

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 66: “DON’T DESPAIR BUT PERSIST IN PRAYER”

LUKE 18:1-8

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Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 66 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Don't Despair But Persist in Prayer."

Sermon Introduction

Admiral Jim Stockdale was the highest-ranking US military officer in the prisoner-of-war camp sadistically known as the "Hanoi Hilton" during the height of the Vietnam War.

He was brutally tortured over 20 times from 1965 to 1973, which left him limping for the rest of his life.

And during his imprisonment, he and his fellow prisoners-of-war lived without any rights, no set release date, and no certainty as to whether they would even survive to see their families again. And yet, after his eight *long* years of imprisonment, Stockdale survived and was liberated, while many of his brothers in arms did *not* make it out alive.

When asked how he survived, Stockdale said, "I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted *not only* that I would get out, but *also* that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."

When he was asked who did *not* make it out, he said, "Oh that's easy. The optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."

And then, he said what has become known as the Stockdale Paradox, which is about balancing *optimism* with *realism*:

[Quote] This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.¹ [Unquote]

In today's passage, around 2000 years before Stockdale said this, we see this same idea at play. Jesus exhorts his disciples to confront the brutal fact that they *will* face injustice in the world, but he also calls them to never lose faith that *he* will prevail in the end. And in that time of waiting, he calls them *not* to despair but to persist in prayer.

The One Thing

As you wait, do not despair; but in faith, persist in prayer.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 18:1-8.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

Last week, we saw that in light of a question from the Jewish religious teachers about the kingdom of God, Jesus affirmed that he is the King in the kingdom of God.

And then, he turned to his disciples and explained to them that, in his first coming, he must suffer and die to bring about their salvation (v. 25), but in his second coming, at the end of the age, he will return in an obvious, sudden, severe way to bring just judgment upon all people and to take his people home (Luke 17:20-37).

And that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 18:1-8.

¹ And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

¹ Excerpt from Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), taken from Jim Collins, "The Stockdale Paradox," <https://www.jimcollins.com/concepts/Stockdale-Concept.html>.

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in three parts.

- In verses 1 to 5, we'll first explain the parable of the unjust judge and persistent widow.
- And then from verse 6 to the first part of verse 8, in light of the parable, we'll look at two motivations for persistent prayer, which are that God is just and loving towards his elect, and that God will not delay in doing right.
- And in the second part of verse 8, we'll close with one challenging question about our faith that Jesus poses.

- I. The parable of the unjust judge and persistent widow (vv. 1-5)
- II. Two motivations for persistent prayer (vv. 6-8a)
 - A. God is just and loving towards his elect (vv. 6-7a)
 - B. God will not delay in doing right (vv. 7b-8a)
- III. One challenging question about our faith (v. 8b)

I. The parable of the unjust judge and persistent widow (vv. 1-5)

Look at verse 1.

¹ And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

What's interesting here is that Jesus tells them the point of the parable at the very beginning. He doesn't save the punchline until the end, but he's telling it to them up front, and he wants them to make the connections even as they listen to the parable.

Verse 1 is basically the "so what?" of this entire passage. It's the one application point that Jesus wants them to walk away with—always pray and do not lose heart. Or do not despair but persist in prayer.

To "always pray" does *not* mean that *all* we should do is pray. That would be impossible. We need to eat, sleep, and do many other things that God has called us to do.

Rather, to "always pray" simply means that we are to pray *consistently* and *persistently*, as we'll soon see in the parable.

But *why* is Jesus bringing this up to begin with?

We need to remember the *context*.

Jesus is still on his way to *Jerusalem* (Luke 17:11), where he knows he will suffer and die for the salvation of all who believe in him. Three days later, he will *resurrect*, but then forty days later, he will *ascend* into heaven. So Jesus *knows* that he doesn't have much time left with his disciples before he's going to be gone.

And remember, Jesus has just been talking about his *second coming* with his disciples, saying that the days are coming when they will desire to see him, but they won't be able to (Luke 17:22).

And during that time of *waiting* and *praying* for Jesus' return, he knows that it's going to be difficult for his disciples. He knows they're going to struggle, and that they're going to be tempted to lose heart, despair, and give up.

Or as Stockdale put it, Jesus knows his disciples will be prone towards "dying of a broken heart." In the midst of suffering and trials and persecution, his disciples will wait and wait and wait, pray and pray and pray—and it will seem like God has failed them. It will seem like Jesus is *not* coming back to right all wrongs and restore all things.

And so, in order to *prepare* them for the time of waiting in between his first and second coming, Jesus tells them this parable.

Look at verses 2-3.

² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'

Jesus introduces two characters in the parable on opposite spectrums of power in society.

First, in verse 2, he introduces a *judge*, which means that he was in a position of *power*. But he "neither feared God nor respected man," which is literally the *opposite* of what you should expect from a judge. In essence, this judge doesn't care about God, people, or justice. As we'll see later, all he cares about is *himself*.

Second, in verse 3, Jesus introduces a *widow* who is seeking *justice* against her adversary. We don't know the details of her case, but from Jesus' telling of the parable, it seems that she is experiencing some injustice from someone and that she is in the right.

It's very odd that she's *personally* appealing to this judge at all because, in the first-century patriarchal society, it should have been her *husband* or her *son* or some other male counterpart going before the judge on her behalf.

But she's a *widow*, so she has *no* husband. And it's probably safe to say that she has *no* son to represent her either. And with few openings for a woman to earn a living in the first century, she was probably *poor* as well.

In Scripture, we often see widows being categorized with orphans, immigrants, and the poor. They were among the marginalized and most vulnerable in society, and thus were often the victims of injustice.

Even the *religious teachers* of the day, who *supposedly* feared God, were accused by Jesus of "*devour[ing] widows' houses*" (Luke 20:27). So what should we expect from this *judge* who *doesn't* fear God and *doesn't* respect people?

This widow has *no* status in society, *no* representative to plead her case, *no* money to live on—she has *nothing* to win over this unjust judge who cares *nothing* for her or God or justice. All she can do is just *keep coming* to the judge over and over again to *plead* for justice.

Anyone listening to this parable would have recognized that this is a *terrible* situation for the widow. Just look at the *character* of this unjust judge, and just look at the *plight* of this unfortunate widow. It seems *hopeless*. There's *no way* that she's going to get justice.

But then, look at verses 4-5.

⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, “Though I neither fear God nor respect man,⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.”

This is the *surprise* in the parable. Somehow, the persistent widow *eventually* receives justice from the unjust judge.

He *refuses* her justice for a while, but he then begins to *reason* with himself. He *acknowledges* that he neither fears God nor respects people, but he also acknowledges that he’s so *annoyed* and *bothered* by the widow’s *persistence*.

To “beat me down” *literally* means to “blacken my eye,” but of course, he means it *figuratively*—“to wear me out by continual annoying.”²

So the unjust judge *finally* decides to give her justice *not* because he cares about her, God, or justice, but simply so that she will *not exasperate* him with her persistent pleas.

<pause>

Ok, so that’s great for the *fictional* widow in the parable, but what does *any* of this have to do with Jesus’ *disciples* and the exhortation to always pray and not lose heart?

Is Jesus saying that his disciples are to *badger* God in prayer until they get the justice that God *doesn’t* want to give them? No! Not at all!

It’s quite the *opposite* actually. How do we know? Because of what Jesus says next.

So let’s turn now to look at....

II. Two motivations for persistent prayer (vv. 6-8a)

Just like his *early* disciples, Jesus knows that *all* of us are *also* going to struggle in this time between his first and second coming. He knows that as *we* wait and pray, we’re *all* going to be tempted to lose heart, despair, and give up.

So these words of encouragement are *not just* for Jesus’ *early* disciples, but also for *all* of us who share in the same struggle as *his* disciples.

So what are the two motivations for persistent prayer that Jesus gives?

First...

A. God is just and loving towards his elect (vv. 6-7a)

Look at verse 6 to the first part of verse 7.

² Nicholas Perrin, *Luke*, TNTC (Westmont: IVP Academic, 2022); NET footnote.

⁶ And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? ...

Notice first the *assumption* that Jesus makes in verse 7. He *assumes* that his disciples *will* experience injustice, to the point where they will cry out to God day and night—that is, they will pray persistently and consistently—asking him to give them justice.

- This could be the unjust suffering and persecution they experience for their faith in Christ.
- This could be unjust systemic treatment from society because of ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic class.
- This could be unjust treatment from a boss, a parent, a spouse, a friend, or someone else.

Unfortunately, we live in a broken and sinful world, where *all* of us—no matter who we are—*will* experience injustices in our lives.

But notice what Jesus’ disciples are *not* doing. They are *not* taking justice into their own hands in a vengeful way. They are *not* responding aggressively, passive-aggressively, or even apathetically. *Rather*, they are crying out to God in prayer day and night, *trusting* that he is the one who will *ultimately* give them justice.

Now what does it mean to ask God for *justice*?

The Bible talks about justice in two ways.

First, there is *retributive* justice—or *rectifying* justice—which is what we probably normally think of when we think of justice. This is punishing wrongdoers, reestablishing rights, and caring for victims of unjust treatment.

Second, there is *distributive* justice—or *primary* justice—which is making sure that goods and opportunities are more equitably distributed in society. This is when a person, in his day-to-day living, conducts *all* relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity, and equity.

If *everyone* were living out *distributive* justice—that is, acting with fairness, generosity, and equity—then there would be *no* need for *retributive* justice—that is, punishing wrongdoers, reestablishing rights, and caring for victims of unjust treatment. But *because* we live in a broken, sinful world, we need *both* retributive and distributive justice for the time being.³ But that will *not* always be so.

We may *not* realize this, but whenever we pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10), we are essentially asking God for *both* aspects of his justice.

We are asking that he bring perfect *retributive* justice in our world. For anyone who has put their faith in Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, Jesus himself has borne all the *retributive* justice—or all the *just punishment*—that we deserve for our sins. And as Christians, we’re asking God to lead *more* people to put their faith in Christ, so that they may be *justly forgiven* in him.

But if anyone hardens themselves in rebellion and opposition against King Jesus (as Psalm 2 describes), we’re asking God to carry out his *perfect* retributive justice upon them.

This may sound unkind or unloving, but we must recognize that such people are bringing harm against others. Of course, our greatest longing is that they would repent and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that Christ

³ Tim Keller, *Generous Justice* (New York: Riverhead, 2010), 1-18.

bears their just punishment and their lives are transformed. But if not, we ask that God himself would prevent them from doing greater harm to his people.

Still, not only *retributive* justice, but we are also asking that God empower us to live out *distributive* justice—to live in a way that *matches* and *showcases* the character and purposes of our King—Jesus Christ. That may even be to express *distributive* justice to the very ones who are treating us *unjustly*.

In either case, we trust that God *alone* is the one who is *perfectly* just, so we don't trust ourselves or other people to ultimately give us the justice that we *desire*, but we wholly depend on him to give us the justice that we truly *need*.

So *that's* what it means to ask God for justice.

Now, as we look at verses 6 and 7 together, we see that Jesus is making a “how much more” argument.

If this *unrighteous* judge will give justice to this *unknown* widow, *how much more* will our *righteous* God give justice to his *elect*?

And that's the *key* for understanding this parable *rightly*.

We have to understand that this parable *cannot* be read in a one-to-one way. But like the parable of the dishonest manager (Luke 16:1-13) that we looked at about a month ago, this parable is almost entirely a parable of *contrast*—that is, God is *not* like the unjust judge, and Jesus' disciples are *not* like the unknown widow.

The “how much more” argument only makes sense when we can recognize the *contrasts*.

Even in the parable *itself*, the judge is *contrasted* with God because he does *not* fear God. The assumption is that, if he *did* fear God, then he would respect people, especially the marginalized and vulnerable, and he would act *justly*. Why? Because that's what *God* would do.

Whenever we have a guest preacher come to our church, we usually ask them how they would like to be introduced, and they'll usually send us a short bio that we can use to introduce them.

Now, if someone were to ask me how *I* would want to be introduced as a guest preacher, I'd probably propose something like, “This is Eric Yee, husband to Tina, father to Caleb and Micah, and a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta.” Of course, there's *more* to me than just that, but those are some of the *main* things that I spend most of my time doing.

Now, in light of that, think about how *significant* it is, then, that the biblical writers introduce *God* as “a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Ps. 68:4-5 NIV).

Or stated more *descriptively*: “He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked” (Ps. 146:7-9 NIV)

Why does Scripture introduce God that way? Because those are some of the *main* things that God *does* in the world. In short, he identifies with the marginalized, the vulnerable, the weak, and he takes up their cause—to give them justice.⁴

And so, we can trust that the Judge of all the earth will surely do what is just (Gen. 18:25).

So God is *not* like the unrighteous judge, but Jesus' disciples are also *not* like the unknown widow.

Here, Jesus calls his disciples “the elect”—that is, God *chose* them in Christ before the foundation of the world to be his own (Eph. 1:4).

Whereas the *widow* was a *nobody* to the judge, if *we* are united to Christ through faith, then we are *not* nobodies in God's eyes. Our names are *written* in the book of life (Rev. 20:15), and they are *engraved* on the palm of his hands (Isa. 49:16). His eyes *saw* our unformed substance, and he *formed* our inward parts and knitted us together in our mother's womb (Ps. 139:13-16). He *knew* us and he *chose* us to be his own even before we ever came into being (Rom. 8:29-30). *That's* what it means to be God's *elect*.

And if we are united to Christ through faith, then *that's* what our relationship with our God is. He loves us as our heavenly Father, and we love him as his beloved children.

Still, perhaps some of us here struggle with a “widow” mentality (or what's sometimes called an “orphan” mentality), where...

- You feel alone and that you need to fend for yourself.
- You're anxious over many things, like relationships, money, and health.
- You live with a sense of unlimited expectations to fix things, to please others, or to see yourself in a certain way.

If you can relate to this kind of “widow” mentality, then perhaps prayer is a last resort or confined to a quiet time, but it's *not* a vital part of your life.

If that's you, then you need to know that, in Christ, you are *not* like the widow, but...

- God is with you until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20); he will never leave you nor forsake you (Deut. 31:6; Josh. 1:5; Heb. 13:5).
- He is your heavenly Father who knows and graciously provides for you what you need (Matt. 6:32-33).
- He does *not* expect you to carry the burden of all the things wrong around you, in other people's lives, or even in your own life, but he alone is the sovereign Lord who makes all things work together for your good (Rom. 8:28).

If you're a Christian, it's unlikely that *any* of this is new. But there's a difference between *agreeing* with these truths, and truly *believing* and *living* in light of them.

There is so much *assurance* to be found in your *election*, so much *rest* to be found in your *justification*, so much *joy* to be found in your *adoption*—and yet we often write them off as just Christian platitudes without really pressing in on how *glorious* these truths are meant to be for us. Christianity is *not* merely about doctrines to believe, but these truths are meant to drive us to *Christ*—to treasure *him*, to love *him*, to find our all in *him*.

No matter what your *formal* doctrine is, are you living more like a *deprived widow* or more like a *beloved and chosen child* of your heavenly Father?

⁴ Tim Keller, *Generous Justice* (New York: Riverhead, 2010), 6.

Now even as we note these *contrasts*, we should also note that there is *one* thing that we *should* imitate in this parable, and that's the *persistence* of the widow.

Jesus' disciples are to "cry to [God] day and night," which is just another way of saying what Jesus said in verse 1—that is, we are "always to pray and not lose heart." We are to pray *consistently* and *persistently*, just like the widow did.

But *even* for that, it's *not* exactly one-to-one. There's *still* a *contrast* because what *motivates* a *disciple's* persistence is radically *different* than what motivated the *widow's* persistence.

In the parable, the *widow* persists because she *knows* that this judge is unrighteous and doesn't care about her, so the *only* way that he's going to listen to her and give her justice is if she *exasperates* him and wears him down with her persistent pleas.

But as *Jesus' disciples*, that's *not* our situation at all! *We* persist in prayer because we *know* that our God is a just God who cares for us *so much* as his chosen and beloved children. Not only is he *willing* to listen to us, but he *invites* us to cast all our anxieties upon him because he cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

In other words, we persist in prayer *not* because God *doesn't* listen and we need to *exasperate* him; no, we persist in prayer because he *does* listen and we *trust* that he is just and loving towards us. We come to God as a beloved child *freely* and *persistently* comes to his father. *Who else* would a child turn to for help but their just and loving father?

The fact that God is just and loving towards his elect ought to make a world of difference in our motivation for persisting in prayer.

Now the second motivation is that...

B. God will not delay in doing right (vv. 7b-8a)

The second part of verse 7 to the beginning of verse 8 says this:

⁷ ... Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily...

We're prone to *despair* when we feel that the wait is too *long*, and justice is too *delayed*.

But here, Jesus challenges our perspective of *time*.

From *our* perspective, especially if we're experiencing injustice, we feel like it's a *long* delay. And this is *not* unique to just us, but all the saints throughout history have felt this tension. That's why throughout the Psalms, we see God's people repeated asking God, "How long, O Lord?"

But from *God's* perspective, he does *not* delay in doing right.

From the standpoint of *eternity*, God does *not* delay.

When we're younger, time seems to move much slower. Each *year* feels like a *decade*, and we can't wait to grow up. But as we get *older*, time seems to *speed up*, and suddenly a *decade* feels like a *year*, and we're wondering where all the time went. Of course, time didn't slow down or speed up, but we *feel* the days in

proportion to the *span* of our lives. When you're only 4 years old, one year is a *quarter* of your life, so every year seems to move slowly, and everything feels much longer. But when you're 40 years old, a year is just 1/40th of your life, so every year seems to fly by without feeling like much time has passed at all.

But what would it be like to adopt the perspective of *not* a four-year-old or a 40-year-old, but as someone who knows they have *eternal* life in Christ? What is a year, a decade, a century, or a millennium in light of the span of our *eternal* lives? This is the perspective that *God* has, and this is the perspective he wants *us* to adopt, for "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8).

Also, from the standpoint of *redemptive history*, God is *always* on time.

Scripture says in Galatians 4 that "when the *fullness of time* had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to *redeem* those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (vv. 4-5).

And throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus repeated says, "My time has *not yet* come" or "my *hour* has not yet come" (John 2:4; 7:6, 8; cf. 7:30; 8:20), and then, on the night that Jesus was to be arrested, it says that "Jesus knew that *his hour had come* to depart out of this world to the Father" (John 13:1; cf. Matt. 26:18) and he prays "Father, *the hour has come*; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you" (John 17:1).

In light of redemptive history, God has been sovereignly orchestrating everything according to his appointed time and perfect will.

Also, from the standpoint of *our sanctification*—that is, God conforming us more and more into the likeness of Christ—he is *always* on time. First Thessalonians 4 says "For *this* is the will of God, your *sanctification*" (v. 3). I think we sometimes feel that God is delayed because *our* will is often *not* our *sanctification* but our *comfort*. But if we know that *sanctification* is God's aim, then we know that we *must* be refined in the fire. The process of *sanctification* is like the process of *refining* silver or gold (Mal. 3:3).

Simon Guillebaud, author of the book *Sacrifice*, recalls a story of a woman who went to observe a silversmith at work; he writes:

She observed him at work for a while, and then asked him, 'Do you have to sit here the whole time the refining process is taking place?' 'Yes,' he said. 'It's important. If the temperature rises by even the slightest degree, the silver will be damaged.' The woman was comforted by the thought that similarly the Lord was watching over her, and however difficult her current circumstances were, He was in control. **He wouldn't let the refining process go on a minute longer than was required, because His purposes were good and He didn't want her to be damaged.** After a while the woman got up to leave, but as she was halfway out the door the silversmith called her back and told her he had forgotten one detail: **he only knew that the refining process was complete when he could see his own image reflected in the silver.**⁵

Our suffering as Christians is *not* a sign of God's *delay*, but a sign of his *sanctifying* process. He is the master silversmith *carefully* putting us through the furnace to burn off our impurities and *carefully* watching us throughout the entire process that it might not be too much for us. And one day, his purifying work will be complete in us, and we will be fully "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29).

[⁷ ... Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily...]

⁵ Simon Guillebaud, *Sacrifice* (Leyland, England: 10Publishing, 2013), 31-32.

Also, from the standpoint of *salvation of the lost*, God does *not* delay but he exercises *patience*.

Second Peter 3 says, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (v. 9).

God is *not* slow, but he is patient and compassionate towards the lost. He’s *not* bringing final judgment right now because he’s graciously giving all peoples time to hear the gospel, repent of their sins, and believe in Christ for salvation.

In this time between Jesus’ first and second coming, 2 Corinthians 6 says “Behold, *now* is the favorable time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation” (v. 2).

If we adopt a perspective that *only* has regard for *ourselves*, we will see God as *slow* and *delayed*. But if we adopt a perspective that has regard for the *salvation of the lost*, then we will see God as *patient* and *compassionate*.

<pause>

When we’re able to adopt a *proper* perspective—that is, *God’s* perspective—it helps us *not* to despair but to persist in prayer.

But we live in an age where *expediency* and *immediacy* are the standard for what “works.” If it isn’t fast, then something isn’t working.

And it’s very easy to apply that same unbiblical standard to *prayer*.

- Perhaps as an asylum seeker or refugee, you’ve been praying and waiting for a call to tell you that your status has changed or that you’re finally being resettled to a new country.
- Perhaps as a student, you’ve been praying and waiting for a good friend to come along or for a community where you feel like you truly belong.
- Perhaps as a single, you’ve been praying and waiting for a potential godly spouse to follow Christ with for the rest of your life.
- Or for all of us, perhaps you’ve been praying and waiting for your loved ones to finally turn away from sin and turn towards Christ in faith.

If we’ve been praying for someone or something for months and years, and we don’t see what we want to see, we begin to lose heart. We convince ourselves that prayer isn’t “working,” and we’re tempted to give up.

But what would it be like if we adopted *God’s* perspective rather than our *own* limited perspectives?

- To look through the filter of *eternity* rather than *immediacy*?
- To see from the lens of *redemptive history* rather than our *own* lifetimes?
- To trust that God is committed to *refining* (or *sanctifying*) us rather than simply giving us what we want?
- To adopt God’s *patience* and *compassion* for the *salvation of the lost* rather than complaining about God’s *supposed* delay in providing our *own* comforts?

The certain hope that *every* Christian has is that Jesus *will* return one day, where he will right every wrong, wipe every tear, and restore everything broken. He *will* bring about complete, perfect justice upon all the earth.

And when he does, we will *not* feel that he was *delayed*, but in light of eternity, in light of redemptive history, in light of our sanctification, and in light of salvation of the lost, we—along with all the saints—*will* magnify the wisdom of God, the goodness of God, and the perfect timing of God.

And so, in this time of waiting, having *that* kind of *God*-centered perspective helps us *not* to despair but to persist in prayer.

<pause>

And now, let's turn to...

III. One challenging question about our faith (v. 8b)

The second part of verse 8 says this:

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

Here, Jesus turns the tables on his disciples.

In the time between Jesus' first and second coming, the questions in the disciples' minds will be: "Will *God* be faithful to who he is and what he has promised? Will he hear our prayers? Will he be just toward us? Will he love us? Will he speedily give us justice?" And to all those questions, Jesus gives a resounding, "Yes!"

In fact, those are *not* the real questions at all. *God* will *absolutely* hear us, be just toward us, love us, and speedily give us justice.

The real question is *not* regarding whether *God* will be faithful, but it's whether *we* will be found faithful when Jesus returns. Jesus *will* one day come to judge the living and the dead and to make all things right, but will he find *faith* on earth? Will he find *faith* expressed through *persistent prayer*?

That's the real, challenging question that he wants to leave his disciples with.

- He's told them *what* they ought to do—to not despair but to persist in prayer.
- He's given them *motivations* for persisting in prayer—that *God* is just and loving towards them and that *God* will not delay in doing right.
- And now, he leaves them with this open-ended question: "So when I come back, is that how I'm going to find you living?"

Notice that Jesus asks whether he will find "faith" when he comes back. On the surface, this seems like it's coming out of nowhere. He hasn't been *explicitly* talking about "faith" at all throughout this passage. But Jesus is now making *explicit* what has been *implicit* this entire time—that faith is *not* just *conceptual* or *intellectual*, but true faith *must* be *expressed* and *evidenced* outwardly in our lives. And in this case, that outward expression of faith is seen through *persistent prayer*.

Only people who *believe* that *God* is faithful to who he is and what he has promised will *persist* in prayer.

In fact, *believing* is the very reason that you struggle and are tempted to lose heart in the first place. It's *because* you believe that *God* is faithful that you're struggling to reconcile what you *know* is true about *God* with what you're *experiencing* in your life. It's *because* you believe that *God* is *just* that you're struggling to make sense out of *injustices* in your life.

But the very fact that you're *continuing* to pray shows that you *still* believe those truths about God. You haven't abandoned your faith, but you express your struggles honestly before the God that you *still* believe in.

<pause>

At the same time, I know that there are some dark nights of the soul, where it's *so difficult* to pray. We feel so beaten down and worn out by our sufferings that we can't seem to utter any words of prayer.

Or maybe, you're a newer Christian and you just have no idea how to pray, let alone *persist* in prayer.

Thankfully, God does *not* leave us to ourselves, but he has given us his Word and his church.

Regarding his *Word*, there have been times in my life when I felt so overwhelmed that I didn't have the will to get out of bed to face the day. I knew I needed to pray, but even the thought of prayer felt like too much for me. So I would listen to the Psalms on audio, and made those my own prayers. When I didn't have the strength or words to pray myself, I *borrowed* words from God's Word—from the prayers in the Psalms.

Regarding his *church*, our corporate gatherings are also meant to teach and encourage us in prayers saturated with God's Word. We have corporate prayers of praise, confession, thanks, and petition. To remember these different kinds of prayers, think of the acronym ACTS—A, C, T, S.

- A is for adoration or praise.
- C is for confession.
- T is for thanksgiving.
- S is for supplication or petition—or asking God to work in certain ways.

So...

- If you are struggling to *adore* or praise God, learn to do so through the corporate prayer of praise.
- If you're struggling to *confess* your sin to God, learn to do so through the corporate prayer of confession.
- And the same goes for *thanks* and *supplication*.

And as we learn from these corporate prayers, we are *not* just listening to *someone else's* prayer, but we are making these prayers our *own* as we say "Amen" collectively at the end.

But it's *not* just the corporate *prayers*, but *everything* we do in our corporate worship as we *read* the Word, *preach* the Word, *pray* the Word, *sing* the Word, and *see* the Word in the ordinances are meant to *encourage* us to persist in our *faith* and thus persist in our *prayers*.

Let me just highlight the aspect of *singing* the Word together as a church. Scripture calls us to "address *one another*" in songs of worship as we *exalt* the Lord together (Eph. 5:19). There is something especially edifying about hearing the *whole* congregation sing out *loudly* these amazing gospel truths that we believe in.

In a way, it's as if the lyrics of the songs become our collective *prayers* to our God. And in a way, it's as if hearing one another singing these songs is *calling* us to recognize these wonderful truths and *pressing* them deeper into our hearts.

Just last week, as we were singing the chorus of "Christ Our Hope in Life and Death" together as a church [in Jakarta], I started tearing up as our congregation was crying out in one voice:

O sing hallelujah!
Our hope springs eternal;
O sing hallelujah!
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death.

In that moment, God used the *loud* voices of our *whole* congregation to teach and to encourage me to *persist* in my faith.

And the ministry of the church is not *only* experienced in these *formal* corporate gatherings, but also in all the *informal* times as well.

There have been many times—whether over a meal, whether before or after Sunday Celebration, or over a message or call—when different members have asked me how I was doing. And when I told them that I honestly wasn't doing well, they simply prayed for me right there and then.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate that. Especially as a pastor, I care for and I pray for every single member of our church. But to know that it's *not* just one-way, but different members in our church actually care how I'm doing and are praying for me, especially when I'm struggling, I can't tell you how encouraging that is to me, and how they help me *persist* in my faith.

And not only in the *church*, but such ministry to one another is also meant to be experienced in the *family*.

Husbands, pray for and with your wife; and wives, pray for and with your husbands.

If you have kids, I encourage you to practice family worship each day, where you sing the Word, read the Word, and pray the Word. Use that time to specifically pray with your kids in light of what you just read in the Bible.

Teach your kids that we don't "go to *church*," but we come to *worship* the Lord with God's people. Model for them what it looks like to sing praises to our God, and let them listen to your prayers.

If you're a husband or father, wife or mother, sibling or child, you're *not* just to live life together, but you're meant to help one another *persist* in the faith, and one of the primary ways to do that is to *pray* for one another and make prayer *prominent* in your family.

If any of this seems too difficult or daunting, please come talk to me [or Pastor John] after Sunday Celebration, and I'd love to talk more about it with you.

All this is to say that we are *never* called to persist in prayer *on our own*, but God graciously gives us his Word, his church, and, for some of us, our family as well, to help us persist in our faith.

And so, when the Son of Man comes—when Jesus returns—may he find true and persistent faith among his praying people.

Conclusion

As we close, let's take our eyes off of *ourselves* and fix them upon *Christ*.

Let's remember that Jesus *knows* what it's like to experience *injustice* in this world.

- He was betrayed and abandoned by his closest friends in his greatest hour of need.
- He was condemned to death in a corrupt court of religious leaders that ought to have known better.
- He was wrongly crucified as a criminal even after the Roman governor declared him innocent.
- But worst of all, for the first time in his life, the sinless Jesus was utterly *alone* on the cross as he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46) as he stood in the place of sinners and bore the wrath that we deserved.

If there was *anyone* who was tempted to *despair*, it was surely *Jesus*. If there was anyone who was tempted to lose heart, it was *him*.

But what do we find Jesus doing amidst such insufferable injustice?

- In the Garden of Gethsemane, "being in agony he *prayed more earnestly*; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).
- And on the cross, "Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last" (Luke 23:46).

Even in the garden and on the cross, Jesus did *not* despair, but he *persisted* in prayer.

And so, we do *not* look to *ourselves* or our *circumstances*, but we fix our eyes on *Christ* and find that only in *him* can we always pray and not lose heart.

So once again...

The One Thing

As you wait, do not despair; but in faith, persist in prayer.

Let's pray.