward Jerusalem, where He would die on the cross for our sins, where He would be raised on the third day. As Jesus travelled with His disciples in that direction, He taught in this section of Luke vitally important lessons on discipleship and on following Him.

This morning as we turn to Luke Chapter 18, we find two amazing parables on prayer, two very engaging stories that the Lord gave to enhance and to inform and to activate our prayer lives. Before we dig into these two parables, let’s understand the magnitude of the parables that Jesus spoke forth.

If we are not careful, it would be easy for us to drift into the idea that these parables were just quaint little stories, kind of like fables we tell children at bedtime to teach a moral lesson. However, the parables are so much more than that.

When Jesus delivered a parable, they measured on the Richter Scale. They are revelation from God that comes with the authority of God to activate things in us. So often these parables would infuriate some of the people that heard them in that First Century setting.

The Pharisees, they would get really, really upset as they began to perceive some of the things that Jesus was communicating. So instead of standing up before them with a little children’s story book, it was like Jesus stood up with a hand grenade, saying, *Let’s see what happens when we pull the pin and toss it and watch it explode.*

The teaching ministry of Jesus through these parables is explosive. There is an element of that here in what is before us today. When we get into the city gates of Jerusalem, boy-oh-boy, some of the illustrations that Jesus gave, they are intense.

However, for the one who is a disciple, for the one who is a follower of Jesus Christ, for the one who is seeking to learn from and live in Christ, these parables are like a power cable. So often like phones, our battery life feels like it is being drained.

And Jesus is saying, *Let's see what happens when we take this cord and plug it in.* Let's see if the Living Word of God can revive and renew. Jesus wants to come to us, and this is the Word of the Lord. It is living. It is active, and the Word of Christ is to dwell in us richly.

This morning we have before us two parables. In the first parable, Jesus takes us to the courthouse at the city gate of some town. In the second parable, Jesus takes us to the temple in the city of Jerusalem.

First, we are given an example of persistence and perseverance in prayer in the midst of the injustice and the suffering that is experienced in this world that is, in fact, filled with sin. In the second parable we are given an example of humility in prayer, the kind of humility that first initiates a walk with God. But it still ought to characterize those who know the Lord in the midst of a religious world where so often there can be so much self-righteousness

So we have these two parables this morning from the heart of the Messiah to us. First we have a parable in Verses 1 through 8, providing for us:

1. An Example of Persistence in Prayer (18:1-8)

As we move into Chapter 18 and Verse 1, Jesus was still speaking to His disciples about His return to this earth, about the coming of the Kingdom in power and in glory.

Jesus had been telling His disciples about how the full manifestation of His Kingdom will come with force upon an unbelieving world at the end of time, an unbelieving world that His people will be called to live in.

Now we see the example of perseverance of prayer in the midst of hardships. Luke Chapter 18 and Verses 1 through 8:

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

We have the so-called *Parable of the Persistent Widow*. Let's begin by noticing how this is one of the few occasions in the pages of the Gospels where the point of a parable Jesus is given prior to the actual telling of the parable.

Did you see that in Verse 1? *He told them a parable to the effect, to the intended outcome, that they ought always pray, that they keep on praying, and not lose heart.* Question: When are the followers of Jesus most prone toward losing heart? When do we experience the condition of getting worn out and losing morale?

I would submit to you that we have the sense within us just to give up and to lose heart when we face difficult circumstances that are prolonged. I think that most Christians, they are able to experience a season of trial for a time with poise and faith.

However, when these trials and draining experiences of injustice drag on and on and on and on with no end in sight, that is when the heart even of a believer can feel like it is becoming deflated. They shrink. They faint. That is when we might be tempted to lose heart.

At the beginning of this parable, it is like a sympathetic Dr. Luke was giving an editorial comment to the followers of Jesus Christ in this world, saying, *Brothers and sisters, tune into this. Pay attention! It is the will of the Lord that we always pray, that we pray without ceasing and that we do not lose heart.*

Remember that his entire parable is given to us in the midst of end-times teaching. Life in this world will always be hard because it is a fallen world. It is under the curse of sin. But especially as we approach the end of the age, the prophetic portraits in Scripture is that it gets harder and harder.

Last week we learned from Jesus that in the days preceding His return to the earth in power and in glory, it is going to be like the days of Noah, and it is going to be like the days of Lot, who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah. We are going to be living in the midst of a world population that is less and less attune to the heart of the Lord.

People will have more and more freedom to express their sinful impulses. Therefore, people will become more and more calloused in their character, in their treatment of others, and in their treatment of the people of God and the church.

And Jesus was saying, *In the midst of such a context like this, keep on praying. Keep going back to the Lord. Abide in the presence of the Lord, the Living God, through prayer, and do not lose heart. Do not grow faint.* Then Jesus preceded to give us this parable to give us something of an unexpected example of the kind of strength that the Lord desires to have within us.

So, we have this engaging parable before us. There are two main characters in this parable. First, we have the woman that is presented to us. She was a widow. Her husband had died, and she had an unnamed enemy, and she was being sinned against.

We are not told the exact nature of the grievance, but, clearly, there was a legal element to the matter at hand. Most likely, her husband's assets had been tied up in court as some unscrupulous relative was trying to make a claim on those resources. Instead of providing for her, this kinsman was trying to take from her. She was going to the judge for justice, saying,

My husband left these things for me. Can you get me what he left for me? That is what I understand to be happening here.

The widow was one character, then, on the other hand, we have the judge. He is presented to us as a fiercely independent thinker. He did not feel any sense of accountability to God. He did not give a rip about what the people around him think. He did whatever he wanted to do.

This judge was not responding to the widow's case with an immediate verdict. He was lollygagging. The situation did not affect his life. It was no skin off his nose, so he was happy to let it linger on indefinitely.

Given the position of women in that society, she did not have many options as far as how she could have addressed this issue. She could not go the typical way of bribing the judge, because she did not have any resources to do so.

She could not go and try to file a complaint against the judge's supervisor, because he was a man of authority. If she tried to complain about him to his supervisor, behold, he was the supervisor. Try again! So, what did she utilize? What resource did she use? Perseverance and persistence! She just kept going back to him.

It is quite an entertaining picture that Jesus laid out before us. You could just picture her going to the judge's chambers at his structure at the city gate. Knock, knock, knock, knock. *Mr. Judge, remember my case?* Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock.

I have a family member who is trying to take the resources left for me. I am in trouble here. I need help. Can you please give me justice? The judge blew her off. The next morning came. Where was she? She was right back at the city gates at his chamber door. Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. There she was knocking.

Hey, remember me? We talked last night. Have you come to a decision? Are you ready to render the verdict. Let's get this finished. Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. He did not respond. He told her to go away.

Then what happened? Well, maybe she googled his address or his name or she used whatever means she could to figure out where this man lived. So, one morning soon, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. You get the point? There she was again! Knock, knock, knock, knock.

What a beautiful home you have, oh Mr. Judge. How nice it must be to dwell securely in a home like this. Mine is about to be taken away. Are you giving me my verdict yet? Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. He blew her off again.

So, what did she do? Maybe this time she figured out where his friend lived, and she found that friend out to dinner. Guess what happened? Are you getting sick of it yet? Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. There she was knocking again. *Oh, how nice, you are having a lovely dinner. I wish I could have a lovely dinner.*

She just kept going back again and again and again. Then finally, the judge threw his hands up and he gave up, not because he sensed any kind of fear of the higher power, not because he was worried about what people would think, but he relented just so that she would stop bothering him, according to Jesus in this parable.

The judge gave her justice so that she did not beat him down. This literally could have been translated so that she did not give him a black eye. We have this widow and suddenly she is like MMA a Cage Fighter. She just went to town.

This is the picture that Jesus presented to us—persevering strength. This is what He wants in the hearts of His people. This is what He desires to produce in us by His Spirit. Then Jesus went on to apply the parable and in the place of the widow, He put the church, the elect, the chosen people of God.

In the place of the unrighteous judge, He put God our Father. Somebody might say, *What?! Wait a minute, that does not quite work out, because God our Father is not a reluctant, unrighteous judge. What is that all about?*

You know what? That is exactly right. God the Father is not a reluctant, unrighteous judge, and that is precisely the point. Jesus made an argument from the lesser to the greater and He was telling us, *Brothers and sisters, if there is this unrighteous judge who will eventually give in to the request of someone that he does not really care about, how much more will the goodness and the grace of God bring justice to His beloved people in His perfect timing, as they continue calling upon His Name for justice in this fallen world.*

Jesus' point is this: He will! God will give justice. In this parable as Jesus spoke of its application in Verse 6, Jesus said:

⁶... “Hear what the unrighteous judge says.

Hear it. Think about it. As I read through this parable, I read in the English Standard Version that the unrighteous judge spoke thirty-two words. I think twenty-seven of those words can be left in the parable. I think five of those words must be drawn out. Which are those five words?

They are these, *I will bring her justice.* I will bring her justice. So, brothers and sisters, when people in this world are trying to do you wrong, when you are just trying to do what is right, you stay close to God by calling upon Him, even when your words just become groans, you call upon the Lord.

And in His perfect timing, the day is coming when He is going to bring rapid condemnation upon the heads of those who persist in unrepentant sin. He is going to bring justice and it is going to come down like a lightning bolt, when God's perfect timing comes. That is what Jesus said last week, didn't He?

When the Son of Man comes, it is going to be like this bolt of lightning that lights up the entire skyline. He is going to come, and He is going to come with power and with swift retribution upon those who persist in sin.

Now we are in this time of waiting on the Lord with enduring prayer. The foundation of this very parable implies prolonged difficulty. Otherwise, why would it have to be persistent and persevering? This brings us the language of calling upon the Lord day and night. Why is that the case, because the painful and unjust things that happen in this world seem to continue on day and night.

So we need to keep going to the Lord, calling upon Him that He would do His work. We need to call on Him day and night. Meanwhile, as we do call upon Him, we, say, *Lord, why don't You bring this justice down upon this world right now at this moment. Let's just do it. Come, Lord. Maranatha. Amen!*

Let us recall that the delays of God are in order that men and women, that fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, coworkers, cousins, aunts, uncles, that people might repent and experience transformation, rather than condemnation.

Let's recall that the delays of the Lord are in order that the children of God might release their grip from the things of this world and be close to God, clinging to Him, and all the while coming to know that it is the Lord, the Living God, He is the One who is holding them fast.

The delays of God are in order that the elect of God might be refined and purified of worldly longings and be strengthened by the hand of God as they draw close to Him. When He comes, it is going to be swift and it is going to be awesome.

In the grand view of eternity, we are going to understand that His timing is perfect. In the meantime, Jesus says don't lose heart. Don't lose heart. Don't lose heart! Abide in Me. Call upon Me. Pray.

Then Jesus concluded with a searching question:

⁸...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth

Will He find His people practicing this kind of endurance, supplied by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we keep going back to Him? I think that the question brought even close to home is will the Lord find faith in our hearts, even in the midst of the difficult things that we experience in this world that He has the ability to act on.

Sometimes He acts in this world, in time, in ways that blows out minds. But we can be certain at the return of the Great Son of Man that the scales are going to be balanced, and we are going to see that He is perfect.

I pray that we can receive this parable on persistent prayer, because I know that there are many, many people in this relatively small family of believers that are going through dark times and

difficult days. Many of you are in the midst of the hard questions and the uncertainties and the anxious nights.

I pray that you will hear right now the voice of your Messiah, saying, *Come to Me. Come to Me! Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you justice.*

Let faith and trust rise up that King Jesus sees it all; that He knows it all, and as much as it troubles you, it troubles Him even more because He is holy, holy, holy, holy, holy. And He wants to hold you up and hold you fast and comfort you and see you through until the day comes when you walk and emerge into His glorious Kingdom, cleansed by Jesus and covered in Him, without fault and with mighty shouts of joy into your eternal home with King Jesus Christ.

We continue and see a second parable that Jesus has for us. First, we have a parable that gives us an example of perseverance. Now we have:

2 An Example of Humility in Prayer (18:9-14)

We just read about the nature of ongoing prayer in the Christian life, now the spotlight is on what we might understand as the first prayer of the Christian life. Yes, even the sinners prayer, the entryway.

We are those who approach God with humility, not self-righteous pride. Even as we understand the kind of prayer that is modeled for us here as the first kind of prayer, there is a sense in which it is also the ongoing character of our prayer. We are to be those who are humble in the sight of the Lord.

Now we go to a second parable and go from the courthouse to the temple for another unlikely example of exemplary prayer. Knowing that there were Pharisees hearing this, this text probably came with the effect of that hand grenade that I talked about earlier.

Luke Chapter 18 and Verses 9 through 14:

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get. ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

BAM, before the Pharisees who were there within ear shot. Wow!

This parable takes us into the temple, as we read in Verse 10. The observant person might notice that there are Jewish places of worship everywhere now days, and these places are called temples.

I remember growing up and riding my bike up and down Del Amo Blvd toward Mae Boyar Park and there was a building with the title *Temple Beth Zion*. They have changed the title since, but I am not sure of the name now.

Driving down the 405 in the area of Westminster, you will find a place called *Temple Beth David*. So, there are many places of Jewish worship in our day that they call *temples*. But in this First Century setting, everybody knew that there was only one temple and it was the temple in Jerusalem.

Everybody knew and realized that this was the one most sacred place on the face of the planet earth; where somehow there was a connection between the earth and heaven; where somehow earth was lifted up just a little bit and heaven descended down, so that the glory and the presence of the Lord would manifest itself in that place as God received the offerings and the sacrifices presented by the priests for the people of Israel.

This was a very, very holy place. Jesus took us there. Here in this parable, we observe two men drawing close to that sacred place for prayer. As the ESV has it again in Verse 10, it says that they were going into the temple to pray.

Very few people would have been allowed this exclusive privilege of entering the actual small building. They would be on the compound, but for the sake of this parable, perhaps Jesus gave us that picture. They would not have gone all the way into the Holy of Holies, but they would enter in, and they were going to pray before the Lord.

These two men presented to us are a total contrast to one. The differences are stark and seen not only in the content of their prayer, but in the countenance—in their bodies as they went and prayed.

The first man presented to us is a Pharisee going into the temple, and he did so standing tall. Evidently he was a man who was very sure of himself and he offered a prayer to God that was very full of himself. Have you ever noticed that there are some people in this world, they are just absorbed with themselves?

Most conversations between two people goes two ways. I talk about what is going on in my life. You talk about what is going on in your life. The conversation goes back and forth. We relate with one another. But there are some people that whatever you say, they can always bring it back so that they are talking about themselves, themselves, themselves. Have you ever encountered such a person?

No? Maybe you are that person! Maybe I am that person. But evidently this man was even bringing that into his practice of prayer. He went to utter a so-called prayer of thanksgiving, and he used the *I* in his short prayer five times. *I thank you God that I am not like other people. I'm*

not committing none of these major sins, like extortion or adultery or unjust things. I am doing my tithes scrupulously and I fast twice a week.

The Law of the Lord required fasting on the day of atonement, which is fifty-two times a year. But this man doubled that and fasted hundred and four times a year. It was like he was putting a badge of armor of honor on his shirt. I wonder if there was ripple of laughter going through the crowds that Jesus was teaching this to as they knew guys just like that.

The kicker of it is that this parable is prefaced by telling us that this person trusted in his own sense of righteousness and he prayed this prayer with contempt for others. He did not have the ability to see how he stunk. He was a self-righteous man. That is one person.

Then we have the other man who drew close. It would seem that he never even went into the temple. The tax collector is brought into focus and he stood far off. His countenance could not be any different. He could not stand tall. His sense of sin was pulling his head low.

This passage tells us that he was there beating his chest. According to the tense of the underlying Greek, he was doing this in an ongoing way. It is as though he was communicating that the problem was in his heart. The problem was inside of him as he was beating his chest, acknowledging before the Lord that the problem was within the corruption of his heart.

He was saying that he had sin in his heart and the only prayer that he could offer up to the Lord was a brief prayer, *God, be merciful to me a sinner*. And the definite article in the Greek could be translated *have mercy on me, the sinner*.

So the closer he got to the temple where the holiness of God was represented and manifested, the more he had the sense of his own sin, and all he could do was call upon the Lord for mercy. What was so interesting to me digging down into the Greek here is that the word here for *mercy* is not the usual word for mercy that is found throughout the New Testament.

The word that is used here is the word for propitiation and it is given in kind of a verb form. The teaching of propitiation is that divine anger and wrath and indignation is alleviated through blood sacrifice for the humbled sinner.

So the kind of mercy that this man called upon God for was for the diversion of wrath away from him. This was a person who understood that he, for his sin, ought to fall under the condemnation of the holiness of God. He was saying, *Have mercy on me*.

He did not approach God saying, *Lord, I know I have done some messed up things, but if You could just kind of understand the background of my life and the way my father treated me when I was a young boy and how few opportunities I had in life compared to everybody else, maybe you would understand the way that I did things and have some mercy on me*.

Instead he went before the Lord saying, *I have done messed up things because I am a sinful man. Inside of me there is something that is flawed and corrupt and fallen. I have ripped people off*

for my own gain. There is no other way around it. And, God, I am being broken before You and I need mercy. Can You have mercy on one such as me?

That was the attitude of his prayer, and Jesus responded:

¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Brothers and sisters, behold, the good news spoken forth from the heart and mouth of the Messiah. He declares the humbled, broken sinner justified in God’s sight. The man convinced of his own righteousness went home still wrong with God. The man freely confessing his sin went home right with God.

The word *justified* is another vitally important biblical word. It speaks of the gift of being declared righteous in the sight of God, given a righteous standing by God’s grace as a gift through faith.

This is one of the big facets of the jewel of our salvation—that when a person comes to the Lord, saying, *I am a sinner. I need forgiveness. I can’t stand before You on the basis of any merit of my own;* when we come before the Lord telling Him we need His mercy and asking for His forgiveness—the double exchange of justification occurs. Our sin is taken away from us. It is removed from us.

But God does not leave it with that, leaving us in a neutral situation. Instead, He goes on to cover us in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Law perfectly in our stead. He gives us the gift of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the Good News.

This, brothers and sisters, is the kind of prayer that initiates the Christian life. This is where it all begins. So that if a person tries to approach God saying that they are not really that bad, but actually, are a pretty good person, they have not gotten it.

We are sinners. We have all lied because we have deceitful hearts. We have all spoken forth words intended to wound because we are sinners. How many different illustrations of it are there? We could go on and on.

We must confess that we are sinners. I John Chapter 1 and Verses 8 through 10:

⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

When a person has this kind of brokenness before the Lord, this whole moment of justification issues forth in regeneration. There is a whole aspect of our walk with God where He makes us

alive. Actually, I should reverse that and say that He regenerates us. We have faith, then there is justification that occurs.

I didn't intend to go back and forth on *ordo salutis*, but that is a really interesting discussion that can be had. There is renewal that starts to occur within, where we are born again and made new and we begin to long for the things of the Lord.

Not only is this the kind of prayer that initiates a saving relationship with God through Christ, but there is a sense where this kind of humility ought to characterize our prayer lives. The more Scripture that we read, the more that we take in, the more that we learn about the ways of the Lord, the more that we absorb the fact that He is holy, holy, holy, the more we grow in the knowledge of God, we also grow in our perception of our own sin.

So the more Scripture that we internalize and take in, the more we say, *Lord, have mercy on me. Transform me here. Transform me there. Transform me here. Transform the there. Lord, have mercy on me, Renew me. Make me new through and through, and let your holiness pervade more and more of my heart and life and soul.* We, brothers and sisters, ought to be humble-hearted people, praying in the sight of the Lord; rejoicing in the fact that He has saved us mercifully in Christ.

I want to close by pointing out what I perceived as a point of tension between these two parables. On the one hand, there are evils and injustices that occur in this world and those things are wrong and justice and righteousness is good. At the same time, which one of us has not perpetuated sin and unrighteousness?

Even though there is desire that the justice and the judgement of God come into this world, there ought to be patience, desiring that more and more repent and come into the goodness of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, that they might be forgiven and that they might be made new.

So we persist prayerfully before the Lord in view of all of the hard things that are faced, and we do so with hearts that are humbled, understanding we too are sinners who have been saved by grace.

Let's close in a word of prayer.