

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people."³ In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'⁴ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone,⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.⁷ And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?"⁸ I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:1-8 NRSV

For me, patience or persistence is not a natural trait. I admire people who seem to exhibit it effortlessly. In fact as I recollect the number of funerals I have done over 29 years of ministry it was rare when the surviving family and friends spoke of those traits when they spoke about the deceased. Today we also have the added challenge of trying to go against an instant society which is encouraged to "have it all now" by any means possible.

One of the great promises of Jesus during his lifetime was that of his second coming. When he ascended into heaven I believe there was an expectation on the part of those who remembered this promise that it would happen within their lifetime. I find it interesting this parable comes right after such a discussion at the end of chapter 17. If the church of the Thessalonians made it a major challenge for Paul to correct their assumptions and anxiousness over the Lord's return, we have to assume that most likely they were not the only ones impatient, wondering when the Lord Jesus will return, or if he had already.

Thus we read the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. First of all this parable could not give any more extreme examples of people on opposite sides of the social-economic scale. The judge, obviously by his title was very powerful in society. He could vindicate or sentence those who came before him; their very lives were in his hands. What makes matters even more extreme is Jesus relating that he is in effect, a "crooked" judge.

The widow on the other hand, was on the lowest rung of society. Without a spouse or without family support she was no more than one on the streets, with no means of survival. So it from appearances it would seem that her going up such a "hard-headed" judge would be virtually impossible. But this is not the case. She is very consistent and persistent. Every day she goes to this judge, until finally this crooked judge grants her wish, with the comment that she might wear him out. It is interesting to note the sense in the original Greek can bring forth the picture of the widow actually "beating up" on the judge!

Jesus then makes the point that if this "crooked" judge can be swayed by a powerless widow, how much more will God answer his children in their prayers? Yet he still hints persistence will have to be practiced by the believer, who will have to wait upon God's timing for Jesus' return.

Perhaps for you and I we need to really take this parable on persistence and prayer to heart. I know it really goes against how our society operates on a "get it now" basis, but it does bring forth God's good results. Bill Hybels, who pastors a very successful

independent church outside of Chicago, Illinois tells this story. Even though their religious practices and traditions may be different than ours, this is a marvelous story on persistent prayer:

Bill Hybels tells about an interesting experience after a baptism service in their church. He writes: "I bumped into a woman in the stairwell who was crying. I thought this was a little odd, since the service was so joyful. I asked her if she was all right. She said, 'No, I'm struggling.' She said, 'My mom was baptized today. I prayed for her every day for almost 20 years. The reason I'm crying is because I came this close to giving up on her. At the 5-year mark I said, "Who needs this? God isn't listening." At the 10-year mark I said, "Why am I wasting my breath?" At the 15-year mark I said, "This is absurd." At the 19-year mark I said, "I'm just a fool." But I just kept trying, kept praying. Even with weak faith I kept praying. Then she gave her life to Christ, and she was baptized today. I will never doubt the power of prayer again."

May we too not "doubt the power of prayer" and rest in the gracious timing of God..

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