

## **God is There**

Luke 18:1-8

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Imagine a poor black woman in Chicago, whose landlord refused to install heating in the apartment, appeals to a court for justice. But the judge is an atheist bigot who believes black people should be kept in their place. The woman is persistent, but without offering bribes, and eventually even this racist judge becomes so self-conscious that he is forced to give her justice. This is how David Wells contemporizes Jesus' parable of the persistent widow to restore its original shock value. This story has three characters: the persistent widow, the unrighteous judge, and God Himself, who is the righteous Judge whom the unrighteous judge did not fear. The parable teaches us what faith through prayer looks like when hardship drags on with no end in sight. Our faith must press on in prayer, without giving up in the face of obstacles, because God is there and will act according to His good purpose and timing.

The widow in this parable is the victim, the paradigm of helplessness as often is the case throughout the Bible. She is destitute with no male friends to help her plead her case in court. So she must go to court herself to settle the dispute, which was most likely to do with inheritance. She is an individual with all the odds stacked against her. The purpose of the parable, which is stated upfront, is to be in prayer like the widow in her persistence. The widow had many obstacles to perseverance, and it was easy to be demoralized and give up. Can we be as persistent in prayer when we face obstacles, or even when it seems that God is not answering our prayers? Many of us pray for the salvation of our loved ones, but we may not see them come to Christ until the end of their lives. We don't know when or how God will answer, but can we trust Him and continue to pray? This perseverance not only applies to prayer but also to every aspect of Christian life and ethics. Can you remain faithful to your spouse even if the marriage falls short of your expectations? Can you remain faithful to God when the world calls on you to abandon your values? For us one of the main things that pulls us away from faith is popular culture, but in many places government persecution puts severe pressure on Christians. The Chinese government is cracking down on house churches, and the church I served for the last fifteen years was just forcibly shut down. The government is banning college students from participating in any extracurricular religious activities. So students now are feeling pressure from

schools and even more from their parents to abandon the faith. In the midst of these obstacles, this parable exhorts believers to persist.

The second character in the parable is the unjust judge. In the ancient world community opinion would shame public figures into behaving right. But we see this judge doesn't care about what the public thinks, nor does he care what God thinks. Despite his wickedness, he eventually grants the widow justice just to get rid of the headache and annoyance of her constant appeals. Jesus' argument here is that if even a wicked judge will grant justice to the persistent widow, then how much more should the righteous Judge in heaven do likewise to those who are persistent in prayer. Do we trust God to bring justice, and do we pray for it? Though we may not be wronged in such a manner as the widow, we should still pray for justice in a broader sense. How much do you pray for social justice? Do you care enough to meet the needs of the oppressed? Whether or not we agree with him, we should pray even for the president, that God will guide him to lead justly. The members of the house church I served in China prayed even for their government leaders, that they may be saved, even though it seems impossible. Today it seems like injustice is prevailing around the world, but ultimately we must still pray and trust that God's sovereign purpose will be accomplished.

Finally, the parable teaches us about God, that He will not let injustice stand forever. Ultimately justice will be restored when Jesus returns to abolish all evil. Some prayers may not be answered until the day Jesus returns. But all wrongs will eventually be made right. Can you rely on this promise after two millennia? 2 Peter 3:8-9 says that to God 1000 years is like a day. This is a quote from Psalm 90:4, which was used by Jews to explain why the Day of the Lord had not yet arrived. Peter goes on to say that God keeps us waiting in order that more people may turn to Him, because once Jesus returns, the door will be closed forever for even one person to be saved. God has His reasons for delaying, but it is not for us to comprehend. The question for us, as v. 8 says, is will He find faith when He returns? Will we persevere no matter how long it takes? We may not understand His purpose, but let us be challenged to persevere in faith even in the face of enormous obstacles.