

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark Peters and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. I've been away the last three weeks, enjoying time with my family in Whistler and camping along the Oregon Coast. It's good to be with you this morning.

It's unfortunate, that Jesus doesn't get more credit for being a brilliant theologian He was but I think it's because He spent so much time telling stories. We tend to associate theology with logic and reasoning, and stories with entertainment, but Jesus used stories to teach profound truths about God, what it means to be human, and what life is like when heaven and earth meet.¹

As we have been saying, week by week, Jesus didn't tell stories primarily to entertain or to educate, but to expose what was in His listeners' hearts, and, to evoke a response. This Sunday we will look at one final Jesus-story before our Summer Sermon series concludes.

Let me invite you to open your heart to Jesus and to His story. I pray that His words will expose the way you think, what you value, and desire. I pray that His words will give you reason to reevaluate how you are living. I pray that the Holy Spirit will give all of us the grace to respond well to Jesus.

I want to begin this morning with a series of questions I have been contemplating all week. What does it take to make us say:

- *I quit!*
- *I give up!*
- *I can't keep going!*
- *It's not worth it!*

I wonder, what have you quit, or, been tempted to quit?

- Perhaps you put an early end to your music lessons.
- Maybe you quit a sports team, or, your job.
- I wonder, have you ever given up on a diet, or, given in to unhealthy habits?
- Have you quit on yourself, or been tempted to walk away from a friendship, a marriage, the church, or even faith in God?

Why do we give up on things, or on people?

- Some times we give up because we cannot live up to our own expectation—*if it isn't easy, if I can't be good at it right away, maybe I should move on to something else.*
- Some times we give up because the way forward is complex, difficult, and painful. Perhaps you've been persevering for a long time and you are reaching the end of your reserves—some times we quit because we don't know how much longer we can hold on.
- Some times we give up because we have lost all hope—*I can't do this, it's never going to get better, it's not worth the blood, sweat, and tears.*

All of us are prone to walking away from what matters most; all of us are prone to losing hope and faith. Jesus knew this about His disciples, He knows it about us, and so, He told a story about prayer, perseverance, and God's promises. I want to read this story for you this morning, and let me encourage you to turn there with me now—Luke 18:1-8.

¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies In The Gospels*, 279.

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ 4 ‘For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

6 And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 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? 8 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?’”

As I said moments ago, Jesus didn’t tell stories primarily to entertain or to educate, but to expose what was in His listeners’ hearts, and, to evoke a response. The two questions we must ask of every parable are:

- *What does this parable expose in my/our hearts?*
- *What response does Jesus call for?*

And in order to answer these questions, there are two steps we must take. **First**, we need to discover who Jesus’ original audience was, and, the occasion that prompted the telling of the parable. Jesus didn’t tell “random” stories to “random” people; His stories were targeted to specific people, arising from a particular set of circumstances. **Second**, we need to grasp the reference points in the story that would have been understood by the original audience but are often lost on us.

1. Original Audience/Occasion: Let’s begin by looking at who the original audience was, and why Jesus told them this story. If your Bible is still open, let me encourage you to turn back a chapter to Luke 17, beginning at verse 20.

Luke writes, *“Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, 21 nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst [or, among you].” 22 Then he said to his disciples, ‘The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. 23 People will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. 24 For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”*

Jesus spent more time talking about the kingdom of God than any other subject. To be clear, when Jesus talked about the kingdom, He was describing what life is like when people are submitted to God’s plans, purposes, and leadership. The Jewish religious leaders were equally concerned about God’s kingdom; remember, Israel was no longer a sovereign nation. Rome ruled Israel with an iron fist and the people longed for the day when Caesar would be overthrown and God would once more be their King.

And this **is** how they thought about it. If God were King, then we would be free—Rome would be gone, we would be independent, and finally enjoy power, privilege, and wealth. Israel’s leaders, and some of the crowd, opposed Jesus, not because He spoke of the kingdom, but because the kingdom He described was not to their liking.

They were not so different from us. Who among us doesn't wish that God would act **now** to remove all pain, to put an end to evil, and to vindicate those of us who are committed to Him? The Pharisees wanted to know, "*When will God act decisively? And, what will be the sign it has taken place?*"

Do you ever wish you had a way of seeing into the future? Many do. Some read horoscopes or visit a psychic, hoping to catch a glimpse of what's ahead. Others take a more scientific approach: they look to CNN or the BBC, they watch the stock market rise and fall, digesting as much information as they can in order to make an intelligent guess about the future—they want to be prepared, they want to be in control. Within some Christian circles, this desire to know the future has resulted in wild predictions, based on obscure biblical prophecies, in order to figure out exactly when Jesus is going to return.

In vs. 23-25, Jesus indicates that the day of God's decisive action—when Jesus returns in power and glory—is a day that they will not see and cannot predict. This Day is coming, and when it does it will be visible and obvious. Have you seen lightening flash across the sky? Have you felt thunder shake the ground beneath you? Such power is impossible to miss. In the same way, when Jesus returns, everyone will know.²

But, Jesus said, before this Day takes place, the central event in salvation history must take place. Vs. 25—Jesus would be arrested,

falsely accused, and sentenced to death by way of the cross. In the plan of God, paradoxically, the path to victory is one of suffering and death. Darrell Bock writes, "Suffering precedes glory for Jesus. Rejection must come before glorious rule can follow."³

It's clear from the way Jesus described the kingdom, that the kingdom comes in stages. Some of its blessings are immediate. With Jesus' death on the cross, we can be forgiven and adopted into His family. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has won the war over sin, death, and the devil. When Jesus returned to the Father's side, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all who believe.

But the kingdom has not yet come in fullness. God is King, but many have not embraced His leadership. Pain and persecution still exists. Though the war has been one, the devil continues to battle and evil persists. When Jesus returns, no one will be able to oppose Him; on that day, God's plan, purpose, and leadership will be embraced. On that day, the life of heaven—God's goodness, love, and peace—will be given full expression on the earth.

But until that day, we wait and we trust in God. The religious leaders didn't like this message; Jesus' disciples were there too and I can't imagine they liked it either. *Wouldn't it be better if God just simply flexed His muscles and got rid of pain and evil in a moment? Why must we wait? Why must we persevere through suffering?*

These are big questions. In every generation Christians must grapple

² Darrell L. Bock, *NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, 455-456.

³ Bock, 452.

with the way things are and wait until God sets things right again. Consider this—if Jesus walked the path of suffering, can we expect anything different? This is a hard teaching to embrace, and Jesus recognized that upon hearing it His disciples might lose hope and be tempted to quit following. And so—Luke 18:1—“*Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*”

Now that we’ve looked at the original audience and the occasion that prompted the parable, let’s examine a few details in the story in order to get to the meaning and application.

2. Examining The Details: There are two main characters in Jesus’ story—a judge and a widow. The judge is described as one who neither “feared God or cared about others.” This description could be interpreted by modern readers as being a good thing—*perhaps this means that the judge was objective, unbiased, and neutral?* Suffice it to say, this is not what Jesus’ audience would have heard.

Proverbs 1:7 says, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*” In other words, to bow before God and follow His ways, is the first step towards becoming wise. The one who rejects God, rejects truth itself. According to Psalm 14:1, the one who rejects God cannot, ultimately, live rightly, since God Himself is the standard of right and wrong.

In Jesus’ day, a judge who didn’t fear God had no sense of accountability to higher authority, and, had no compass for discerning right from wrong. In Jesus’ day, a judge who didn’t care about others had no sense of responsibility to protect those who were weak, vulnerable, or in need.

The Old Testament frequently indicates that God expected that widows would be protected and provided for; from a biblical perspective, the judge had a moral obligation to act.

- Deuteronomy 27:19 says, “Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the **widow**.”
- Proverbs 31:9 says, “Speak up and **judge fairly**; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”
- Isaiah 1:17 says, “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the **widow**.”

In His story, we discover that the widow comes back again and again, pleading with the judge to “*grant her justice.*” Culturally speaking, in the ancient world, the fact that the widow is advocating for herself means that she had no children or relatives to defend her cause—she was utterly alone, destitute, and desperate.

The fact that the judge refused to grant justice to the widow is, in and of itself, the evidence that he neither feared God, nor cared about others. But it wasn’t the judge’s behaviour that would have been shocking to Jesus’ original audience—they would have been shocked by the widow’s persistence. Though she was powerless, she refused to give up and would not leave the judge alone.

The judge said to himself, “*Even though I don’t fear God or care about others, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!*” The original Greek words used by Luke are actually borrowed from the boxing arena; the judge relents because he is concerned for his own safety—he’s afraid that the widow will “give him a black

eye”. The image is meant to be funny—the powerful judge is afraid of the powerless widow.

So what are we to make of Jesus’ story? What does it expose in us, and how would Jesus have us respond?

In verses 6-8, Jesus draws two comparisons. First, a comparison is made between the unjust judge and God—it’s a comparison by way of contrast. If a wicked judge will eventually grant justice, how much more will God? Because He is good and loving, He will see that His **chosen ones** receive justice.

Second, Jesus compares the widow and her situation to that of His disciples—it’s both a comparison of likeness and contrast. The widow experiences injustice, she feels alone, and yet she perseveres, waiting for justice to come, and in the end, she receives it. Similarly, disciples of Jesus can expect to be the object of ridicule, rejection, and persecution; true disciples **will** walk the same path of their Crucified Lord.

And yet, God has promised to act decisively. Already, Jesus has acted through the cross to defeat sin, death, and the devil. Already, forgiveness has been offered, and adoption is available to all who call on the name of Jesus. When Jesus returns, God’s action will be swift and sure⁴; future vindication and victory is certain—we have God’s promise and He is Faithful and True.

⁴ In vs. 8, Jesus promises that God’s chosen ones will receive justice, and **quickly**—this needs some explanation. How are we to understand this in light of the call to wait? It could mean one of two things, or both: (1) Jesus wanted to convey the idea that His return is imminent—at any time—without specifying when that will be; and/or (2) a part of God’s vindication comes in the protecting/sustaining work God does in/for His chosen ones; though they suffer, they are not destroyed.

The widow’s behaviour exposes our own tendencies. Unlike the widow who perseveres, our tendency is to give up. When surrounded by complexity, confusion, failure, or pain, we tend to lose sight of God. We know we have lost sight of God when He is doesn’t seem relevant to where we are. We know we have lost sight of God when we minimize what He’s already done, is doing, or has promised to do.

All of us are prone to doubting God’s goodness and timing. All of us are prone to losing hope and faith. Jesus knew this about His disciples, He knows this about us, and so, He tells a story about prayer, perseverance, and God’s promises. **How are we to respond?** Like the widow, we are called to put our trust in God, to persevere, and to wait patiently for the Day of His Coming.

Application: In the time remaining, I want to turn our attention to the means through which Christ sustains us in difficulty, namely **prayer**.

While Jesus commends the widow for her persistence, He is not thereby teaching that if we continue to pray for a particular outcome, over time we can wear God down and bend Him to our will. Instead, prayer becomes the way we centre ourselves upon God.

Prayer is the very definition of humility and dependence; whenever we bow our head to pray, we are admitting that we need God. We

tend to be prayerless in the areas where we feel capable and strong. We tend to be prayerless, if, after we have tried praying, God doesn't meet our expectations.

Quite often, prayerlessness is not a “blanket” condition. We may have faith for all kinds of things, but be a practical atheist in other areas. We live like an atheist wherever we take matters into our own hands, or resign ourselves to a hopeless situation, as though God were not present, powerful, and loving. *What have you stopped praying about, and why? Has God changed, or has our faith faltered?*

One pastor has described “**hope**” as “**the joyful anticipation of the Lord’s goodness.**” Our hope, our strength, our courage to persevere is nurtured by the Holy Spirit, whenever we bow our heads in prayer. In prayer we look to the One who never grows tired or weary, the One who is eternally present and loving, the One who sees the end from the beginning. Let those who long to be wise, find themselves frequently in prayer.

Prayer is about much, much more, than getting what we ask for. In fact, **what God does in us while we wait, trust, and pray is often just as important as whatever it is we’re praying for.** God’s promise to us is that in the end, He will set everything right again, but while we wait for that day—even if we suffer in the waiting—God is at work for our good.

In Romans 5:3-5, the Apostle Paul tells us that *suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character produces hope.* One author comments, “What that means is that biblically, waiting is not just something we have to do until we get

what we want. Waiting is part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be.”

Prayer is the means by which we surrender control of our lives to God. Prayer is not the way we convince God that we know better than Him; it is the means by which we confess: *You are trustworthy and true; I choose to trust in Your goodness and timing.*

This morning I want to call you to faith, to perseverance, and to prayer. And if you are not sure where to begin, or how to pray, then I want to invite you to join me in praying the prayer Jesus taught His disciples.

- Our Father, who is in heaven
 - Hallowed be Your Name,
 - Your Kingdom come,
 - Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
- Give us this day our daily bread.
- And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom, the power, and glory forever and ever. Amen

The moment we begin to pray this prayer, God begins to work in us. Praying for God’s name to be hallowed, slowly puts an end to our desire to make a name for ourselves. To pray for His kingdom to come will mean choosing to surrender to His leadership in our lives. When we pray for His will to be done, we are praying for His plans and purposes to come to pass in us, around us, and through us.

This prayer begins with an opening ascription—**Our Father**; it concludes with a final declaration—**Yours is the Kingdom, Power, and glory**; and in between we have six petitions.

I have been using this prayer to shape my weekly praying. On **Sundays**, as I pray to God, my Father, I am reminded that is Present and Powerful, Good and Loving—I didn't choose Him, He chose me, and that means I have nothing to prove and nothing to fear. On **Mondays**, I pray for His kingdom to come. I pray that the Spirit will empower me to embrace God's leadership, that I would have the courage to obey and follow wherever He leads. On **Tuesdays** I pray for God's purposes to be worked out in my life, in my family, in my neighbourhood, in the North Shore High Schools, in our City, and Country. I think you get the point.

All of us are prone to doubting God's goodness and timing. All of us are prone to losing hope and faith. Jesus knows this about us, and so, He told a story about prayer, perseverance, and God's promises.

My dear people, let us put our trust in the Father. Let us invite the Holy Spirit to fill us and sustain us. And let us fix our eyes on Jesus, let us wait patiently and persevere until He returns.

Worship: This morning Nik and the worship team are going to play a song for us entitled, *Even So Come*. This song is a prayer for Christ's return, a prayer in which we confess our trust in Him and our willingness to wait. As they sing, I invite you to make this your prayer.

Prayer Ministry Invitation

Benediction: *“To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”*⁵

⁵ Jude 24-25.