

# 不義的審判 Unjust Judgment

Luke 18:1–8

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Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

ATPC

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Have you ever been asked this question: “Does prayer really work?” We might say, “Prayer isn’t about begging for what we want.” Yet even when we pray for justice—such as praying for wars to cease—the wars between Russia and Ukraine, and between Israel and Palestine, continue. We might say, “Prayer is simply expressing our hearts to God.” But when we pray for a sick person’s healing, are we truly hoping for recovery—or only offering emotional comfort? We might also say, “Prayer is only to seek God’s will.” Yet when we pray for God’s kingdom to come, the world seems to move ever farther away from the teachings of Jesus.

Today, through Luke 18, we continue to learn from Jesus’ teaching what kind of prayer Jesus expects from us—and more importantly, how we can have a healthy, living relationship with God.

## Context

In today’s passage, Jesus tells a parable to his disciples: a widow continually petitions an unjust judge for justice. Unfortunately, this judge “neither feared God nor had respect for people.” Interestingly, even though Jesus calls him unjust, the judge eventually grants the widow’s request simply because she keeps bothering him. Luke tells us clearly why Jesus told this parable—“to show them that they should always pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). When we compare this unjust judge with the righteous God, Jesus leads us to a conclusion: “Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?” (18:7). This is a typical teaching method Jesus uses: if even the worst person can do this, how much more will God! And that is why he ends the parable by asking, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (18:8). Jesus wants us to have faith—to keep praying persistently in all circumstances.

This encouragement to pray is deeply tied to the historical setting in which Luke was writing. Around thirty to forty years after Jesus’ ascension, followers of Jesus were being severely persecuted by the Roman Empire. After all, they worshiped a man executed as a criminal and were viewed as political rebels. Even the temple priests cooperated with Rome,

helping arrest Christians in Judea to eliminate threats to their own authority. In such a society—where believing in Christ could mean a death sentence—keeping faith was far from easy. From that perspective, Luke’s portrayal of Jesus’ teaching makes perfect sense. For those early Christians, prayer was not merely asking for daily needs, but an act of faithfulness in a world where justice seemed absent—an expression of their willingness to risk their lives for the gospel of God’s kingdom.

In this parable of the unjust judge, Jesus calls us not to pray vaguely, but to understand prayer through three dimensions. These three aspects help us see how Jesus wants us to pray, what we should pray for, and why we pray.

## Protesting Injustice

When we look closely at the parable, we notice Jesus chooses two characters at the extreme ends of society: a powerless widow and a powerful judge. A widow—without male protection—had no rights in ancient Jewish society and was often treated as less than a person. Such a humble character mirrors the early Christians under Roman rule, who faced discrimination and persecution. Confronted with injustice, the widow does not remain silent. She knows her rights and understands how she has been wronged. She persistently brings her complaint before the most powerful authority she can reach—not just once, but over and over again.

In our faith, God is the ultimate authority of the universe. Correspondingly, prayer becomes our strongest protest the injustices of the world. In our Presbyterian tradition, one of our confessions—the Confession of Belhar—was written by the Reformed Church in South Africa during the darkness of apartheid, when the church chose to stand with the oppressed despite persecution. It declares: “We believe... that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and fight together against all which may threaten or hinder this unity.”

Scripture is full of examples where prayer confronts injustice. In Exodus, the Israelites cry out to God in their oppression (Exod 2:23). In 1 Samuel, Hannah prays in tears because of her barrenness and the cruelty of Peninnah (1 Sam 1:10). In 1 Kings, when King Ahab angers God by worshiping Baal, Elijah prays for the rain to stop (1 Kgs 17:1). In Nehemiah, after the destruction of Jerusalem, Nehemiah fasts and prays (Neh 1:4). In Daniel, when Daniel and his

friends are imprisoned unjustly, they fast, wear sackcloth and ashes, and pray earnestly (Dan 9:3).

In both the Old Testament witness and Jesus' teaching, prayer is not an act of passive escape from injustice but the primary, active response to it. Yet we know from experience that injustice seldom disappears just because we pray. Often, as we pray, the reality of injustice continues to disturb us, tempting us to give up. That is when we begin to ask: Does prayer really work? And that question leads us to the second dimension of prayer—the search for meaning.

## Seeking Meaning

During World War II, the Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl was imprisoned in Auschwitz because he was Jewish. Though he survived, he lost most of his family and endured unimaginable suffering. Out of that experience, he developed his theory of existential psychology. He wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

This insight deeply resonates with our theology of prayer. The attitude we choose toward suffering shapes how we interpret it—in other words, we search for meaning through it. The Book of Job offers several perspectives on the meaning of suffering. Job's three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—believe suffering is punishment for sin. Elihu thinks suffering is God's way of instructing people. But Job himself experiences God personally, and God's final response is profound: no one can fully understand divine wisdom; we are called simply to trust.

Whatever interpretation we hold about our own suffering, I believe persistent prayer helps us discover its deeper meaning. Understanding our suffering is something no one else can do for us—prayer is our first step toward facing it actively rather than avoiding it. Thus, in times of injustice, the question is not "Does prayer work?" but "What meaning are we discovering through prayer?" Prayer amid suffering is not an escape from reality, but a way to give new meaning to it. When we pray, we do not throw up our hands and say, "Forget it." We fold our hands and whisper, "We still believe"—we still believe in God's sovereignty, in God's timing, and that through prayer God grants us new understanding and wisdom.

## The Resilience of Faith

In the process of seeking meaning, we cultivate the third dimension—the resilience of faith. If we do not actively resist injustice and engage suffering, we will never reflect on what suffering means; and if suffering has no meaning, we will not be able to endure it. Conversely, when we search for meaning, we gain resilience. We are strengthened inwardly so that hardship no longer easily breaks us.

At the end of the parable, Jesus asks, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (18:8). Jesus knows how fragile his disciples’ faith is—after all, they fled in fear before his crucifixion. That is why he tells them to “pray always and not lose heart.” Jesus knows he will soon leave them, and that they will face persecution even harsher than his own. He wants them to learn that following him on the path of God’s kingdom means walking through injustice and suffering, yet through continual prayer, they will receive a deeper faith than ever before.

Jesus himself models this faith in his prayer at Gethsemane. On the eve of his arrest and unjust trial, he prays: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42) Jesus expresses both his anguish and his hope—the desire for the cup to pass—and yet, even in injustice, he seeks not his own will, but God’s.

If we view prayer as a discipline of faith, then we value not merely the outcome but the process—growth through struggle. This growth is sustained by resilient faith, forged in prayer, which enables us to endure suffering and continue to pursue justice.

## Endurance, Character, and Hope

As I reflected on these three aspects of prayer, Romans 5 came to mind: “Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Rom 5:3–5) Paul describes the same movement Jesus teaches in this parable: from suffering, we gain endurance; from endurance, tested character; and from character, hope.

When we courageously confront injustice and ask God for justice, we must work harder, pay higher costs, and face our own pain honestly—and that process produces endurance. As we endure, we begin to seek meaning in suffering; that search shapes our character. And from such tested character, we find hope.

In early twentieth-century China, after the fall of the Qing dynasty, people lived under corruption, foreign occupation, and deep humiliation. The writer Lu Xun captured this despair in *The True Story of Ah Q*. The protagonist, Ah Q, refuses to face his own suffering; he bullies the weak and takes pride in false victories. Even at his execution, he comforts himself, saying, “At least I look like an important person.” Ah Q represents the opposite of Jesus’ teaching on prayer: he avoids suffering, distorts reality, and deceives himself until death.

Jesus’ teaching calls us to the opposite spirit—not self-deception, but honest struggle for meaning and faith. In suffering, prayer says, “Even when reality defies my hope, I still believe that God’s justice has never left.”

In today’s divided world, prayer remains our faithful response to injustice. Whether you lean Republican or Democrat, you can see injustice on the other side. Yet through God’s word, we learn: in waiting, we live with meaning; in silence, we trust the God of justice.

Let us pray: *Righteous God, when the world discourages us and our prayers seem unanswered, remind us that prayer is not an escape but an act of faith. As we await your justice, help us seek your meaning. Before we see the answers, help us still choose to trust. May our prayers become signs of your justice and hope in this world. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*