

## THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE

Thomas Edison is credited with inventing a lot things. The incandescent lamp (light bulb) was one such invention. He tried hundreds of materials for filaments and they did not work. Edison was not a “one-off” type person. He kept trying, failing, learning, and trying again until he discovered something that would work. The truth of the matter is that most things we try the first time do not work very well. In such areas, persistence pays off.

In the area of human relations, we can see evidence of the success of persistence. Courtship that leads to marriage is a good example. A person applying for a job and “selling” his skills is another example. A sales person will find that persistence will eventually lead to a sale. The secret of success, in a lot of cases, is to “keep on keeping on.”

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught about the importance of our taking actions and following through in order to be successful. The formula can be boiled down to three words: ask, seek, and knock. The idea of these three imperatives is that we are to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, and knock and keep on knocking.

We find Jesus returning to the idea of taking initiative and sticking to it as it applies to prayer in the first nine verses of Luke 18. We see in verse 1

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Notice the word “Then” in the NIV and NKJV or “And” in the KJV and NAS. The inclusion of this linking word would imply that the context of the parable that we are studying is in conjunction with the teaching in the latter part of Luke Chapter 17. Recall that Jesus was asked a question regarding the coming of the Kingdom of God by the Pharisees. After He briefly answered their question, He then addressed His disciples regarding what would be happening in the time period following His death and leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. (Note that many apply this discourse to what will happen in the end time events rather than being fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem.) We will try to tie this teaching to “always pray and not faint” to the events Jesus had just spoken of in the last part of Chapter 17.

The exhortation to always pray carries at least two ideas. First that we are expected to pray rather than NOT pray. Second that the time to pray is “whenever.” Prayer (talking with God) is always appropriate. The Greek word translated “always” is *pantote* and can mean in “all kinds of times.” The admonition is not that we are to go into our prayer closet and remain in a state of isolation at all times. It helps me to think of it this way. If you are awake, then you are probably communicating with someone. You may be talking to a friend or family member, but most likely you are talking to yourself. We are always processing information and we do that with words. As we think about something or as we “mull over” an idea, we are essentially carrying on a conversation with ourselves. If we have a problem, then we try to figure out how to handle it. We rack our brains for ideas and think through possible outcomes and consequences before we actually deal with an issue. I think that what Jesus was saying was that we need to be carrying on that conversation with God. In stead of asking ourselves what we should do, then we should be asking Him what He would want us to do. By doing this we are expanding our

resources beyond ourselves and tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit.

Many of the problems we encounter and attempt to solve winds up having a solution that is beyond our capability to carrying out the solution. If you are in conversation with God (Who is all powerful) then it becomes a natural next step to ask Him to act on our behalf.

The alternative to this kind of prayer is to “faint” or give up. The Greek word for “not to faint” literally means “not to give in to evil, to turn coward, lose heart, behave badly.” This parable would then apply to many different responses we **might** have when we are confronted with difficult situations. The range of responses when confronted with evil could be on the extremes of our joining in an participating in the evil, we might just be passive and do nothing, or we might take inappropriate actions to oppose the evil and find ourselves behaving badly. Just as an example we could consider the Abortion issue that are confronted with in the world today. We could give up and give in and go work for Planned Parenthood (participating). We could do nothing (passive). We could go bomb abortion clinics (behaving badly). The other alternative is to pray and seek the Lord’s wisdom and then follow His direction. (Show the three alternatives along a line with passive in the middle, and the other two extreme on the right and left. The correct alternative would be shown on a higher plane than the first line.)

Jesus introduced the cast of characters in the story that was illustrating His point about prayer. The first character is found in verse two. He is the judge.

He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men.

Jesus set this illustration and painted a picture of an example of a really terrible and uncaring judge. He will use this later as a contrast to God Who is good and perfect in all things. This judge was not guided by his conscience (did not fear God) and he was not guided by the opinions of other people. He was not concerned about the wrath of God nor the criticism of people. These two things naturally go together. If a person does not respect nor honor God, then he is not likely to have any respect for anyone else. You get the idea that the only person this man cared about was himself. He was driven by selfish motives. At the same time, he was a person of considerable power and influence and because of his position could force others to do his bidding.

The next character (the widow) is introduced in the first part of verse three. (The third character (the adversary) is also identified in this verse.)

And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

In that society, a widow was an example of someone who was (for all practical purposes) powerless. She came and did not demand help, but plead for help. She was not asking for revenge or any advantage over another person but was seeking “fair” treatment or justice. She is presented as a stark contrast to the judge with regard to having influence and she was conducting herself within the accepted decorum of the day (she did care what people thought).

The third character in the parable is “the adversary.” This is a person who was apparently doing

harm against and taking advantage of the powerless plight of the widow. As crass as our society has become in the last several decades, most of us still have a sense of indignation against anyone who would take advantage of those who are defenseless and powerless. That feeling was not so much the case in the society of the first century. There were unscrupulous people who looked for those they could take advantage of. (To be sure there are the transients who move into an area and prey upon the elderly by selling services that are never delivered. So it still goes on in our day.)

The scene is set up with the characters and the situation: bad judge, poor widow, mean adversary that leads to a constant outcry for justice from the poor widow to the bad judge about the mean adversary. So what does the judge do? Let's look at verses 4 and 5.

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

The first thing we see is a delay in any visible action on the part of the judge. The delay is a result of his not caring about what is right or what is justice for the widow. Since he cares only for himself, his action is prompted by what will help keep **him** from being bothered. This is not a good example of being properly motivated, but it got the job done.

How does this parable apply to the disciples and how is it related to the discourse that Jesus gave at the close of Chapter 17?

\$ The judge is an anti-type of God and His nature.

\$ The powerless widow is a type of the church (the elect) who were going to undergo pressure from the adversary and have no status or influence on those in civil government. This was the experience of the early church in the 40 year period between AD 30 and AD 70.

\$ (Alternate: The powerless widow is a type of the church at any time and especially during the end time.)

\$ During this time, the adversary was the Jews who were persecuting them and literally ran the Christians out of Jerusalem.

\$ (Alternate: The adversary is represented by the devil and the evil spirits that seek to thwart the purposes of God through the church. Some might even argue that this is referring to the anti-Christ.)

So what can we learn from this parable. We find the lesson in verses 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. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

The idea presented is that if an unjust judge who is motivated by the reasons will eventually decide in favor of justice, then how much more will the Righteous God Who wants only the best for His people also carry out justice on behalf of His people.

Consider the following:

The judge did not know nor care about the widow	God knows and cares for and protects His own.
The widow had an adversary who persecuted her	The church had and has adversaries who persecute
The judge delayed for lack of concern	God delays so that the work of redemption can be done
The widow was all alone in her pleas for help	The church are many who agree when united
The widow had to keep her distance from the judge	We are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace
The widow came to an unrighteous judge	We come to a righteous Father
The widow had to plead her own case	We have an Advocate with the Father
The widow had limited access to the judge	We have no limitation but are to cry out day and night
The widow's constant asking provoked the judge	Our prayers are a delight to the Father.

What do you think the answer is to the final question Jesus asked in this parable? “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” Because there will be a delay in the start of justice (which will be executed swiftly once it starts), people will tend to lose heart and give up and not keep the faith. The early Christians likely had a lot of time to wonder if justice would come upon the Jews before the destruction of Jerusalem. In later generations, they wondered if there would be any justice when the persecution of the church was happening at the hands of the Romans. We could follow the persecution by the rise of Islam, the oppression of the corrupt popes against the true believers, the persecution by state-controlled religious institutions that caused many to flee Europe and come to America and the persecution that came in the last century from godless Communism. We can continue to wonder even in our day as we sense the coming persecution of the church at the hands of a godless society that elevates humanity to the place of God.

Down through the ages, we see the fall of the oppressors such as first century Judaism, the fall of the Roman Empire, the disarming of the power of the Roman Catholic popes, the demise of state controlled church institution and the fall of Communism. The Church of Jesus Christ is still alive and well and will be victorious over secular humanism.

What are we to do? Be persistent in prayer: Cry out to God - day and night - for His will to be done and to recognize that He is working to bring about that will through the very ones whom the world is persecuting. Just as the Jewish leaders came to Jesus and asked Him when the Kingdom of God would come, there are those today who would taunt the church with such questions as “when is Jesus coming back?” What an opening to witness to the lost. God is delaying so the work of reconciliation can continue.