

Don't Stop...and Start!

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 18, if you've ever prayed about a matter so long that you just want to quit praying about it, this message is for you.

If your prayer lacks faithful endurance, this message is for you.

If you talk about it more than you do it, this prayer is for you. If you ever struggled in praying over something, this message is for you.

If none of that applies to you, this message is for you. Because you're not honest about your prayer life. Too hardened to see the struggle.

So regardless, I believe this message is for you. And me. It's in Luke chapter 18, beginning in verse 1. And it says, And Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

[1 : 20] He said in a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, Give me justice against my adversary.

For a while he refused. But afterward he said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor respect man, Yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I'll give her justice.

So that she will not beat me down by her continual coming. And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge says.

And will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? Last week I shared with you a parable that I was preaching from that I told you would you be difficult.

[2 : 32] It was difficult and one that seldom was preached on because of its difficulty. And some of you told me afterwards that you'd never heard a sermon on that parable. And if I preach that again in a couple of years, which I probably won't, but if I did, you'd probably come back to me and say, I've never heard a sermon on that parable before.

This one is tough too, but for, and for some of the same reason. So I want to clarify something immediately so that you know, and then we can get on to how to apply this to our life.

God's not in this story. Don't misunderstand me. See, the story is from God. And Jesus told the story, but God's not a character in Jesus's story.

The judge in this story is not God. God's nothing like this judge. I want to show you that, and I want to show you the difference between God and this judge and see why that difference ought to impact our prayer lives.

First thing I want you to see is the nature of God. The nature of God. This judge that Jesus describes in this story is godless, and he's either an egomaniac or a sociopath.

[4 : 00] Because Jesus states that he didn't care about God or about people, and then he knew it about himself as well. He couldn't care less about this woman's problems, but she wears him down.

So he acts toward her as he should, but not because he cares, and not because he's concerned, not because he's determined that fairness and justice must reign supreme.

To be honest, he's just tired of her. It's not worth it to him to not respond. Who cares anyway?

It's his attitude. It's the same effort that any child makes when he wants a snack or she wants a toy. And the thought is I'll make my parents as miserable as possible until I get what I want.

I have two girls, and I'm pretty soft sometimes. I'm not saying give in to it because that's a sermon for another day, but I'm saying this judge said just hush already, and I'll do it.

[5 : 17] And that may sound like a parent from time to time. But that's this judge. That's not God. God expects us to ask.

God tells us to ask. James chapter 4 verse 2 and 3 says, you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly. The nature of God is nothing like this man's sinful nature.

I'll tell you another difference between God and this judge is the justice of God. The justice of God. There were two kinds of judges in this culture.

There was an orthodox judge in the tradition of Moses. And there's a wonderful story, true story, in Exodus chapter 18, when Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, comes to see Moses.

[6 : 30] He makes a visit. And he sees Moses being pushed and pulled every way as he tries to adjudicate every conflict that the people of God had amongst each other.

All of them would come to Moses. And it literally says that it went from morning until night. Moses was constantly hearing of these conflicts and making a judgment on each one.

And Jethro saw it, watched it, and said, and you got to look deep into Hebrew to see this, dude, you got to chill. You're going to wear out.

You can't do this. You need to develop a court system that covers small numbers of people. And then when there's a problem with that, let them go to the next level.

And if there's a problem with that, let them go to the next level. He gave specific instructions, and Moses followed his advice. And then only the cases, the only cases he saw were those Supreme Court-type cases, those ones that could not be handled otherwise.

[7 : 41] Based upon that system, there were judges that upheld the law of Moses and its principles. But there's another judge that was common in this day, and that was an appointed Roman judge.

They were appointed by Rome, appointed by Herod, and they worked without pay from the government. They made the verdict that they needed to make in order to make a living.

A good living. And so, it's very possibly that kind of judge that this widow, who on the other hand has no clout at all, in that atmosphere, in that society, poor and powerless, typically, she would be desperate.

And this situation sounds financial, and she wants or needs someone to pay up. And there is desperation in what she says.

I mean, she wants somebody, the original language is very clear about this, somebody to pay. And that could be somewhat vindictive, and it could be somewhat in need.

[9 : 03] Quite honestly, if you get hungry enough, it's hard to tell the difference. You just need the matter taken care of. And so, she asked again, and again, and again, and the judge gives her what she wants, not for the sake of justice, but because he does not want to be beat down by the lady.

That's a boxing term there. It can be interpreted as, I don't want her to give me a black eye. I don't want her to make me look bad.

She keeps following me around, begging me, and I keep not responding to that. She could hurt my reputation. So, he acted quickly to make her go away.

Not anything to do with justice. Just make her go away. Because remember, he has no fear of God, nor does he care for people. He's self-centered, and he makes the decision for his sake.

So, don't ever get confused here. This judge is not God, and does not represent God, because God loves us, and cannot, we cannot beat him down.

[10 : 23] He's not concerned about us beating him down. We can't give God a black eye. Neither can anybody else, by the way. God's motive is not escape.

God's motive is not to get us to hush, not giving us what we want, or not to be intimidated, or not to be bothered. God's motive is just. It's fair.

It's right. It's his will. And this godless, disrespectful Roman judge did something good for this poor lady.

If she, if he would do that, how much more would a loving, just God do something for us? I want you to listen to what Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 7, 7 through 11, about making a request to God.

He says, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you.

[11 : 30] For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father, who is in heaven, give good gifts to those who ask

him?

In other words, folks, listen to me. Bring it to him. Whatever it is, he knows what's right.

He'll get it right every time. You can rest in that because God is just. I'll tell you another difference between this judge and God.

And that is the timing of God. At first, for a time, this judge refused to give the lady her request.

[12:49] And her persistence dragged him down to the point where he just gave in. Again, I want you to know that that's not how God works. God wants us to pray.

God wants us to pursue. And he don't want us to stop praying. He is working in us as we pray.

But he will not be dragged down by our prayers. God moves when and as God chooses to move.

And one of the great difficulties that we have when we seek the Lord in prayer is the timing of God.

We just can't figure it out. We just can't get it. Because when we pray for something, we want it and it'd be best if we have confirmation immediately.

We want it now. We want it our way. But that's not how God works. God purposely delays.

[14:03] His delay keeps us before him. His delay teaches us patience.

You don't have to, I don't like when people say don't pray for patience because God's going to whoop you like a dog. I just don't like that kind of dog. It's the fruit of the spirit. We ought to have it. I'll just tell you this. And some, some of our fruit and patience is not that, not that rosy. But I'll just tell you this.

If you'll pray about matters consistently before God, he'll teach you patience. You don't have to pray for it. Just pray for the matters that are burdensome to you because God's has a purposeful delay that teaches us patience.

His, his delay matures our faith because we're trusting him. God responds on, on his schedule.

[15:05] God does not respond on our schedule. And we can become as frustrated as we want to and we can yell out and walk out in the backyard and put on a show. God's timing is based upon the will of God and you can rest in that.

And that's tough but it's true for all of us. But you know what? It was true for Christ because in that difficult time, the night of his arrest, he spent that time with the disciples in the upper room and then left there to go to the Garden of Gethsemane on the, on the night of his arrest.

Matthew tells us that he went to pray with Peter, James, and John. Then after praying for a time, he went a little further to pray. And I've heard wonderful sermons preached on, you got to go a little further.

But let me tell you what that really means. It means he walked from here to over there. That's what that means. He got away from them and he went a little further into the garden. And then he came back to them and he found them sleeping.

And then he left them and went back to pray. He came to them again and prayed the same thing.

And again and again and again he sought the Father because he was about to sense and feel the wrath of God of all of our sin that was going to come upon him that night and the separation that he feel and the sin that he would bear.

[16:46] And he struggled in that and he went back to God the Father again and again and again. The Apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh.

He said it was a messenger of Satan. And theologians have tried to figure out forever what that messenger of Satan was. What was that throne of that not throne thorn that thorn of the flesh.

What was that? Was it a physical malty? We know he had a problem with his sight. He even spoke of it. He wrote in large letters because he couldn't see very well. What was it that?

Was it somebody? What was it that just just hung onto him so difficult? He said I prayed about it three times for God to remove it.

Now when I read that I don't believe that was three sentence prayers. I believe we're talking about three seasons of prayer when he took that thing back to God again struggled with that in prayer asking God to remove it and God would not remove it.

[17:58] He never did. He just taught him that God's grace is sufficient regardless of the thorns that we face regardless of the messengers of Satan that pass through our lives whatever they may be.

God's grace is sufficient. When Herod threw Peter in jail the church was earnestly praying for him and late that night miraculously God led Peter out of the jail and he went right to where that church was praying and he knocked on the door and a lady named Rhoda a servant came to the door and

looked out and saw it was Peter and was so shocked that she didn't even let him in she just ran back and told the praying church that he was out there and the church said you're out of your mind he's not out there because we're praying for him to be released and when they opened the door they were amazed because in that case the timing of God was quick quicker than they anticipated listen my friend the timing of God is something that we'll never understand but I'm talking to some people this morning who are going through some stuff

I know a little bit here and there but I don't have a clue I've been doing this long enough to know there's a pain on every pew in this place this morning I don't know what it is I don't have to know what it is God knows what it is and I want you to know you can trust the timing of the Lord he's good for it he can handle it and he enjoys the time that you spend pursuing him in the matters that are heavy upon your heart the timing of God is something that we'll never understand but we must trust I'm going to tell you something else the return of the Lord is certain and it is soon and it could be today we may not leave this building it could be today or it could be after we're all gone and I don't mean from the building

I mean from life we don't know I'll tell you it sure don't look like that's the case but we don't know when he'll return but we do know we do know that he will and we don't know when or how he'll move in answering to our prayers but I can promise you Christ will return and Christ will answer your prayer and it will not be on your or my time schedule but it will be on time because God's always on time I'll tell you one more difference between this judge and God and that is the motive of God you know we worry so much sometimes about what people think of us we don't talk about it but we worry about it you know do they really like me why did they look at me that way

I think I saw them in the aisle in the grocery store and they didn't speak of course I didn't either but does that person look up to us do they think bad of us Eleanor Roosevelt said you wouldn't worry so much about what other people think of you if you realized how seldom they do let me tell you who thinks the world of you and who's always looking out for you and that's God Walter Dixon lived in England he was walking home one day and he passed the home of an elderly lady who had been forced to take on a small child because of a family tragedy her and the child lived in that home and the house was on fire as

[22 : 55] Walter walked by the lady was saved but Walter saw the young boy in an upstairs window as the house was ablaze there was an iron pipe a drainage pipe that came down the side of that building and Walter grabbed onto that pipe and climbed that drainage pipe and rescued the boy but the pipe was burning hot and when he brought the boy back down Walter's hands were gnawed and deformed because of what he had done for that boy several months later the elderly lady died and the community came around that little boy and many of them wanted to adopt him and bring him home one wanted to bring him home because they had lost their own son and they wanted to bring that child home and another wanted to bring him home because they had a farm and they needed a good worker on the farm and they could provide a good living for the boy it was a both and situation and in the midst of these requests Walter

Dixon walked up and he just held up his scarred hands and he was granted the adoption if you ever wonder what Christ thinks of you if you ever wonder what he thinks of your request of him be sure of something he loves you dearly and his motive is his love he cares so much about you that he sent his only son to die in your place John 3 16 and 17 says for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him he loved us so much that he stretched out his arms on a cruel Roman cross and had the equivalent of railroad ties hammered into his hands and Christ died for you and if there's any doubt about his motive you just look at his hands and realize the love that he has for you but I'm thankful today that I can tell you that Christ not only died for you

Christ lives for you as a matter of fact he's making intercession for you the Holy Spirit even interprets our prayers on our behalf Romans 8 26 and 27 says the spirit helps us in our weakness have you ever been weak in prayer has anybody ever struggled with how do I pray about this God do I pray for them to linger for a possible healing or God do I pray that they receive their heavenly reward their struggles and we don't know how to pray for we don't know what to pray for as we ought and the spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words and he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the spirit because the spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God that means I don't have to figure out how to pray God's will I just have to

pray and seek God and the

Holy Spirit knows my heart and he will interpret what I'm trying to say and smooth it out and bring it before the father he will work in you because not because you beg or beat him down but because he loves you don't ever question the nature of God don't ever question the justice of God don't ever question the timing of God or the motive of God instead live in response to that how do we live in response to that that's why he told the parable pray always 1st Timothy 5 chapter 17 says pray without ceasing wow that's a statement ain't it what that means is we live a life of prayer it does not mean that it's absent from having a time set aside just for prayer when everything around us as much as possible gets still and we take time out of our schedule and we book it for the Lord Jesus and lift up our prayers to him prayer but it also means that as we go along the way that we're praying it means when we're in the car by ourself that we we cut off the console we stop worrying about the telephone and we just seek God it means that when somebody comes by and says will you pray for me do it right then if God leads you stop them and say let's do it if you don't pray for them right then so you don't lie and say I'm praying for you and forget about it pray for them and then continue to pray for them as a matter of fact you can just have an ongoing conversation with the Lord at all times if you'd like to that's what praying without ceasing is and then Philippians 4 6 says don't be anxious about anything but in everything if you think there's matters in your life that's too small to pray for you're wrong if you think there's two matters in your life that's too big to pray for they mean too much to you you don't want

[29 : 54] God's will you just want your will we won't admit that but I'm going to tell you if there is things like that everything let everything be a matter of prayer a prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God and there's a passage that I've struggled with over the years and I've learned to understand it and I want you to as well because I believe it'll help you it's Psalm 37 4 and it says delight yourself in the Lord and he'll give you the desires of your heart so does that mean that if I get happy with the Lord he's going to give me everything I want because man I got a list no that's not what it means it means if we make him a priority in our lives we spend time with him and we delight in him and he becomes the love of our life the joy that we experience

God does a work in our heart he changes the desires in which we have the things that have meant so much to us in the past don't mean as much as they used to the stuff that we feel like we've got to have we don't have to have it like we used to he may give us an insight about something that that we a lot of times don't have until we buy it and we start paying on it and then go wow I guess I had to have this after all God gives us an insight into those things changes the way our heart works changes the desires of our heart and so when we delight ourselves in him he gives us the desires of our heart because the desires of our heart is to have more of him that's what transformation is about that's what sanctification is about being made more like him that's what happens when we spend time in prayer bringing everything before him and delighting in him he'll do a transformation in you but only if you seek him praying always

Martin Luther the 16th century German theologian said prayer should be brief frequent and intense and Jesus said you ought to pray so pray always and lastly believe always don't lose heart he gave this parable so that we would not lose heart even when you're weary seek the face of God for the will of God in the name of Christ he told us this story so that we ought not to lose heart my friend that's what living by faith is living by faith is not giving up it's trusting the Lord when you don't see his hand at work it's trusting the Lord when things don't seem just and don't seem right it's trusting the Lord with his will what is best and relying upon him John tells us in 1 John 5 14 and this is the confidence that we have toward him that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us we ought always to pray and not lose heart

I titled this sermon don't stop if there's a matter on your heart that you're taking before the Lord and you're struggling with it because you don't seem to get an answer to that don't stop praying don't stop just keep bringing it back to him you need it he enjoys the time with you don't stop and if your life is not marked by seeking the face of God in prayer well then start today quit worrying about all this stuff and give it to God prayer is not about getting your will done in heaven it's about turning your will over to him and watching his will work in you that's what it is and it's a transformation process it's a growing process and you don't pick up on that with every episode that comes along in your life but if you'll seek

God in prayer about those matters you'll see the difference some of you need to come to this altar today and give something to God you've been holding on to it you've been worried about it and you're not letting go of it some of you are weary there's matters in your life there's a thorn in your flesh there's a messenger of Satan there's some garbage going on somewhere that you don't want anything to deal with and you're struggling with that and God says pray always believe always I'm going to tell you he's at work I thank God he's at work in us I thank God he's at work in you seek the face of God today with every head bowed and every eye closed it is my greatest burden that someone may hear my preaching and never have received the

[36 : 13] Lord Jesus Christ as a personal Lord Savior and if that's your case today I want you to know that today's the day of salvation he'll save you he'll change you from where you are don't try to clean up before you come to Christ you'll never be able to do it you'll never will you come as you are and he'll make you everything you need to be love to guide you in that we're going to stand and sing in just a moment you just come you come and say I want to give my heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ we'd love to guide you in that process maybe you're here this morning and there's a burden upon your heart burden you want somebody else to pray with you about or a burden that you just need to lay at this altar before the Lord that's what it's for no reluctance let's just be concerned about what God would have maybe God's leading you to make a private decision public maybe you've given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus but you've never been baptized as a believer you've never publicly acknowledged your faith before him let us lead you through that process maybe you're here this morning and you're struggling with you're struggling with God leading you to be a part of this church you'd like to talk to us about that we'd love to have that conversation with you I encourage you today whatever

God's telling you to do don't do anything less you don't have to do anything more than that but if God's telling you to do something you'll be obedient and follow him Lord Jesus thank you for your word thank you for your love thank you for what you show us help us to live in response to it oh God I pray in Jesus precious name amen stand together