



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
Dr. Rob White – Senior Minister
<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: On Not Taking "No" for an Answer!

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Christ calls us to pray persistently in the faith that God will grant justice to those who cry to him day and night.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 18:1-8

Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 18, verses 1 to 8.

Starting at verse 1:

He then told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not become discouraged:

“There was a judge in a certain town who didn't fear God or respect man.

And a widow in that town kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’

“For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, ‘Even though I don't fear God or respect man,

yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice, so she doesn't wear me out by her persistent coming.’”

Then the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says.

Will not God grant justice to His elect who cry out to Him day and night? Will He delay to help them?

I tell you that He will swiftly grant them justice. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find that faith on earth?"

-- May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!

-- I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

-- I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

Some years ago, Mother Teresa planned a visit to the office of super-lawyer Edward Bennett Williams in Washington D.C. Her purpose was to enlist Williams' assistance in building a hospice for AIDS patients.

Williams had learned the purpose of Mother Teresa's visit beforehand. He confided to his friend, Paul Dietrich, that AIDS was not his favorite charity. They then worked on a polite refusal, which Williams practiced before Mother Teresa's arrival.

When Mother Teresa arrived, she made her proposal. Williams very nicely but very firmly said that he was sorry but he could not help. Mother Teresa said, "Let us pray," and bowed her head. Williams rolled his eyes, but he bowed his head. Mother Teresa prayed.

After her prayer, Mother Teresa once again asked Williams for money to build the AIDS hospice. She made exactly the same appeal that she had made before her prayer. Williams again politely but firmly told her that he was sorry but he couldn't help. Mother Teresa said, "Let us pray." Williams rolled his eyes again, but what was he going to do! He bowed his head again as Mother Teresa prayed.

Williams saw the handwriting on the wall. Mother Teresa had him trapped in his own office. Finally, when she ended her prayer, Williams said, "All right! All right!" and pledged his support to her cause.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus tells a story rather like that. A widow came to a judge, asking for justice. The problem was that this was a wicked judge who cared nothing about God or anyone else. His only concern was his own welfare. The rich and powerful could count on a full hearing in his court. All else need not apply.

The widow was the opposite of rich and powerful. When her husband had died, she had lost her income and her property. She had nothing and, as far as everyone was concerned, she was nothing. She could not expect any help from the wicked judge, but she expected it anyway. She demanded justice day after day, and would not take "no" for an answer.

Finally, the wicked judge said:

**"Though I neither fear God, nor respect man,
yet because this widow bothers me, I will defend her,
or else she will wear me out by her continual coming" (vv. 4-5).**

In other words, "I'll do whatever it takes to get this woman off my back."

Jesus said, "**Won't God avenge his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night?**" (v. 7). In other words, "If a wicked judge will grant justice to those who ask, won't our loving Father do the same?"

- Have you ever prayed and despaired of an answer?
- Have you ever gone through tough times that seemed that they would never end?
- Have you ever felt that you were at the end of your rope?
- Have you ever wondered if God cares?

If so, this parable is for you! It's a parable of promise!

- It promises that God is there!
- It promises that God cares!
- It promises that God answers prayer!
- It promises that God will vindicate the person who continues to pray through the tough times—the person who continues to hope—the person who clings to faith.

I must admit that, within that context of promise, there are problems. God does not answer every prayer as we ask. God does not answer prayer according to our timetable. Christians, in this life, suffer just like everyone else. Sometimes the good guys appear to be losing and the bad guys appear to be winning.

But there is something else at work here too. God does not always give us what we want when we want it. God allows us to suffer—sometimes terribly. But, if we would have it be so, God is with us every step of the way. God walks with us even through the valley of the shadow of death.

God sent his son into the world to share our burden and our suffering. Jesus walked our walk—and shared our temptations—shared our pain—and even shared our death. The Christ who endured the cross promises that God will "**avenge his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night.**"

Jesus knew that was true. He experienced the full measure of God's faithfulness and love:

- Jesus experienced God's faithfulness on the night he was born—born into a sinful world to redeem the world and make it whole. How could a tiny baby, born in a stable in a backwater country, save the world—but he did.
- Jesus experienced God's help as he walked the dusty roads of Israel—healing the sick and raising the dead.
- Jesus experienced God's help as he faced Pilate's questioning without fear.
- And Jesus especially experienced God's redeeming help on Easter Sunday, when God broke the bonds of death—not only for Jesus but also for those who would believe in him.
- Jesus experienced God's help when he rose from the grave.
- Jesus experienced God's help when he went through a locked door to rejoin his disciples in the upper room.

- Jesus experienced God's help when he met with the unbelieving disciples who were suddenly transformed by his presence into pillars of strength and paragons of faith.
- Jesus experienced God's help when he forgave Peter for Peter's three-time betrayal—and saw klutzy Peter turn into a fiery apostle.
- Jesus experienced God's help when he showed his hands and feet to Thomas—Doubting Thomas—and heard Thomas say, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

We ought to know something of God's help too, because we have seen it in the lives of prayerful people.

We've seen people of faith bear great burdens and great sorrows with great strength. We've seen people who had every reason to be defeated but who, instead, were full of faith and full of joy. That kind of faith is a gift of God—a gift that God wants to give to every one of us.

Many years ago, a Christian wrote a poem that we need to hear. Before he wrote it, he had suffered—and he had prayed—and he had struggled with the fact that God had not answered his prayers in exactly the way he had asked. He said:

I asked God for strength that I might achieve;
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for help that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy;
I was given poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I was given nothing that I asked for;
But I was given everything that I had hoped for.

Despite myself, my prayers were answered;
I am among all people most richly blessed.

The story is told of a not-very-successful salesman who asked a successful salesman the secret of his success. The successful salesman said, "There's no great secret. You just have to keep jumping at every opportunity that comes along." The first salesman said, "But how do you know when an opportunity is coming?" The successful salesman responded, "You don't! You just have to keep jumping!"

Our parable tells us that there's a spiritual truth here. We cannot predict the moment that God will bless us. We cannot predict the moment that God will vindicate us. But, as we keep praying, we keep the channel of blessing open, ready to receive God's blessings. This parable of the widow and the wicked

judge is Jesus' promise that, if we keep the channel open, God will use it to bless us—not always as we want—not always as we ask—but better than we could ever imagine.

But, while prayer would seem to be the easiest of disciplines, it often comes hard for us. Martin Luther once noticed his dog sitting near the table, watching Luther eat. The dog sat there motionless with unblinking eyes, watching Luther move food from his plate to his mouth. Reflecting on the dog's persistent gaze, Luther said:

"Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat!
All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat.
Otherwise he has no thought, wish or hope."

- Don't you wish that you could pray like Luther's dog watched the meat!
- Don't you wish you could pray with that kind of intensity!
- Don't you wish you could rattle heaven's gates and awaken God to hear your cries of distress!
- Don't you wish that you could pray like the dog watched the meat! I do!

But we can. We can pray fervently. We can pray persistently. We can say, "God, hear my prayer"—and have the assurance that he will do that.

Joseph Scriven was a man acquainted with grief. Born in County Down, Ireland, he aspired as a young man to follow in his father's footsteps as a Royal Marine, but his poor health made that impossible. Then he fell in love and was engaged to be married, but his fiancée drowned before their wedding could take place.

To put as much distance as possible between himself and that tragedy, Scriven then moved to Canada. While living there, he became engaged again, but his fiancée became ill and died before they could be married.

In his grief, Scriven determined to devote himself to a life of service. He was especially known for carrying a bucksaw and cutting firewood for people in need.

Scriven received word that his mother was ill. He couldn't afford to return to Ireland, so he sent his mother a poem in the hope that it would comfort her. The poem began, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!" He later submitted a copy of his poem to a religious journal, where it was published. A few years later, in 1866, he died.

But his poem lived on in ways that he could never have imagined. Ira Sankey, a musician who worked with Dwight L. Moody, published it in a book of hymns, and Moody had it sung in his evangelistic meetings. Soon "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" was one of the best-known hymns in America. Missionaries took it abroad, where people sang it in many languages.

This hymn has maintained its popularity for a century and a half—probably because a man acquainted with grief—who happened also to be acquainted with faith—helps us to see that faith can triumph over grief.

- If we can watch a football game with every ounce of our being, we can learn to pray like the dog watched the meat.
- If we can pursue a hobby with every resource at our disposal, we can learn to pursue God persistently in prayer.
- If we can have faith in a politician—or a coach—or a teacher—or our spouse—we can certainly have faith in the God who gave us life—and who made it possible for us to awaken this morning to a new day.
- If we can pay rapt attention to a sunrise or a sunset, we can learn to pray like Luther's dog watched the meat.

Let us be a people of persistent prayer so that we might become a people of perpetual blessing!

-- That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

-- Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! -- For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

-- Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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