

The Importunate Widow

Prayer and Persistence · Parables of Jesus

Luke introduces this parable with explicit purpose: Christ spoke it 'to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint' (Luke 18:1). The context suggests believers facing delay in Christ's return, persecution, and unanswered prayer. The parable teaches that if persistent entreaty overcomes even an unjust judge's resistance, how much more will the righteous God respond to His elect's continual cries? Yet the parable concludes with a sobering question about whether persevering faith will characterize believers when Christ returns.

In a certain city dwelt a judge 'which feared not God, neither regarded man' (Luke 18:2)—a thoroughly corrupt magistrate, accountable to neither divine law nor human opinion, dispensing justice only when self-interest dictated. A widow in that city—representing the powerless, those without advocate or influence—came repeatedly to him, saying, 'Avenge me of mine adversary' (Luke 18:3). She sought legal vindication, likely regarding property rights or debt collection, matters in which widows were frequently exploited.

Note: Widows occupied a particularly vulnerable position in ancient society, lacking male protection and advocacy. Scripture repeatedly commands care for widows (Exodus 22:22, Deuteronomy 27:19, James 1:27), and God identifies Himself as their defender (Psalm 68:5, 146:9). That this widow had no patron to bribe or pressure the judge emphasizes her complete dependence on his willingness to act justly. The Greek word *ekdikēson* ('avenge me') carries the sense of legal vindication or justice, not personal vengeance.

For a time, the judge refused. But the widow continued coming—the Greek imperfect tense indicates repeated, persistent action. Eventually the judge

reasoned within himself: 'Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me' (Luke 18:4-5). The phrase 'weary me' literally means 'give me a black eye' or 'wear me out'—he granted justice not from compassion but from sheer annoyance at her persistence.

Christ then applied the parable through lesser-to-greater reasoning: 'Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?' (Luke 18:6-7). If an unjust, self-interested judge eventually responded to persistent petition, how much more certain is the righteous, loving God to answer His elect who continually cry to Him? The phrase 'though he bear long with them' suggests God's apparent delay is not indifference but patience, allowing time for His purposes to mature. Yet Christ promises, 'I tell you that he will avenge them speedily' (Luke 18:8)—when God acts, it will be sudden and decisive, though the waiting may seem long from human perspective.

The parable concludes with Christ's penetrating question: 'Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:8). This challenges believers to maintain persistent prayer and enduring faith despite delayed answers and prolonged trials. The parable warns against fainting—losing heart, abandoning prayer, surrendering faith—when God's response tarries. It assures that persistent, faith-filled prayer will be answered, while questioning whether such persevering faith will characterize Christ's followers when He returns.

Key Verses

Luke 18:1-2

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:

Luke 18:3-5

And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

Luke 18:6-8

And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

Hebrews 10:36

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

Luke 11:5-8

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.