

The Persistent Widow [Family Service]

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[0 : 00] So, at the moment in our morning services we are working through ten parables in Luke. A parable is just a story that Jesus told in order to teach us some important things.

And today we are going to look at the first parable that we read, we actually read two, but we're going to look at the first one, the parable of the persistent widow. I'll read it again quickly. Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

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 will 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.

[1 : 10] Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? So this is the story of the persistent widow. I want to ask the boys and girls a question first of all.

Do you know what persistent means? What do you think? Any ideas what persistent means? No? No?

No? No? So, do you ever go to a toy shop or a sweet shop and ask your mum and dad for stuff and say, Please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please do you do that?

Well, that's a wee bit like what persistent means. Sometimes persistent can kind of be like I kind of in a sort of not so good way where we're a bit demanding.

Where would I wee bit like, I really want it. I want it. I want it. And it can be a bit pushy, maybe a wee bit too much. But in other ways, persistent can be a really good thing because to be persistent just means that you're not going to give up and you keep on working and keep on going.

[2 : 17] It's a bit like practicing something. Practicing a sport or practicing a musical instrument or trying to get better and better at something or always trying to help people. To be persistent in a good way just means to never give up.

And this parable in many ways is all about not giving up. And there's four important things in this parable that I want us to look at together and we're going to just go through them one by one quite quickly.

So number one and boys and girls, I want you to learn all of these and hopefully we'll be able to remember them all. Four important things. Number one, sometimes it seems that God doesn't listen to our prayers.

That's an important thing to remember. Sometimes it seems that God doesn't listen to our prayers. So praying as I'm sure you know is a really important part of being a Christian. Now prayer is just very simple.

It's just talking to God. And the reason we do it is because as Christians we are in a relationship with God. God is our friend. God is your friend.

[3 : 23] God the Father is our Father. Jesus is our brother. And God the Holy Spirit is the one who comes alongside us to help us and to comfort us. If you think about it, all friends should talk and all families should talk.

And by praying we're just talking to God because God's our friend and we are in His family. And I want you to remember that you can talk to God about anything, absolutely anything, whether that's

your schoolwork or your friends or your family or stuff you've got to do if things are worrying you. Sometimes when you're young, through the day you can feel really good and everything seems excellent and then you can go to bed at night and things can seem not so good. Do you ever worry at night? Do you ever feel a bit scared at night?

And sometimes you go to bed and you're like, oh, I'm not sure about that. And things that don't bother you during the day all of a sudden bother you at night. I remember that used to happen to me when I was wee. When I would go to bed at night, all sorts of things would worry me.

I used to worry all sorts of daft stuff. I used to worry about my kids, my parents getting a new car because I loved their car. I don't go to bed at night really nervous about a new car.

[4 : 38] But it was a VW camper van, so come on, it was a cool car. But I was terrified of all these things and at night they would worry you. And I remember talking to my parents about it and my parents said, pray to God.

And do you know, I remember it was amazing that when I prayed, even though I was tiny, I remember that kind of horrible feeling and worry would always get better when I prayed. So please never ever forget that you can always talk to God and always pray.

But sometimes it's easy to think that God's not listening. You think, well, God's so busy and so big and there's so many people and he's probably not that concerned about me.

And that's especially true when we maybe ask for specific things in prayer. So maybe you've prayed for something that you maybe wanted to happen and it hasn't happened. Maybe you've prayed about something that you didn't want to happen, but it has happened.

And sometimes you think, well, this doesn't seem to make sense. We say to pray about stuff and then it doesn't seem to go the way I wanted to go. I didn't want that to happen and it did happen. Or I wanted this and it didn't happen.

[5 : 43] Is God not listening? What's going on? Well, Jesus is telling us, one of the things Jesus is telling us in this parable is that that's not true. When we think that God's not listening, that's not true.

He says, you should pray always and not lose heart. And that's teaching us a very important lesson about prayer, that God doesn't always answer our prayers straight away or in the way that we want him to.

And overall, I think there's, you could say, this is maybe a bit of a, this is just making it very simple, but I think it's true that there's really three ways in which God answers prayer.

Sometimes he says, yes, sometimes he says, no, and sometimes he says, not yet.

But whatever his answer, it will always be for our good. Sometimes he says, no, because what we want isn't actually good for us. So I want you to know, what did you have for breakfast today?

[6 : 46] Please tell me, what did you all have for breakfast? Reza, what did you have? Wheatavix, excellent choice, what else did you, what did you guys have for breakfast over this side? And I think, what did you have? Nice, Waffles, excellent, that's good, well done, Angie, good, excellent.

Patrick, sorry, moment of glory for you. What else did you have for breakfast, everybody? What did you have? Wheatavix with banana, excellent, that sounds lovely.

These are good breakfasts. So, see if you said to your mum tomorrow morning, she said, what do you want for breakfast? See if you said, Haribos, what do you think they would say?

No, that's terrible, isn't it? So if your parents say no to Haribos for breakfast, why do you think they're saying no? Do you think it's because they don't like you and they're like, I want to spoil their day by not giving them Haribos for breakfast?

Why do you think they say no? Why do you think? They're going crazy because they're having too much sugar, exactly, exactly.

[7 : 53] Haribos are lovely, but they're not really the best thing to have for breakfast. And when your parents say no, it's because saying no is actually good for you.

And so, I think that's a really important thing to remember. Other times God will say no because the thing that we want now is maybe not something that we're going to want later in our lives.

That's a really important thing to remember. Grownups need to remember that as well. Sometimes we want stuff now and we don't realize that later in life we're actually not going to like that so much.

So I want you to think about the stuff you like to watch on Telly.

And I want you to think, if I could only watch one TV program ever again, what would that be?

Okay? So I've got some examples.

Okay? Let's see. Do you know what all these things are? Pepper pig, who likes pepper pig? Yes, excellent, excellent.

[8 : 55] Who's that middle one? Blaze. Blaze, who likes Blaze? Yeah, Blaze is very cool. At the end, who have we got at the end there?

Popper troll. Do you like Popper troll? Yeah, that's good. And then here in the middle, who's this? The blue suit, do you know who that is? That's the suit.

What's that? That's the suit. No, that's the second one down. It's a bit older for older kids. That's, well, the grownups know that is surely.

It's a modern, do you know that? There's a modern version of this. It's very cool. So that's Thunderbirds are go there. In the middle, who likes Match of the Day? Yeah, maybe, yeah, yeah, likes football.

Good. What's the one on the left there? Strictly come dancing. Who likes strictly? Yeah, no, I don't like it. What about this one? What's that one?

[9 : 49] Britain's Got Talent. Do you watch Britain's Got Talent? Yeah, yeah. Middle one on the bottom, who's that? SpongeBob, SpongeBob. The last one, what's that?

Coronation Street. So imagine that you could only pick one of these, right? So you could only watch one TV programme ever again, right?

I want you to think about that just so quickly. Who would pick Peppa? It's the one programme they could only watch ever again. Okay, Annie, good choice. Blaze, who would pick Blaze? It's the one programme. Yes, excellent.

Who would pick Paw Patrol? Okay, good. Thunderbirds are go. Yeah, good choice, yes. Match of the Day? Yes, someone would watch that, yes.

Strictly come dancing. Look at that, yes. Britain's Got Talent. Yeah, yeah. SpongeBob.

[10 : 46] Good choice, Fraser. Coronation Street. You'd have to be crazy to pick that programme.

It's just a subtle rebuke. Or maybe not so subtle. So the important thing I want to say here is, right, you need to think about how old you are.

And this is especially for the older ones, right? When you were maybe in Kresge or in preschool, you would have maybe said Peppa Pig or Blaze.

But now that you're older, you would maybe think, oh, I don't think I really would like to spend the rest of my life watching Peppa. And as you get even older, you think, oh, well, no, I really wouldn't want to choose Paw Patrol now that I'm in P7 as my favourite thing.

And the key point I'm trying to say here is that stuff that we really want now is not necessarily stuff that we're really going to want later. And God knows that.

[11 : 50] And that's why sometimes He says no when we pray. And often we can find that, that things we want at one stage in life, we don't want later in life.

Some people pray for a job, some people pray for an opportunity to do something, some people even pray for a girlfriend that later on they look back and think, well, actually, I'm glad that God said no.

Sometimes God says no. But sometimes God can also say not yet as well. And part of the reason He does that is that it's because waiting can be very, very good for us.

Waiting can make you more appreciative. Waiting can make you wiser. Waiting can make you more patient. And sometimes waiting can actually make you stronger.

I think the key point to remember in all of this is that when it comes to prayer, it's not really about God wanting you to have amazing stuff.

[13 : 03] What it's really about is God wanting to make you into an amazing person.

The second thing that we learn from this parable is that sometimes it feels like everything's a bit unfair. So it can feel like God does not answer your prayers.

And it can also feel like everything around us is unfair. If you look at this story that Jesus told, there's a lot of unfair stuff in it. So you have this judge who is not a very fair person, doesn't fear God, he doesn't respect other people, he basically doesn't care what anybody else thinks.

And you have this poor widow who is being wronged by somebody else. When it says there, give me justice against my adversary, that's just a fancy way of saying that somebody's being bad to me. This poor widow is saying somebody is being bad to me. And it's all very, very unfair. And often things can be unfair in life. I think in this past year you did the story of Joseph, didn't you?

[14:11] Did you use Joseph in kids' church at some point? Yeah? When Joseph, tons of unfair stuff happened to him. So he was treated really unfairly by his brothers, wasn't he?

What did they do to him? Can you remember? Can you remember? They threw him in a pit and then they sold him, didn't they? And he went to Egypt.

And there in Egypt Joseph was treated really badly. He got thrown into jail because a lady told lies about him. And then he was in jail and there was a butler there, the King's Cupbearer.

And he said, if you help me get out of jail, I'll help you. But what happened once he went back out of jail? He forgot all about Joseph for a long time.

And so there's lots of unfair stuff for people in the Bible. There's lots of unfair stuff for us. And sometimes for children, things can seem very unfair.

[15:07] Now, I want to ask you boys and girls, are you very, are you good at doing a, a, a, a that's not fair face? Okay? Do you think you can do it?

Right, let's, let me see. Show me your that's not fair face. Oh, excellent. I knew you would be good at me. Excellent. Good. Can you do a not fair? Can you do it?

Let's see. That's good. If something happens, not fair. I found one online. I thought it was quite good. It's not fair. It's not fair. Yeah. Sometimes we feel like that. That's not fair. And sometimes it can be the silliest things that make us feel like that.

I remember I shared a very, very funny story that was told actually by Alastair I and he was saying there was two children in the back of a car and they were squabbling and they got really annoyed with each other and they were getting annoyed with each other all the time.

And then one of them got really annoyed and the people said, what's wrong? And he said, they looked out of my window. And they gave me the silliest things.

[16:11] Sometimes we can fight over really silly stuff. Sometimes there's things that are really, things that are unfair. But it's not just silly stuff. Sometimes there's really serious things that are unfair.

Any of you think of things that are kind of unfair? Just know that's not good. Like serious things, not just silly things, but serious things. What stuff do you maybe learn a bit in school or think about that's unfair?

What do you see? Yeah, that's right. People don't behave badly. People shout at it. That's not good. That's not very good at all. What about stuff to do with like around the world?

What stuff's unfair all around the world? Can you think of anything? Some people don't have clean water. Some people don't have clean water. That's a great example. Some people don't have enough to eat.

Some people don't have homes. And some people treat other people really badly. So these things can be really, really unfair.

[17:08] Bullying is another example of something that's really unfair. Gossiping and talking about people in a bad way. All of that stuff is unfair.

All of that's teaching us a very important lesson. And it's a lesson that I want you all to learn and to remember. That is that sin is never fair.

Sin has mucked up the world and it makes life very unfair. God made the world to be a brilliant place to live, but sin has mucked that up.

And so now people don't have enough to eat. People treat each other badly. People get sick. And the biggest unfairness of all is that people die.

Because God didn't make us to die, He made us to live, and sin has wrecked that. And one of the biggest tricks that the devil can play on us is to make us think that sin will feel fair.

[18:12] The devil likes to make us think that sin will feel fair. So if someone hurts us, so if someone maybe does something at school that upsets you or if your brother or sister gets in your nerves or breaks something or hurts us, we can think, I need to get them back.

And if someone lies about us, we think, well, I'm going to lie about them and that will feel fair. We think if I get this person back for the wrong that they've done to me, it's going to make me feel fair. But in the end, sin doesn't ever make us feel fair. It makes us feel guilty.

And if you look at the things that God tells us not to do in the Bible, when He says, don't lie, don't steal, don't be selfish, don't be aggressive, don't be greedy, don't be lazy, these are all basically saying, don't do stuff that's unfair.

And so when things feel unfair, always remember that that's the effect that sin has had on the world. It's easy to think that just more sin will make it fair.

[19 : 19] Now, I need two volunteers, okay, two volunteers to come and help me with something. Okay, Abby, I become, I need one more.

Excellent. I become, I don't know which Flanagan you are, which is terrible. So what's your name? What's your name? Connor.

Excellent. So you just stand over here, right? So at Abby, you stand here, right? See this square here on the floor, right? That's your square, right? Right, Connor, you stand here.

See this square in here, that's your square, right? That's your square. Keep it tidy, right? Okay.

Okay, so Abby, take a handful of that and put it onto his square.

Oh, look what she did to your square. What are you going to do? Well done.

[20 : 16] How does that feel? Horrible. Look at that. So one of them threw paper in another person's square, and so in order to be fair, you get it back.

But what's the end result? Is everything good? No. What is everything? It's a terrible mess, isn't it? You made a terrible mess of my floor.

Isn't that terrible? And so you can see that you can easily think, oh, well, if I just get Abby back, then it's going to be fair. But actually, it's not fair. It just makes a mess.

What do we actually need in this situation? What do we need to do with all this stuff? Clean it up exactly and take all of the rubbish away.

That would make it better, wouldn't it? And that's exactly what Jesus has come to do with sin. He hasn't come to throw more across at other people. He's actually come to clean it up.

[21 : 20] And that's something that we must all always remember. So don't ever think that more sin will be fair. More sin just means more mess, doesn't it? Yeah.

I'm starting to think that this was a terrible idea. Anyway, thank you very much, excellent. Good job. Round of applause for Abby and Bernard.

Excellent. By the way, Derek is a clean freak, so do not tell him that I did that.

If we just add more sin to sin, it doesn't make things fair. It just makes things worse. What we need is someone to come and just take it away completely, and that's what Jesus did.

So the parable teaches us that sometimes it feels like God doesn't listen to our prayers. Sometimes it feels like everything is unfair. But the parable also teaches us that in truth, God is always listening, and God is always fair.

[22 : 26] Now, whenever you read a parable, you have to be a wee bit careful that you don't read too much into it. In this parable, the judge is unfair.

He's mean, and he's a bit grumpy. And he only helps this woman because he's fed up of her pestering her. So does that mean that God is grumpy and mean, and only answers our prayers because he's fed up?

Is that what it's saying? No, not at all. Jesus is actually making a contrast where he's saying, if even a grumpy judge will help a widow, so too, how much more will God?

That's why we should never give up, because God is not grumpy. He's not selfish. He's amazingly kind and caring. And the two things that we've been reminded of here is first, that God is always listening to us.

Verse 7 speaks about praying to him night and day. You can see it day and night there in the third bottom line. A great reminder to us that God is always listening, even the tiniest prayer that you guys say as children, God is always listening to us.

[23 : 38] Sometimes it can be really tough when we feel like no one is listening. In this parable, the widow would have felt that nobody was listening to her. And sometimes we can feel like something's wrong.

We can feel like maybe our parents aren't listening to us, or our teachers aren't listening to us, or our friends aren't listening. And sometimes us grownups can be so busy with stuff that we don't always hear what little children are saying to us.

But do you know that that never happens with God? Because even if your voice is tiny, God always hears you and is always listening.

The parable also reminds us that God is always fair. As Jesus says, God will bring justice for his people. Remember we said a moment ago that sin has made things very unfair.

We must never forget that God is not like that. In fact, it's theologically impossible for God to be unfair. It's really interesting that Jesus chose a widow as the main character in this parable, because back in these days, a widow was a woman who had a really difficult time.

[24 : 51] She'd lost her husband, would have probably lost her income, would have been poor, and easily forgotten by people. But again and again in the Bible, we're reminded that God cares for widows and for other vulnerable people, those who are orphaned, those who are sick, those who are lonely.

God never says, oh well, who cares about people like that? God is always concerned that people are treated fairly. In fact, God is concerned even about the little details. It's a really interesting example that even when it comes to weighing stuff, God hates it if people are being dishonest.

If you imagine going into a sweetie shop and you said, I want 10 pounds of sweets and they gave you a bag that looked big, but in it was only 9 pounds, that wouldn't be fair, would it?

God's saying that's awful. Do not do that. Always be honest, always be fair, always be true. And yet all too often, people are unfair towards others.

We can see that in lots of parts of the world. There's lots of different ways in which people treat others badly.

[25 : 58] But in the midst of all that, I want you boys and girls to never, ever forget that it's impossible for God to be unfair.

All of His laws, His plans, His purposes, His decisions, they will never, ever be unfair. And ultimately, God has promised to put right all the unfairness in the world.

So when Jesus speaks about justice in this parable, he's pointing us forward to the fact that eventually God will bring justice and fairness to the whole universe.

God's going to put everything right. You learned about some of Jesus' miracles in Kids Church this year, where He fed people, where He healed people, where He restored people who were struggling, who were blind, or who had all sorts of difficulties in their lives.

These miracles are a great pointer towards the fact that Jesus has come to put everything that's wrong right. He's come to fix the world.

[27 : 02] Now, this whole idea of justice is a really important thing as well, because justice is something that everybody wants. Even people who don't go to church, even people who say they don't believe in God, they still want justice.

Nobody wants to live in a country where wrong is ignored. So imagine you were in your class. Does anybody here chat in class? None. Oh, excellent. Very impressive.

That's good. But imagine, imagine that two of you were chatting in class, and you were chatting away in talking and talking and talking and not working and chatting and chatting and chatting and chatting.

And the teacher gave one of you a row, and not the other. Would that be fair? No. That would be like an injustice.

We all want justice to be done. Everyone wants justice. Sometimes though, people want justice so much they're impatient for it, and we can make ourselves the judge.

[27 : 59] And we have to be very careful about that. Sometimes we can be too slow to correct things that are wrong. Sometimes we can be too quick to punish what we think is wrong. What we really need is a judge who knows the truth.

And ultimately, the only one who knows the whole truth is Jesus. He is the one who is always fair.

That brings us to the last thing that we're going to say. We must not give up. Instead, we must trust Jesus. At the end of the parable, Jesus speaks about the fact that he's going to return, and when he comes back, he'll bring justice, he'll put right every wrong.

And so in our longing for justice, we need to be patient and we need to trust God. Is God big enough to put everything right? Yes, he is. Is God knowledgeable enough to know the truth about everything?

Yes, he is. He will have the authority to hold everyone to account. Yes, he does. Jesus is going to come back to put everything right.

[29 : 03] But the really important question is, when Jesus comes back, what's he looking for? What do you think he's looking for? Well, it's so easy to think that Jesus would be looking for people who've never done anything wrong.

And so he's going to come back and he's going to look for the really good people. It's easy to think that, but it's not true, because those people don't exist.

When Jesus comes back, he's not looking for people who've never done anything wrong. He's looking for people who trust him. To trust that he hears us, to trust that he's always fair, to trust that he's listening, that he's always listening, to trust that he'll never let us down.

It's so important that Jesus is not looking for people to impress him. He's looking for people to trust him.

And no matter how old you are, it's so important you remember that. Sometimes we can think that we need to impress God.

[30 : 09] Just like in school, sometimes when you go to school, you want to impress your friends and you want to impress your teacher. It's easy to think that we need to impress God. It's not true. You don't need to impress him.

You just need to trust him. So this wee parable has four lessons that I want you to remember.

In order to help you remember that, we've put all four things into a wee poem that I want you to try and remember and listen to. So I'm going to read it out and you can just read it in your head as I say it.

Sometimes it feels that God doesn't listen to our prayers. Sometimes it feels it seems like everything's unfair. But God is always listening. He's always fair and true.

So Lord, I won't give up. Instead, I'll trust you. Amen. Let's pray.

[31 : 05] Father, we pray that in everything that we do, we would remember that you are fair and true and always listening.

And we pray that in all the changes of life and in all that we go through, we pray that we would always trust you and always follow you. Thank you for your amazing care and thank you that you've come to put everything right.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.