

## "The Unjust Judge"

by  
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*"Then he spoke a parable to them ,  
that men always ought to pray and not to faint."  
Luke 18:1*

The purpose for which this parable was spoken is made plain. The inspired writer distinctly announces the object for which Jesus used it, namely to show "that men ought always to pray and not to faint." And the parable is both an illustration and the basis of an argument.

It will be well here, at the outset, to note particularly the special object for which the parable was framed, to guard it from misapprehension. It was not meant to teach us everything about prayer. For instance, it does not teach us in whose name our prayers must be offered up. Neither does it instruct concerning the things which we may ask, and ought to ask, in prayer; nor concerning the shape which our prayers must take. All these things and such things as these are repeatedly taught and made abundantly plain in other portions of the scriptures.

The main point, and I may say the only point, concerning prayer which this parable touches is perseverance therein. This is the point which Christ wished to inculcate and for the illustration and enforcement of which He used this parable. He spake this "parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint." This does not mean that we are required to be engaged in prayer in the manifest attitude and exercise of it always, that is, every moment of our lives. It means that we must persevere in it, never give it up entirely, but have stated and occasional seasons for prayer, and never desist until we obtain the blessing; in short, till we make our departure from this life and find admission into the kingdom that is "undefiled and that fadeth never away." It may be seen that the unfortunate widow was not always before the judge, but that she came again and again till she obtained her request. It was her "continual coming" that influenced the judge to grant her petition. In like manner, it is our continual coming that is meant by praying always and not fainting. This shall be made plainer as we proceed with the exposition.

This parable brings two characters or persons before us--a judge and a widow. Look at each of them. This judge lived in a certain city, and acted probably as a deputy in the capacity of a judge. He was a bad man. He "neither feared God nor regarded man," no doubt like a good many of this class in countries where the machinery of government is in a more advanced state of organization than it was among eastern nations and in ancient times. In the discharge of the duties of his office, this judge was actuated solely by selfish motives. He consulted his own ease and aggrandizement, and was not scrupulous about the means and methods by which he endeavored to secure these.

It will be noticed, therefore, that this judge in his general character was far from resembling God. In his general character, and his ordinary procedure as judge, he stood out in marked contrast to God, who is always good and who always does right. And it was indeed on account of the contrast between him and God in his general character that this particular

instance in his judicial procedure became a parable in the hands of Jesus Christ. But this circumstance, instead of weakening, only strengthens the conclusion drawn and the application made by the Great Teacher. This we shall see more clearly by and by. So far as the narrative describes him, this man resembled God in nothing but the one thing, namely, that in this instance he listened to the prayer of the widow and granted her petition, being overcome by her importunity and perseverance.

Look now at the widow. It is said that the state of widowhood in the east is one of great desolation and of consequent exposure to all manner of oppression. And indeed, generally, we may attach ideas of weakness, desolation, and defencelessness to widowhood.

This particular widow was suffering oppression. She had become the victim of the cruelty of some in human adversary. It is not indeed stated in so many words that her cause was just and that her adversary, who might be called her opponent--that being a correct rendering of the Greek term--was guilty of oppressing her. But we readily gather from the tone of the narrative that this was the case; that she was the victim of oppression. She was a weak, helpless, defenceless woman suffering wrong from the hand of an adversary from whom she could not deliver herself.

And here we have in the widow's adversary a third character that is indirectly brought to view. This adversary no doubt represents the devil. He is the adversary of men. He is an adversary that "walketh about seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). He puts temptations in the way of men. He raises annoyances about them, and he is continually busy with his schemes and plans to frustrate the gospel of the Son of God and to ruin the souls of men. And although it is true that men are fallen and corrupt and have much personal sin to answer for, it is also true that much of the evil that surrounds them and of the misery which they endure is the direct result of the wiles and stratagems and oppressing power of the devil, so that they need the wisdom of a higher intelligence than their own and the strength of a more powerful arm than their own to deliver them.

But what did the widow do in view of the oppression which she was suffering? She went to the judge and begged him to take her part and defend her. She said, "Avenge me of mine adversary." The judge gave no heed for a while. He was careless about her, for he was a man of no principle. He "neither feared God nor regarded man." But she persevered. She kept coming and presenting her petition on every suitable occasion, and, as it would seem, whenever he appeared in public. She came so often that it became quite evident that the annoyance which she gave him would continue for an indefinite period. This made him think; this made him uneasy. And "he said within himself, Though I fear not God nor regard man, yet because this woman troubleth me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me."

This man avowed his ungodliness and inhumanity. He was not ashamed to say in his soliloquy, "I fear not God nor regard man." Neither his fear of God nor his zeal for justice would move him to maintain the cause of a poor oppressed widow. He did not care for her. But lest her continual coming should weary him, he resolved to avenge her of her adversary. It was her importunity and perseverance that gained for her the victory. The only thing on which her success rested was her importunity, her perseverance, her determination not to give up till she obtained her request. Everything else about the character of the judge seems to have been against her, save his sensitiveness to the annoyance of persevering and deter-

mined importunity. But this one thing made the oppressed widow successful in her attempts to find redress for her wrongs.

And now let us see how Jesus reasons out of this case--His lesson concerning the necessity and power of importunity and perseverance in our prayers to God. "And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." Here is an argument from the weaker to the stronger; an argument *a fortiori*, as the logicians call it; an argument in which reason assures us that if a certain proposition is true, much more evident and clear is the truth of another proposition of an analogous kind, but based manifestly upon stronger grounds. Here was an unjust judge, a man that lacked piety towards God and generosity towards men; a widow who could not move him by conviction that she had any claim upon him, or that it was his duty to trouble himself with her affairs, [who] besought him to redress her wrongs. No plea could move him; he resisted every appeal. But she persevered, she was importunate, she continued clamouring out her petition. And at last the judge yielded to the importunity and perseverance which annoyed him, and he maintained her cause. And shall not God hear prayer and avenge His own elect? Assuredly He will; much more certainly He will, for He is good, merciful, kind; and He has appointed prayer. He directs men to make their requests known to Him, and He promises to hear and answer the importunate persevering prayer of faith. Shall not God hear and avenge His own elect, whom His Son has redeemed, and whom He Himself delights to save? He may bear with them long. He may long delay His answer, but at last it will come. "I tell you," saith Christ, laying emphasis upon it, "that he will avenge them speedily."

Brethren, let me urge on you the duty of perseverance and importunity in prayer. It is a necessary and important duty; a duty which is enjoined in various parts of the scriptures besides my text. Take the following passages as examples: "*I will therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*" (I Tim. 2:8). "*Pray without ceasing*" (I Thess. 5:17). "*Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*" (Phil. 4:6). "*Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened*" (Matt7:7, 8).

But before I proceed to urge the duty of perseverance and importunity in prayer, there is a prior question which I would like you to answer, namely, Do you pray at all? It is vain to endeavor to urge perseverance in prayer on a man that has never learned to pray in right earnest at all. It is necessary to begin to pray before the question of perseverance is at all appropriate. And I am very much afraid that there are several here that live without prayer from day to day and from week to week--in fact, that have never learned to pray at all.

To all such, let me say, I hope you will not think me uncharitable when I declare my fear that you are living "without God and without hope in the world." In fact, that you are in the "bonds of iniquity," your sins unforgiven and your souls unregenerate and unsaved. I cannot see the ground for believing anything more favorable concerning you that live without prayer.

But let me ask you, Why do you not pray? Have you any valid reason for neglecting this important duty? I have no doubt you have excuses, but what are they worth? Are they

worth anything? Will they stand the scrutiny of your consciences or the tests of scripture? I am sure that you have been counselled to pray, and that your consciences have told you once and again that you ought to pray; but you have silenced them. You are sinners accountable to God, and can you afford to neglect prayer? You are, in fact, on the road to ruin, and can there be any valid excuse for your neglecting to pray for deliverance? Surely not.

Do you not believe that there is a God who hears prayer, and with whom you have to do? It may be that you have atheistical and sceptical proclivities. Well, there was once a French poet who professed to be an atheist and who could ridicule religion on dry land and during fair weather. But he was once caught in a storm at sea. The ship became unmanageable. For a time all hope of being saved was lost, and the storm scattered all the fine-spun speculations of the infidel to the winds, and he could be seen among a group of terrified and praying people, some of whom were Catholics who diligently counted their beads, and none more lustily prayed and cried to God for deliverance than he did.

But perhaps that is not your trouble. I suppose you are ready to acknowledge the doctrine of God's existence, which none but an arrant fool will deny, and that also you believe the truth of revelation in a general way. Then why do you not pray? Have you no sins to confess and for which you need forgiveness? Alas, you have a multitude of them! Oh pray for pardon through the blood of Jesus! Have you no gratitude to God to express? How can you express it without prayer?

But you have excuses. Well, what are they? Do you say that you are not worthy to be permitted to pray to God? Unworthy! Why, that is one of the great reasons why you should pray. You are unworthy, [so] then ask God to give you an interest in the blood and righteousness of Jesus. This unworthiness of yours will ruin you unless you be delivered from it.

Do you say that you do not feel your spiritual need sufficiently, and that you think you must avoid prayer till you feel your sins more and your wants more? You do not feel; that may be so. That is a bad state to be in; and if you are conscious of it, pray to be delivered from it. Instead of offering an excuse for neglect, it ought to be an incentive to prayer. Ask God to give you feeling and sense, and an anxiety about your soul's salvation.

Or perhaps your excuse is that you do not see that prayer does so much good to those that follow it, that you are as good as they are. And do you think that such an excuse is of any value? You look at others, you see so many faults in them. You are, in fact, an accuser of the brethren. You say they are hypocrites, and that you will be no hypocrite. And will you dare to appear before God and say to Him, "I was no hypocrite. I did not profess to serve Thee at all. I did not profess to love, I did not profess to pray to Thee, and I was no hypocrite. I was just what I appeared to be--a man without love to God, without religion, without prayer." Will such presumption and audacity save you? I beseech you, continue in them no longer. Humble yourself before God at once and pray for pardon.

Prayerless one, your excuses are all flimsy. They cannot bear examination. I beseech you, cast them from you. Neglect prayer no longer. Call on God. Knock at the door of mercy. Come to Him as you are, depending on the death of His own Son for acceptance.

And you, brethren, who avail yourselves of the privilege of prayer, let me urge to perseverance in this duty. "Pray without ceasing," "Continuing instant in prayer," are exhortations of the inspired word to believers. You may sometimes be tempted to "restrain prayer before God." From the lying suggestions of Satan, or the natural unbelief of your own deceitful and wicked heart, or the influence of the business and cares of the world, you may feel indisposed to go into the presence of God. But let not such influences hold you back. Trust the Saviour's word that, "Every one that asketh receiveth," and yield not to the doubting thoughts or feelings of indifference that rise within you.

Perhaps you are discouraged from not finding the degree of success in prayer which you expected, and for that reason are tempted to give up the duty. The teaching of the Lord in the parable which we have been considering is intended to meet this very case. He spake it to this end--that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." You see in the result of the widow's perseverance what will be your happy experience if you follow her example. The Lord may "bear long" in your case, to prove that you are one of "His elect," to exercise the grace that is in you by your "crying day and night unto Him." He may wait till you have a keener sense of your own helplessness and a higher sense of the value of His grace; that you may be more deeply humbled and that He may be more highly exalted in your estimation; but rich will be your experience in the end if you continue to wait on Him. *"Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted that he may have mercy upon you; for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him"* (Is. 30:18). Study the prayers that you find in scripture. Make yourselves so familiar with the inspired word that you can not only use the examples of prayer recorded there, but that you can also turn its doctrines, precepts and promises into prayer. That was the practice which I found very profitable when I was a beginner.

And you on whom devolves the difficult work of the management of households, [you] need to be much exercised in prayer both for them and with them. *"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."* And in order to be successful, your prayers and endeavours must be in the same direction. Your manner of life must be consistent, and you must diligently use the means through which your prayers are to receive their fulfilment. If you pray "not to be led into temptation," do not show your insincerity by willingly going into it, but carefully avoid the places and persons from which it is likely to arise. If you pray for the conversion of your children, let your walk before them, your intercourse with them, and the instruction you give them be all in the direction of that happy result. If you ask for the success of the Lord's cause, labor for its advancement. Use faithfully the means which may have been put in your power for promoting it. Recommend it by the holiness and happiness of your life. In suitable opportunities sustain it by the confession of the mouth, and contribute liberally of your worldly substance for maintaining the operations by which it is extended in the world. Whatever may be the chief object of your prayer, take care that you do not shut out the blessing by closing the channel through which it is to come.

Sermon XIX of Part I, "The Unjust Judge," by Neil McKinnon in Dugald Currie, *Sermons by the Late Rev. Neil McKinnon* (Toronto: James Bain & Son, 1889). Note: The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized.