

Persevering Prayer

By Jeff Noblit

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Bible Text: Luke 18:1-8

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Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.

Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

We're going to Luke 18 this morning. Turn over there with me. Luke 18. We're continuing going verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter through the Gospel of Luke. Before I read the text, let me just share this with you. You have those points in your spiritual pilgrimage where something is said and it just kind of lays a foundation stone you really haven't had laid before in your thinking and understanding. It was approaching, I assume 25 years ago when we were beginning reforming our church to hopefully be more biblically healthy and one of the areas we were troubled about was how widely secular psychology had come into the church and man's wisdom; Freud became more popular than the Apostle Paul in a lot of churches and we wanted to do some things on parenting and home life from a biblical perspective and it was hard to find folks 25 years ago who could teach on that. Now certainly, I hope, we were trying to do that but that sounds odd but that should just be normal but it wasn't.

Anyway, we had developed a relationship, as I mentioned earlier, with Dr. John MacArthur's church in California. We found in them a Baptist Church who strove to follow the Bible and of all things, had about 7,000 people in attendance which is unbelievable when you think about what they believe and teach. So we got a couple of their associate pastors to come here and they taught a weekend parenting course and it was rock solid and great and it kind of laid a foundation which we've been building on ever since. As you know, today on the same vein of instruction, Ted Tripp's books on parenting are sort of a backbone; we look to it. It's just Bible and it's just somebody taking the Bible and applying it. But those guys, those 2 associate pastors from MacArthur's church while they were here said something to us that I hadn't really thought about it and we were talking about trying to reach more people and grow bigger and reach more people and grow bigger and they said, "With what you believe and your convictions, how big do you think you can get in this kind of area?" They said, "2-300 people meeting together around the truth and functioning as a true church would be huge for your area, for your demographic."

I had never thought about that. We came from the mindset of just more is better and grow, grow, grow and, by the way, we're always reaching for souls, amen? We always want to reach more. That never ends. But they kind of posed to me the first time though they didn't use the word "the remnant truth of Scripture," that in the last days those striving to be Christ-honoring and true to Christ will be more of a remnant and they will

not necessarily be the biggest and the largest. At that time, we had already grown weary with adding 300 and 350 people a year and losing 250 to 275 a year. It just was a huge coming and going and people joining for every reason but the right reasons and we fixed all that, obviously, years ago. But that stuck with me, the concept that to strive to honor Christ. Listen, as a true Christian or as a true Christian family or as a true church, you're going to be in a minority. It's going to be a remnant type thing in almost every city, town, culture you're in.

The Lord is pointing that out in our text today. He's giving these disciples some exhortations, some commands, you might say, and also some rich encouragement about hanging on and persevering on through even as God's remnant people when it seems like the culture at large is certainly against you, isn't that true of our culture? We live now in an anti-Christian culture. That's just it. No debate about this anymore, it's done. Now, we should pray fervently that God in mercy might not withdraw all of his restraining power on evil and might give us a turn back to more biblical sanity in our culture. That can happen, by the way, but we live in an anti-Christian culture. And then added to that as our Lord points out over and over and as the Scriptures teach very clearly, there are so many in professing Christendom who have only the form of the real thing and not the reality within and that's against us also. As a matter of fact, it's harder, I asked a person who is a missionary in a very difficult mission field for many years; they had civil wars and their lives were in danger. I asked them after they had come back to America and they faced the typical church context of trying to be true to God's word in a compromising church setting. I said, "Which is more difficult? Fighting the warfare of the American church and the path it's on and trying to get it back to truth or facing civil wars and jungle life on the mission field?" He said, "The American church battle is harder than that battle." I thought, "Wow." And he should know. I thought that was interesting.

So the Lord is teaching his disciples whose culture was against them and then he says as we learned last week they are going to be many who profess to be your brothers and sisters who hold the label Christendom who are not going to be for you but you're going to have to keep on persevering even in the midst of that. Like I said, the first time I ever really thought about that was about 25 years ago when those 2 associate pastors challenged me in my thinking about what we were trying to accomplish here.

Luke 18, beginning in verse 1, going through verse 8,

1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2 saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3 There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' 4 For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" [I just find that humorous.] 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and

will He delay long over them? 8 I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

I've entitled this "Persevering Prayer," and that's the major theme of what Christ is talking about but it's bigger than that because any time there is a need for persevering prayer, and by the way, there's always a need for persevering prayer, he's emphasizing also persevering in your true Christian life, persevering as a true Christian fellowship of believers all over the church. So it's about persevering in difficult days in general but maybe a real foundation stone of being able to do that is that you must be persevering in prayer.

Alright, notice first of all, I. The principle of persevering prayer. He just basically states it here, the principle of persevering prayer. Verse 1, he just simply says, "He was telling them a parable," now here's the principle, "that at all times," not just some of the time but at all times, "they ought to pray and not lose heart." Now, sub point A is this: prayerlessness equals sinfulness. Prayerlessness equals sinfulness. I'm wrestling with this because I had 3 years of graduate school Greek and I don't know anything about Greek. I had it but I forgot it. I know enough to study and use the study guides but I'm not a Greek scholar and I wrestle with the Greek scholars here because as A. T. Robertson, the most prominent of Baptists and evangelical Greek scholars, says the phrase here in verse 1 "not to lose heart" literally should be translated "don't give in to evil." Don't give in to evil. So the contrast there is immediately set before us, "Keep praying, persevering in praying, because when you stop praying and looking to God and trusting God, you are sinning." There is no neutral ground here and I think I would like to hope that there's some neutral ground. Our fallen flesh would like to reason there is some neutral ground. Well, I'm not really praying like I ought to but I'm not involved in sin." No, when you're not praying like you ought to you're sinning. His point is: when you stop persevering in prayer you are starting to sin because not praying is sin.

Now, let me elaborate on this "don't lose heart." Let me say this: it's like 2 sides of a coin perhaps, one side of the coin is, "Well, I've lost heart. I've lost confidence in my Christianity. It's just so hard out there and so many are against us and so many talk down about us and other Christians think we're off, I've just lost heart. I've lost my confidence." That's one side, that's true but the other side of the coin equally true is, "Yeah, and that's a lack of faith and that's sin." You see, unbelief is not a weak thing, unbelief is a wicked thing. Now, get that down in your heart. Unbelief is not a weak thing, unbelief is a wicked thing.

I think the idea is that genuine and true praying involves these 4 things. You can analyze it and lay it out a little differently but I think this is a good analogy of what's going on in our hearts and in our spirits when we're really praying right. 1. It is a humble dependence on God. The fact that you pray is a bowing in humility to God. It's a humble dependence and any time we are not in humble dependence before God, we're in arrogant pride before God. Again, there is no neutral ground here. So praying has to involve humble dependence.

Secondly, it involves a belief in God's greatness and any time you're not in your heart striving to say, "Oh God, you are infinite in holiness and in wisdom and in might," then you are bringing God down and exalting yourself which, again, is pride and sin. There is just no neutral ground here.

Praying involves a humble dependence; praying involves a belief in God's greatness; thirdly, prayer involves a belief in God's faithfulness. It would just be one thing if God were great but he's not just great, he's faithful. He's faithful to his promises. He's faithful to his covenant. Now, I'm not saying when you pray you've got to cogitate all of these thoughts consistently. I'm not saying that, it's just there if it's true Christian praying.

Number 4: true Christian praying has a confidence in ultimate success. It means no matter what's happening around me, no matter how it looks, no matter how long it's been going on, no matter how the numbers look, no matter how many people don't stand with me, it just doesn't matter. I know God's word is true. I know he has changed my heart. My confidence is in Christ and in his word and I'm standing on that. One day somehow this is the right track. There's going to be success. It doesn't matter what happens.

That's true Christian praying. All of this is just faith. That's Christian faith. Now, we may wane and we may have weak moments and there are seasons when it's not as strong but the Christian has something embedded in his heart that says, "I am no match for this infinitely holy, wise, loving, all-powerful God. I come to him in humble dependence. I come to him believing in his infinite greatness. I come to him trusting that he will be faithful to those he saved. And I come to him believing that ultimately I'll have success in him and following him."

Well, let's look at the reverse of that: the opposite of persevering praying which involves those things is that I'm not humbly looking to God in dependence; I am not believing in God's greatness; I am not trusting in God's faithfulness; and I am not confident that he will bring eventual success. That's unbelief. So that's why I think the original saying of Jesus was we ought to continue to pray at all times which is persevering praying and not lose heart, that is, don't turn to evil, evil unbelief. If you're praying, you're believing. By the way, if you're believing, you're praying. I'm not talking about getting in a prayer closet on your knees. There is a time for that, the Bible doesn't tell us exactly what time or how much time; we have grace to one another on those issues but he's talking about this continual heart attitude and presence of communion with God. Sometimes it's very intense and alone, sometimes it's maybe more shallow and I think that can be a good word. Some people talk about shallowness in their prayer life and I know what they mean and I'm not saying that they are wrong but, brothers, when you're at the job and the deadline is on and the boss is over your back and your heart and mind is all digging in, you're not just praying the same way you pray in the prayer closet at home. But you still commune with God. You still say, "Oh God, help me. I want to work for my employer like working unto the Lord. This is difficult." I mean, there is a communion but it's not the rich, deep, earnestness of the prayer closet perhaps so don't get hung up on its got to

look like a certain thing. The Lord is just kind of giving a broad swath here, if you will, of persevering in prayer in all types and at all times.

But if you're not praying, back to my thought here, you are sinning. You are sinning the sin of unbelief. A couple of cross references here. Mark 16:14, "Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen." Now, here the disciples are, had fallen into unbelief about whether or not he was risen from the dead. They didn't really believe he was risen from the dead. They didn't normally see folks risen from the dead but now he told them he was going to be raised from the dead. They just didn't believe it. They had fallen into some unbelief so what did Jesus do? The verse there says, you see the word up there that "He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart." That word "reproach" isn't, "Oh now, I'm sorry. I know you lost heart and I know it's hard." That might be fine too but reproach doesn't mean that. Reproach here has the idea of upbraiding them. It has the idea of insulting them publicly to shame them for losing their faith. Is that the Jesus you understand and worship? Quit making Jesus out to be your little teddy bear Jesus. He's Jesus Jesus. He's not your Jesus, he's Jesus Jesus and, in this case, he publicly shames them, upbraids them. The phrase that is added there, "for your hardness of heart," again, he's pointing out the sin of their unbelief. They weren't just weak in faith, they were sinning. Folks, one of the great ways to grow in faith is to acknowledge to God when you're weak in faith that you are actively sinning.

Well, Matthew 10:14 and 15, another strong principle here about how unbelief is actually a deep sin God will judge. "Whoever does not receive you," he says, that is, they don't believe, they don't have faith, "nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city." What is he saying? These disciples were sent out by Jesus. They were going to testify of the kingdom and of the Gospel to the cities and he says, "When you go out to these cities preaching them the truth about me and my Gospel and they do not receive you which means they remain in unbelief, you're to shake the dust off your feet because the judgment on them for unbelief is going to be radical and severe." He said, "It's going to be worse then the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah." Here's Jesus' point: you Jews know how averse and how offensive Sodom and Gomorrah was to God, well, that's not even to be compared with how deeply God is offended by and will judge unbelief. By the way, you can participate in all the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah and go to heaven if you'll repent and believe but if you remain in unbelief, you can't go to heaven if you live a pristine, clear, moral life all of your life. Unbelief is the greatest sin and God says it's a serious sin.

Now listen to me, let's balance this out with the balance of Scripture: the genuine child of God may wrestle with unbelief but he certainly does not walk in unbelief. Now, did you hear that? There is a difference between getting up in the morning and 8 hours a day or 24 hours a day, 7 days in a week, just intentionally walking in the wisdom of the world, in the ways of the world, indulging in the lust of your heart and squeezing everything you can out of this world. That's just rank unbelief. But there are Christians who love Christ

and the genuine intent of their hearts, the purpose and pattern of their life is to live in faith and honor Christ but they do slide and they do fall into unbelief just like Peter when he denied his Lord 3 times. But they don't remain in that state. They are repenters and they get themselves back on track. I think the expression in Mark 9:24 of the man who wanted his son to be healed by Jesus and he said, "Lord, I believe but help thou my unbelief." How many times as your pastor have I guided us to make some changes and oh, my goodness, the opposition and the critics and the naysayers and everything. I literally lived my life for months if not years saying, "O God, I believe. Help my unbelief." And do you know what? I never prayed that prayer that God didn't help my belief, that he didn't give me something to encourage me. So we do wrestle. We do slip. Why do you think God is telling these disciples in this context of coming difficulties to keep on persevering and it's going to be hard? Because it is hard but we don't throw in the towel. We keep striving and getting back on track and repenting of that unbelief when it comes.

Well, not praying or prayerlessness is sinfulness because it's equivalent to unbelief. Secondly or B in our outline under the principle of persevering prayer: there is no time for no prayer. In other words, there is no time when you shouldn't be praying. It just doesn't exist. Now, we don't pray the same in every case in every context but there's no time when in some form or fashion your heart and spirit is not to be striving to commune with God. This is a pilgrimage of learning we're all on but that's normal Christianity. That's why Jesus says in verse 1, "He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart." He didn't say "most of the time" or "some of the time," he said "at all times." Now, the temptation to throw in the towel, fall into unbelief, the temptation to quit and handle it in our wisdom and in the world's wisdom, all that is is Satan undermining our fortress.

But when Jesus tells us we ought to pray at all times, he's also saying you get to pray at all times. You don't have to go to some mausoleum. You don't have to go to some altar. You don't have to go to some human priest. You don't have to go jump through the hoops of some ritual or sacrament in order to gain some openness before God and find his hearing. No, we can go to God through his Son, Jesus Christ, at all times. So don't let this be a condemning thing and a burden, let it be a joy and a blessing. Folks, you can't even fathom the number of times you offend God in one day. You cannot comprehend the weight of the offensiveness of your fallen sinfulness before this holy God, yet in Jesus Christ, you can come to God any time all the time. That's what he's saying. This ought to evoke gratitude in our hearts, this spirit and attitude of the heart that we should maintain, that we can just commune with God.

Now folks, let's contrast this to the false teaching of pagan religions. Pagan religions think that if they actively work at saying certain verbalized prayers, they've got things, they wrote things they memorize and they just go through these motions of chanting these mantras or whatever back to their deity or to God. The Catholic Church has a lot of these and lo and behold, Baptists have formed some of them called sinner's prayers and they put confidence in doing that thing and we know people may be saved while they are doing some things but the salvation is by faith from their hearts, not the rote work of

going through a motion. That's what pagan religions teach. We're not like pagan religions. It's not like verbalizing repetitions before God. Actually, it's revolting before God. Why? Because Jesus Christ has already gained God's approval. You are not gaining God's acceptance. You are not gaining God's hearing because you do all the hoop jumps of your religious system well. You've gained God through Christ and faith in him alone. It's as simple as a wholehearted acknowledgment, "O Christ, if you are not sufficient for this wretched sinner, I have no audience with God but hallelujah you are sufficient and I know I have avenue and access to my God any time I need him." What a truth is this.

So now we are in this pilgrimage of learning to apprehend and walk in this treasure of having this all time, all the time, at every time, access to God. Now, there are times when burdens come and, as I said in my prayer earlier in the service, it seems like right now in the church family there are a lot of burdens. Being here for 35 years, it just kind of seems that's the way it goes. Sometimes there's just a bunch and then there's not so many and when those burdens come, there are times to get away and earnestly seek God, maybe on bended knee. I'd encourage that. I can't tell you from Scripture that helps your prayer but it's just sometimes good to put the posture in the same position as we want our hearts to be in, bowed before God. But you can't always bend the knee but here's the key: you can always bow the heart. No matter what you're doing, where you're going, what's going on, there's just that communing, "O God, thank you for this day. O God, as I do this task, you know how prone I am to fail and get angry or get bitter. O God, help this sinner. Lord Jesus, you're so good to give me this access." Just a communion. It comes and it's just kind of there. You can't always bend the knee but we can always bow the heart.

But listen, friend, the enemy is never idle nor never wearies of assaulting us and we should not grow weary in resisting him. Now listen to me: you're either yielding to God or warring with God. No neutral ground. You're either yielding to God or warring with God and you don't get to figure out what yielding to God looks like, it's prescribed right here in this book. Young people yield to God by honoring their parents. Wives yield to God by honoring their husbands. Husbands yield to God by honoring their employers God put over them. Over and over we can go. You see, we don't have a vote in this thing: we either yield to God or we war with God.

We should always be mindful that the prayerful heart is never a cold heart. The prayerful heart is never a harsh heart. It's never an indifferent heart toward others and the needs of others. The prayerful heart is always ready to testify of Christ to others. The prayerful heart can patiently endure the cross of opposition and persecution. The prayerful heart is ready to serve others as Scripture dictates, not by men coercing on you burdens that are not supposed to be there but I'm saying your biblical responsibilities for where you are in life. That's the way you serve others; you do what the Scripture says toward them and in the priority of Scripture. Sometimes some of you get so spiritual you just walk through life and everything that pops up, you serve, care, help, show mercy and then the ones you're really supposed to be taking care of get neglected. That's not spiritual. That's idolatry. So while we're ready to serve and care and help all men that we can, we do have priorities and responsibilities Scripture gives us. So don't put more on you than God puts on you. Do you know what happens? That can get you exasperated and that's when you

start losing heart and the real reason was you're trying to be so spiritual and so serving and so helpful to so many, you can't do it and you get burnt out and overwhelmed and emotionally shipwrecked. Don't do that. You say, "Lord, what are the people and the things I'm really responsible for scripturally?" Let that be my priority and, "God, give me the grace to lovingly and humbly say no to even mercy ministries and other services that would conflict with my being faithful to what the word says." Isn't God good to take care of us like that? To get us balanced out and on track?

We have a duty to pray. You don't just pray because you feel like it, you pray because it's right. Now, we find that when we honor the duties God gives us in the word of God, they end up becoming delights. Have you found that out? You start praying because it's right to pray and you start with a cold heart and you end warm and joyous before the Lord. We have a duty to pray just like children have a duty to honor their parents and pastors have a duty to yield to God's priorities, not the priorities of the deacons or the church. Husbands have a duty to work for their employers like working unto the Lord. Christians have a duty to faithfully serve in the local church family, the body of Christ. Christians have a duty to return tithes and offerings. You don't have to feel this. You do what the duty says but if you do it because God has changed your heart, then the delight and the blessing comes. Your emotions follow your will in Christianity and it always works like that.

Well, let me say and maybe I'll close on this. Let me say a word or 2 about what I call the fear factor. Not a television show, it's a reality in the lives of the saints of God. The fear factor. Look, why don't we persevere in prayer? Why do we give up on God? Well, it's always fear-based. It's always fear-based. At the root of it all we're afraid of something. Nothing points this out like 1 Peter 3:6. I'm not talking about wives and husbands today but there's a principle here that brings this out and it applies to everyone beyond this because Scripture bears this out, but particularly in this area, God made a point of it. 1 Peter 3:6, he says, "just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear." He didn't say "without being obstinate and unsubmitive." He didn't say "honor your husband like Sarah honored her husband and don't be dishonoring your husband." He didn't say that, ee said, "Don't be frightened by any fear." He goes all the way to the root issue.

Now, why would a woman not want to persevere prayerfully honoring God in this area? Because she's afraid if she does she's going to miss out on something. There is a fear Satan makes sure wells up in her and actually the wording here means a fluttering tremor. "If I do this, if I do this, this bad thing is going to happen." That's what he's pointing out. There is a fear factor in all of our prayerlessness and all of our lack of obedience no matter what the area is. Husbands, why don't you do the things necessary to love your wives like Christ loves the church? It's a fear factor. "If I do this, I fear this will happen and that will happen." It's always fear. It's always fear. Fear in prayer and fear in faith never exist together. When one kicks in, the other one dies out. Always. When you are prayerful and faithful, fear of honoring God and what will happen negative starts going away. Faith looks beyond the inconsistent unfaithfulness of a husband or a wife or an employer, or young people, you're supposed to honor your parents, of your parents,

whatever it is, faith looks beyond that and fears dishonoring God more than what honoring God might bring back to me. That's why so many times in the Gospel Jesus simply said, "Fear not." In fact he says, "Fear not, I'm faithful. Fear not, I'm not misleading you. Fear not, I'm not going to abandon you. This will be best for you. Trust my wisdom. Trust my greatness. Trust my faithfulness. Do what I say."

1 John 4:18 amplifies this, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." Fear involves punishment, that is, "Something bad is going to happen if I do this. I can't obey God here because it's not going to be best for me." I want to tell you something: your heart is lying to you and the world is lying to you. God's word, God's way is always best. Period. That's why he exhorts these disciples, "Keep on persevering on in prayer." But, you see, what we want to do is we want to make prayer one thing over here and then obedience one thing over here. No, no, it's one package. When you're persevering in prayer that means you're persevering to honor God in his word. Those always go together or it's not praying. Obedient discipleship and persevering prayer are always connected together but if we have a perfected love toward God, then we have a bold confident trust in him. "He is right. He is wise. I'm so stupid." Amen? Is anybody else with me on this? "I'm so stupid and God is so smart." God is just waiting for a few people to take him at his word and show how amazing he is.

So we do not fear what honoring his word may do to us negatively, we fear not honoring his word because we love him and perfect love drives out that fear. The Bible says, "Christ died that we might be delivered from this bondage of fear," so we must throw ourselves in the duty of persistent prayer, persevering in prayer, which inseparably flows and is connected to the duties of obedience to his word and not allow fear to derail us. These disciples, the context here are dark and difficult days. Remember my other sermon? He said, "Dark and difficult days are coming before I return. It's going to be hard so I'm challenging you to not let fear get in there. Keep persevering in prayer and honoring my word as individual Christians, as families and as church families," and that's primarily who he's addressing, the church family altogether.

Now, II. I said I might quit, I decided not to. II. I'll be more quick, though. The parable to encourage persevering prayer. So he gives this parable, this story laid alongside the truth to help to encourage us. This is all for encouragement. Now, you might say, "Well, I'm not very encouraged that there are dark and difficult days to those who are really going to try to be Christ-honoring and Bible-based. That doesn't really encourage me." Well, would you rather have him not tell you it's going to be dark and difficult? Would you rather have him say, "It's going to be wonderful. You can go to a happy church, they're all over the place." Then he said, "It's going to be good, good, good, better, better, better, happy, happy, happy." I'm sorry, that's not what the word of God teaches. If you love the truth and stand on the word of God, there are difficult days but Jesus does give us encouragement.

First of all, he gives us this parable and look at the story itself. We'll refer to it as sub point A in verses 2 through 6, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God

and did not respect man." So this is an ungodly, wicked judge. He didn't fear God. He doesn't care anything about the people he's judging and ruling over. But verse 3, "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' For a while he was unwilling," that's verse 4. Now, let's stop right there. It just means he doesn't care about this widow. He could care less. He only cares about himself. But, "afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,'" verse 5, "'yet because this widow bothers me,'" in other words, she won't let it go. You little animation movie "Frozen," "Let it go, let it go." She won't let it go. She ain't gonna let it go. She's going to say, "I need to see you, Judge." She just won't let it go. "Because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out." So here's an evil judge who doesn't love and respect God, doesn't care for the people who he rules over but yet he gives justice to this widow because she's persistent and persevering and going and seeking justice.

Now, notice, let's get to the point, verses 7 and 8, so the Lord gives the interpretation of the point he's making to them. He says in verse 7, "Now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night," if they are persevering also? "And will He delay long over them?" Again, he's writing in the context of folks who the culture and much of professing Christianity are against them and they are persecuting them. They're lying about them. They're putting a spin on everything they say and teach and do. They're trying to undermine them. Some of them are being locked in jail. Whatever it is and he says, "In that situation, I, your God, your Lord in heaven, am deeply concerned about you and if you will persevere in seeking me for justice, I'm telling you, it's coming. I'm telling you, it's coming for you." His point is: if bad men like the judge in the parable will yield to petitions that he hates, how much more will your merciful Lord honor your petitions and he loves getting those petitions from you. God loves the earnest, ever-diligent intercessions to him for help. He loves that. Verse 8 says, he will bring about justice for his elect if we're persevering to ask him to come help us because we are persecuted in this evil day. My friend, listen, the day is coming when the wicked will fall and will not rise. The day is coming when the wicked will fall and will not rise and the church will be at rest forever. But we are to persevere until that day.

Now, there's a phrase here that if you don't get this phrase, you don't get it. You say, "Well, that makes sense." Well, I mean you don't get the whole context of what he's teaching. Verse 7, "now, will not God bring about justice," these are our Lord's words, "for His elect." If you don't grasp what Christ is saying here you miss the great encouragement, consolation, compassion that the Lord really wants you to get. Who are his elect? Real quickly, Ephesians 1:4, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love." So if you are a true believer in Jesus Christ from the God-ward perspective, God chose you in, that is through the merits of his Son, before the world began. The point is: don't you know if God chose you in his Son, sent his Son to purchase your redemption and seal your pardon and keep you for himself, don't you know he cares deeply about you and if the right time will come and deliver the justice you deserve from an evil and wicked generation. It's not just that you chose him, he initiated these things. He chose you. I don't know about you but there's preciousness in that. There's encouragement in that.

Look, are you listening to your pastor? God never chose to favor anyone he doesn't carry out to completion. So in the context he said, "I want you to get this truth." 2 Timothy 1:9, "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." Now, the rank Arminian wants to take all of these passages, spin it around about halfway and say, "What he's saying is God determined before the foundation of the world," and what does he say here, "from eternity past, God determined to give men the opportunity to be saved." That is not what the text is saying. There are plenty of Greek words that mean the opportunity, that's not what this says. This verse says that he purposed before eternity from all eternity to let you be one of his. He granted to you grace for his own purpose. So you are a precious, chosen object of God's gracious favor before the world began.

You say, "Brother Jeff, what about the others?" One way to look at it is that God stands up there in heaven and his Son is nailed to a cross and God shouts out to every creature on planet earth, "My Son bled and died. His death is sufficient for all," but no one responds. No one. No one. No one does good, no not one. Not one! Not one. And then God says, "There is no way I'm going to let the merits of my Son's suffering go wasted. I've got some I chose before the foundation of the world and I'm going to act on them so that they'll be crushed in their sins, they'll be aware of their wickedness. They will be bowed low by their offensiveness and they'll confess their sins and they'll receive my Son as their Lord and Savior and he'll be glorified for the way he can save those I sent him to save." Jeremiah 31:3, "The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.'" It's an everlasting, from everlasting to everlasting, his love and favor was toward you.

Now, this doctrine of election is despised by some and misunderstood by most but listen to me: if God did not elect some to salvation, none would find salvation. If God didn't elect some and some he didn't elect found it, then they get merit and credit. None of that before my God. It's all of grace or it's not at all. But this doctrine is the keystone in the arch of Christian assurance. It's the keystone in the arch of Christian comfort. It's the keystone in the arch of Christian hope. And these Christians like Jesus was addressing, he said, "There are going to be dark and difficult days. The culture is going to hate you and persecute you. Many will come in my name and form congregations and claim they are my true followers and they are going to hate you and persecute you. How are you going to hang on? You've got to know I've got a remnant that are my elect and I care for you. I chose you before the world began. I chose you from eternity past and I will not forsake you ever. And I will if a wicked judge who doesn't respect God and doesn't care for his people, if they can be brought to do justice for a widow because she perseveres, those of you who prove you are my genuine children that continue to persevere through the persecution and the trial, I will come in justice for you too." If a wicked judge would do it because he's implored upon by those he hates, a loving, merciful Father will do it for those whom he loves and longs to hear their petitions.

So we're to keep coming before him. Abraham waited 25 years before he received the promised son, Isaac. The psalmist said in Psalm 88:1 and 2, "O LORD, the God of my salvation, I have cried out by day and in the night before You. Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry!" That's the kind of thing Jesus is talking about here. Under the crush of difficulty, we don't cave in. We don't modify Christianity. We don't change the church to make the world happier with us. We are true to God. Sometimes that means we fit in okay, sometimes that means the world hates us. We're not trying to be against the world, we're trying to be for God and whatever that means is whatever it means. And we persevere on. Persevere on. And keep praying and keep crying and saying, "O God, set this place straight one day. O God, bring the justice of heaven to earth." Isn't that what he taught us in the model prayer? "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come." What is he saying? "Come to the earth and establish your righteousness and your justice." That's what Jesus is saying here but you've got to persevere through difficult seasons and difficult days.

Then he said in verse 8, not only is God going to come, he said he'll come quickly. It's an interesting word here, verse 8, "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly." It's a picture as if our Lord is leaning over the ledge of heaven saying, "I'm just ready to come. I hear my children. I know they're suffering. They're not perfect but I have made them perfect in my blood in atonement for them and I long to come to earth to show the whole universe they are right and the rest of you are wrong." Listen, when Jesus comes back and sets it straight, it's set straight. When he comes back to settle the score, it's settled. And that picture quickly means he is yearning in his heart to come and rescue his children. So he says, "Keep persevering. Keep praying. Keep going." Keep going.

Again, one of the deep, deep, deep, difficult challenges and we saw this in the earlier sermon in Luke 17 was and 2 Timothy 3:5 brings this out: there are always those who hold to a form of godliness and deny the power thereof. Then he says, "Avoid such men as these." There are always those false professors who claim to be Christians who build their churches and do their stuff. I'm not suggesting that there are not some truly regenerate people in a lot of these congregations but there are too many of them out there who just have the outward form but not the inward reality. That makes it tougher because they don't do stuff biblically but it looks good and it takes a lot of wisdom and maturity and discernment. That's what makes these difficult days difficult. But we must stay with God, we must stay with the truth, we must embrace a true Gospel in fellowship and a true church persevering until he returns.

Then that interesting phrase and I'll just not much more than mention a comment or 2, "I tell you that he will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes," I'm in verse 8, "will He find faith on the earth?" Interesting. I'm convinced Jesus is not saying will he find faith on the earth like he doesn't know. I think what he's saying is it's going to look like true faithful Christians and Christianity have almost disappeared. It's going to look like there aren't many out there. But you listen to me, friend: God always has his remnant. God always has his remnant. Even though true believers and true churches grow fewer perhaps and grow weary, we've got to remember this: at the end of all of it, God remains faithful.

2 Timothy 2:13, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful," don't forget the last three words there, "because He cannot deny Himself." What does that mean? What does that mean? Because before the foundation of the world we were placed in himself. Amen. We were in Christ before the foundation of the world. From eternity past, we were chosen in Christ and the only way we cannot make it all the way through and all the way home is if God denies himself, that is his Son, Jesus Christ. God would have to abandon his love and companionship with Christ for any of God's true saints, the elect of God, to be lost.

Now just run around the church 10 times and praise God for that. Even though there is a moment or 2, a day or 2, hopefully not more than a short season or 2 when I'm not as faithful as I ought to be, though I may be unfaithful, he remains faithful because he will not deny himself. Hallelujah, what a Savior. So when culture and professing Christianity seems to be off track and against us, keep on keeping on. That foundation stone and that perseverance is persevering prayer. Keep going to the word. Keep standing on the truth. Keep believing the old Gospel. Keep being faithful to a true church prayerfully.

Jim Hatcher wrote this this week, thought I'd close with this.

"Amazing truth, that sovereign God,
Who has no need at all.
Of whom the universe is awed,
Before whom angels fall.
Invites us to himself through prayer,
To come before his throne.
Communing with the Father there,
Adopted as his own.

"So how can I so often shun,
The call that he extends.
Which cost the blood of his dear Son,
To bid me enter in.
Lord, draw me near to your side,
And cause my eyes to see.
Forgive me of my sinful pride,
And my complacency."

He nailed it. Prayerlessness is sin. So let's close with that encouraging thought: that our Lord is faithful to his own all the way to the end.

Jesus was telling the truth about his Gospel. He was telling the truth about his church and a lot of people, the Bible text says, began to fall away and quit following him. They said, "Wait a minute. This is not what we signed up for. We thought a kingdom was coming on the earth, the glory," and that's coming, by the way, "but he is going to a cross." He began talking about going to the cross and the disciples began to fall away. And Jesus looks at Peter and he says, "Are you going to go away too?" I love this statement, Peter says, "To

whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. I'm stuck." Are you stuck? I'm stuck. It doesn't matter. Whatever it costs. I'm saying that publicly, whatever it costs, I'm stuck. I'm stuck on Jesus and his Gospel. You can go and do what you want, you can play wherever you want to play, I'm stuck, shipwrecked on God and stranded on omnipotence. I'm stuck and by God's grace we will persevere until he takes us all home.

Let's stand in prayer.