

NEVER GIVE UP!

Luke 18:1-8 Text vss. 4-5 *“For some time he refused. But finally, he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me.’”*

Three weeks ago I concluded my sermon by saying, *“It’s where you put your faith that makes you a winner, because ‘Righteousness comes from God. And it is by faith.’”* If you were listening, you realized **you** can become a winner! **By your faith!** And in our lesson today Jesus told a parable to reinforce that! It’s about prayer. Persistent prayer. Stubborn prayer. Prayer that inspires you to *“pray always”*, even in the face of injustice. When you’re stubborn in your prayers, your prayers become effective. When you spend more time *praying* about something, instead of *complaining* about something, that’s when something begins to happen! Paul Miller took five of his six children camping up in the Pennsylvania mountains. His wife Jill stayed home with their eight-year-old daughter Kim. Paul and his children were getting ready to head home from camping when his fourteen-year-old daughter, Ashley, lost her contact lens. The forest floor was covered with leaves and twigs making a million places for her contact lens to have disappeared. Paul said, “Ashley, don’t move. Let’s pray.” And before he could pray, Ashley burst into tears. “What good will that do? I’ve prayed for my little sister Kim to be able speak, and she still hasn’t. I’ve given up!” Little Kim suffered from autism and what’s called “developmental delay.” Because of her health problems, she was speechless. Ashley had prayed for Kim to be able to speak, but nothing happened. So, Ashley had stopped taking God at His word, which is, *“Ask and it will be given you.”* There are a lot of people like that who share Ashley’s cynicism about prayer. It seems nothing ever happens! However, not everyone says their doubts out loud like Ashley, because to doubt prayer, is to doubt God.

And in our lesson this morning, the widow in Jesus’ parable was desperate! About what? She wanted Justice! *“Grant me justice against my opponent!”* She didn’t say, *“I want my money!”* She didn’t say, *“I want my house!”* Or *“That thing belongs to me!”* No! She said, *“Give me justice!”* And how did she get it? By being persistent! Being stubborn! She refused to give up! She used her stubbornness to deal with a judge who was concerned only with what concerned him. He made decisions out of convenience to himself. He had no moral compass! And the widow? She was among the least influential in the community. She had no influence with that judge. No political ties. No real advantage. She didn’t try to bribe him. So, she became a nuisance to him! And he dismissed her again, and again as she reappeared in his court pleading her case.

Understand, in matters of law at that time, women were considered differently from men. Women rarely appeared in a court of law. Being a widow may have gained her some sympathy. It may have allowed her to enter the presence of the judge. But this judge was not interested in her case. She was a pain in the neck him! So, rather than have her continually appearing before him and asking to be heard, he just took her case and decided it because she was stubborn enough to stay until she was heard. And that’s where Jesus made a dramatic turn in telling His parable. His listeners were probably all on the widow’s side. But Jesus said, *“If an unjust judge will listen to a persistent widow’s case, don’t you think God will hear yours? Don’t you think He will bring about justice to those He has chosen who cry out to Him day and night?”* Or does God just drag things out so that you will give up? But wait! Listen to verse 8. It’s great! Because Jesus said, *“I tell you He will bring about justice for them speedily.”*

Have you ever wondered how God manages all the prayers sent to Him? Is He really capable of sorting the important from the unimportant? Does God have time to care about me and my life? Well, most live as though God doesn’t have the time to care or listen to them, so they don’t bother Him with prayer. But if you really believe God listens to your prayers, you must take prayer more seriously. However, most only get serious about prayer when times get tough. When the going gets rough! Prayer becomes serious when terrorists are coming over our open borders. When our troops go off to war. When there’s talk about nuclear holocaust. Inflation. Recession. Hurricanes. But closer to home, prayer becomes serious when you find yourself in a desperate situation. You get sick. Your spouse or child gets sick. You lose your job. Your future is uncertain due to illness. The point Jesus was making here was about persistence. He said this widow found the secret of how to handle a reluctant judge through stubbornness, which is defined as *persistent determination not to change one’s attitude or position on something*. And Jesus said, *“God is not like that judge. If you want God’s power, you will find it by continuous prayer.”*

And you know, at times we all feel like victims. There are forces far greater than we can control. We feel overwhelmed by inescapable problems. But Jesus said there’s a way to get out of that! There’s a way to a solving your problems. There’s an answer to unbearable pressure. It’s found in prayer! When you speak to the heart of God, He will answer your prayers. Jesus said, *God’s not like that unrighteous judge*. You don’t have to attack God. God will do something on your behalf! Sometimes God delays answering your prayers in order to test your faith. He wants to see if you really trust Him. Sometimes God delays so you can change your request. Over time, you may see your original request wasn’t quite

right as you understand the situation better. You may want to modify your prayer. Make it more in line with God's will. Sometimes God delays so you can develop your faith, strength, trust, and patience in order for you to be obedient to His Will. That may come after you wait patiently and trust God's timing. His answers to your prayer may be "Yes." "No." Or "Wait." A lot of spiritual improvements come through pain, hurt, struggles, confusion, and disappointment.

This parable is teaching you the importance of being persistent in prayer while trusting God for the right outcome. The widow said, "*Grant me justice from my adversary!*" She knew what she wanted! And you need to be just as specific when you pray. Specific prayers help focus your faith, so that in the end you will be able to understand God's answers to your prayers. When the great tenor Luciano Pavarotti died, it was said that as a young boy he wanted to be a soccer player. But his mother wanted him to become a teacher. He taught for two years. Then one night, as an understudy for an opera singer at the local theater, he stepped into the role and performed. He quit teaching the next day. A legend was born! Not a soccer legend. Not a teaching legend. But a singing legend. See, you can dream. But you may find God has an even better dream for you.

Yes, God may have something better for you. Ruth Graham, Billy Graham's wife said, "*If God answered every prayer of mine when I was dating, I would have married the wrong man. Seven times!*" And in another story, "*Two blind men followed Jesus, and calling out to Him said, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!' When He had gone indoors, the blind men came to Him. He asked them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' 'Yes, Lord,' they replied. Then He touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith, let it be done to you.'*" (Mt. 9:27-29) And do you believe He can do what you ask? If Jesus came into this room, right now, and said to you, "*what do you want?*" What would you say to Him? What is it you want God to do for you? Do you believe He is able to do it? How big is your God? Is He big enough for your dream? If not, and you still lack faith that God can fulfill your dream, tell Him about it. Remember, the apostles said, "*Lord, increase our faith!*" And one thing is for certain. Your most powerful prayers are connected to the promises of God. When you know you're praying the promises of God, you can pray with confidence. It's the difference between praying on *thin ice* and praying on *solid ground*. It's the difference between praying a *tentative* prayer and being *stubborn* in your prayer. You don't have to second-guess God. You know God wants you to double-click on His promises, just as you double-click on your computer, or cellphone when you are sure you've found what you're looking for.

There's an old truism: *God said it. I believe it. And that settles it!* Here's a fresh take on that: *God said it, I've clicked on it. And that settles it!* It was settled when Jesus died on the cross and said, "*It is finished!*" He wasn't just making the final payment on your sin debt. It was the down payment on all of His promises. No matter how many promises God has made, they all are answered "Yes" in Christ. What promises do you need to click? It starts with changing the way you read your Bible. Because the Bible wasn't meant to be *read* through. The Bible was meant to be *prayed* through. If you pray through your Bible, you'll never run out of promises to click, because the Bible is a *promise* book. But the Bible is also a *prayer* book. Reading is *reactive*. Prayer is *proactive*. Reading is the way you get *through* the Bible. Prayer is the way you get the Bible *through you*. As you pray, the Holy Spirit will speed up promises to your spirit. It's difficult to predict what, when, where, and how. But over time, *God's* promises will become *your* promises. Click His promises with a pen, or pencil, in your hand. Don't be afraid to mark them down in your Bible. Because a Bible that's falling apart, belongs to someone who isn't! And always remember, when you pray, never give up! AMEN