

Keep Praying Until the Kingdom Comes

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. And let me add my welcome to Rob's. Hello, if you're watching online as well, good to see you. If you're at home, keep your Bibles open. If you're here, please keep your service sheets to the right page.

And we'll keep looking through Luke 18. Let's pray for God's help as we start off our time together this morning. Father, open our ears this morning.

Waken our tired hearts. Bring us to drink deeply from your word. By your spirit, help us to live by your commands and by your wisdom. Make us more like Christ through what we hear this morning.

And guide us to do your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. It's Monday morning. You've gotten out of bed. You've showered. Coffee's in the mug.

Breakfast is in the bowl. And you sit down to read your Bible. Eventually it comes time to pray and then your mind goes blank. Now what? What are you going to pray about this time?

[1 : 0 0] You rack your brain. You try and say something about the passage you've just read. You mumble out some thoughts about things in your mind. But you're not really concentrating. Later on, you hear some tragic news on the BBC.

And you pray about it. But in the coming weeks, the situation never changes. And then it just fades out of the news. You hear a family member has cancer. You pray passionately.

But they still deteriorate. And they still die. You wonder why you keep praying when day after day, it feels like you're just throwing words into a void. None of your prayers seem to be answered.

You no longer know what to say. Your times where you come to pray just feel like cold silences between you and God. For some of us, that picture may feel far too familiar.

Sometimes the big reason that people choose not to believe in God is because they feel like their prayers are going unanswered. For Christians, perseverance in prayer is something that we might find that we struggle with quite often.

[2 : 0 2] When God doesn't answer the prayer that we so desperately desire or bring the justice that we seek, we wonder if our prayers are being heard. Because sometimes they feel like they achieve nothing.

When we're discouraged like that, what do we need in order to help us to keep going and keep praying? Not just praying for the next week or the next month, but what's going to keep us praying to the very end of our lives?

Let me say what Jesus has to say in today's passage will be a great help to us in that battle. Now, in order to get us there, let's remind ourselves where we're at in Luke. We're in a lengthy section of Jesus traveling towards Jerusalem, towards his trial, his death, and resurrection.

He's been teaching the crowds, the Pharisees, the disciples, and mainly focusing in on the coming kingdom that he is bringing. The last chapter brought into clear focus that the coming kingdom is not predictable, but when it does come, it will be swift, powerful, and decisive.

When Jesus comes back, we will not miss it. Nobody will. We're being challenged as disciples on what we think of Jesus' kingdom and whether we are ready for it. It's a good reminder to us that when we die, the big excitement isn't heaven, but the eventual redemption of the whole world, a new creation under Jesus, and that's the kingdom that's coming.

[3 : 24] But if you're anything like me, it just seems very far off. It seems so high up that it doesn't really feature in my thoughts day by day. It isn't the kind of thing that we often discuss at church small groups, nor does it necessarily come up in our prayers that often.

So my question for us this morning is, where's the disconnect? Why do we feel like that when Jesus is so clear and teaches so plainly and for so much of this gospel about the coming kingdom?

How is it that that kingdom features so little in our own thoughts? Well, again, today's passage is going to continue on this theme of the kingdom in Luke and help us think clearly about what it really means when we pray, your kingdom come.

Now, I as preacher this week have a real gift from Luke because this passage starts off with a direct explanation of the point of the parable.

Luke 18 verse 1 says, Jesus told his parable to show them that they should always pray and never give up. So the disciples are meant to always pray and never give up. Sermon done, right?

[4 : 30] That's it. But with the wider context, we know that this is about the kingdom. So this is about disciples' need to keep praying for the kingdom to come.

So that's our first and really our main point of this whole thing. Keep praying until the kingdom comes. So let's dig into our parable then. Jesus brings us two characters.

We've got an unjust judge and a persistent widow. So over here we have our judge. He has no regard for anyone. He doesn't care what anyone thinks of him, not even God. And though it is literally his job, he has no interest in bringing justice.

Secondly, we have our widow. Now, in Jesus' day, to be a widow was to be incredibly vulnerable. Not to be able to hold land or any security of your own. You are at the mercy of the people around you.

The widow in the parable is not only vulnerable but struggling because someone has wronged her. And she's a victim seeking justice. So our widow brings her complaint to the judge and gets nothing.

[5 : 32] Absolutely nothing whatsoever. The judge just has no time for this woman's complaint. Why would he? This widow has absolutely nothing to offer him. She's seeking justice from one who's meant to give it but getting nothing in return.

So she doesn't give up. Our widow goes back again and again and again, just wearing the judge down. You maybe wonder if the woman that Jesus is imagining here is like some really edgy, tough-as-nails Glaswegian granny because eventually our uncaring judge, not because it's right and not because it's helpful, but literally out of fear that she's going to like lamp in one, brings her justice.

She gets justice because she's persistent and possibly a little scary. The big surprise, though, of this parable is in the parable itself but the explanation.

Look down at verse 6. See what Jesus says. And the Lord said, Listen to what the unjust judge says. Doesn't that seem totally wrong at the end of this parable?

You kind of want Jesus to end this by being like, The unjust judge is terrible. Listen to what I say. But no, listen to what the unjust judge says. So why is he saying that? Well, Jesus is getting us to focus in on the impact of the persistence of his widow.

[6 : 50] So look at verses 7 and 8 again. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

I tell you, he will see that they get justice and quickly. This parable is not saying that God is like the unjust judge and that if we want anything from him, we just kind of have to pester him into action.

No, this parable makes a comparison. If even an unjust judge can be swayed by persistence, then how much more will God, who is the perfect judge, bring about true justice?

Now, the answer is massively more, massively, massively more justice will come from God, the good judge. So in the midst of an entire section about the coming kingdom, disciples are being told to persevere in praying for its coming.

God will bring about justice for his chosen people. He will not put off their request forever. One day, justice will be done. And when it comes, it will come quickly.

[7 : 58] The question for the disciples, and therefore a question for any of us who believe in the Lord Jesus, is will we still be praying when he returns? Will we still be those who cry out day and night and being persistent like this widow, or will we have given up?

Do we believe that the kingdom of justice is coming, or have we lowered our sights back to earth and forgotten where history is really going? The simple answer, then, for how we live this out, we must keep praying for the kingdom to come.

This is what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus in light of the kingdom's coming. Every time that we say the Lord's Prayer here every week, do we forget that the third statement in it, after saying that God is Father and that his name is holy, is your kingdom come.

It's hugely important to being a Christian that we understand this. The prayer for God's kingdom coming is more than just asking for some justice now. And it's far more than just some sort of morbid request for the world to end.

But it's an acknowledgement that God's promises to redeem everything in the whole of creation and all of history aren't fully realized yet, but are coming with that kingdom.

[9 : 12] We desire that day of justice to come fully and come soon, so we keep praying for it until it comes. So if you are here and you're a disciple of Jesus, then get praying for the kingdom.

And if you're here or if you're watching this and you're not a follower of Jesus yet, understand that this kingdom is coming. Jesus is crystal clear on that. The day of judgment will arrive, and on the day when it comes, you'll have to give account to God, the judge of all, for how you've lived.

There are only two places for anyone to be, either safe inside the kingdom with Jesus or locked out forever in hell. It's a sober thought, but it's an important one that comes with an invitation.

This kingdom is for all. So come to Jesus. It's as simple as that. Everyone is being invited, and in the coming weeks, we'll see more and more of Jesus' invitation to the lost and the lowly and the weak to come to him.

So if you don't yet know him, come to him now. But let's take a breath for a minute and just step back. It's probably worth us thinking that actually this is the kind of passage we might struggle with a little bit.

[10 : 27] Be honest with yourself. How do you feel about all this kingdom stuff? Do you feel helpless or hopeful? I wonder how the disciples felt around Jesus after hearing this.

They are faithful followers. They're just beginning to get a sense of how much this would cost them to live for the future kingdom. There simply wouldn't be a need for Jesus to tell them a parable about always praying and not giving up unless there was something so discouraging that they might actually give up.

And that then is where we find the second point of our sermon this morning. Don't be discouraged. I wonder how real the coming of the kingdom felt to the disciples when they arrived in Jerusalem to everyone shouting, Hosanna and welcoming in Jesus as king.

The kingdom must have felt like it was this close. But a few days later when he's been crucified and buried, how far away does the kingdom feel?

How discouraged are the disciples? Then he's raised and he's ascended and you know the kingdom's coming and it's exciting. But then what about years later? What about when these apostles planted churches that are, begin to be drawn away from Jesus and from the true gospel?

[11 : 45] What about when they make Christian converts who then fall away as well? I wonder how hard it was for them to keep their focus on the coming kingdom when it felt so far away.

And I wonder about us then. I wonder what gives us similar discouragements. As I mentioned at the start, those seemingly unanswered prayers, the lack of justice that we see in the world. Do we get discouraged by all of that?

If you look back at verses 7 and 8 again, will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

I tell you, he will see that they get justice and quickly. But I wonder if when we hear that, we're more likely to ask it as a real question. Will God bring about justice for his people that cry out to him?

Will he keep, is he not just putting them off forever? Is justice coming quickly? Because 2,000 years seems slow to me. Well, I imagine those questions and others sometimes trouble us.

[12 : 47] Sometimes maybe the lack of detail about the coming of the kingdom in the New Testament discourages us. Sometimes maybe it's because those you love and hold dear don't believe in the Lord Jesus and they're therefore outside of the kingdom and you worry about what will happen when Jesus comes to them.

Maybe you think this entire thing just sounds a bit too dramatic. Like, if you really believe this and you're akin to someone walking around on the streets of a sandwich board that just says the end is nigh. It could just be that you've never thought about it.

There are so many things that could discourage us from taking the coming kingdom seriously. Many things that would lead us to not pray for it. But by comparison then, look at Jesus.

Throughout these chapters, he has a completely unwavering view of the kingdom. He sees it as the culmination of all that he has been called to do. His final work that lies beyond his death and resurrection.

The peace, the eternal life, the complete justice, the righting of all wrongs and the resolution of all sufferings. All these come with the kingdom. Without the coming of the kingdom, none of these will happen.

[13 : 55] And it is the kingdom that is our eternal hope. Jesus' perfect world over which he is king. This world then, fallen and broken as it is now, is not a world where perfect justice will ever be done.

In order for that to happen, this place would need to become sinless. And that is itself the kingdom. The reason we struggle now is because we expect that the kingdom should be coming to me in my life right now and not just in the kingdom.

We find ourselves praying for earthly justice and then when it doesn't come, we get disappointed at God because he hasn't answered our prayers from our point of view. It may be that we've set our sights and our expectations on justice now that may not come rather than justice then.

We just have to grapple with that concept that actually complete justice will not be done in our lifetimes. Not till Christ comes again. Not every debt will be paid.

Not every injustice will be made up for. Not every slave will be freed. Not every chain broken. We simply won't see heaven on earth. Now it doesn't mean that we don't work and strive for those things now.

[15 : 09] That is hugely important. And it doesn't mean that God never brings earthly justice now. That's simply not the case. But that total heavenly justice, that resolution of all things, won't come until the kingdom does.

And that means that you have something to keep praying for all the time. Let me just read for you a quote from somewhere else in the Bible. If you do have a Bible with you here or at home, please turn to 2 Peter chapter 3.

Now think that Peter has heard Jesus giving all these parables and all of the teaching on this road. And much later on when he's written this letter, in 2 Peter 3, starting at verse 8, he says this, But do not forget this one thing, dear friends.

With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?

[16 : 24] You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens with fire and the elements will melt in the heat.

But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. This life, says Peter, is not the place where righteousness dwells.

But we look forward to the place where it does, to this new heavens and new earth, the coming kingdom where righteousness does dwell, where justice is done. And faced with that fact, if we find ourselves longing for justice, which we absolutely must, then we must be people who never stop praying for the kingdom to come.

We must not get discouraged from that goal. Praying for the kingdom to come in no way devalues earthly justice. But it sees the greater goal. Total and absolute justice only comes with the kingdom.

So, to that I say, be encouraged. When we see great injustices that we aren't able to fix, sufferings that passed before is about resolution, we just know that the kingdom isn't here yet, that there is still hope.

[17 : 40] One day there will be justice. Brothers and sisters, let's not be discouraged encouraged that the kingdom hasn't come in power yet, but be encouraged all the more to pray for it as we see it approaching.

In a very real sense, it is closer today than it was yesterday. So, we must follow through on what Luke tells us. Don't be discouraged. Always pray and never give up.

your prayers for the kingdom are never wasted. So, finally then, our very last point, which essentially is just our first point all over again, but it's a reminder.

We must persevere to the end. Remember the last thing Jesus says in verse 8? However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

This is a sharp reminder for us to be careful with this passage. We may have a lot of questions about the Lord's timing and his justice, but the subject of that question is us, not him.

[18 : 37] We are the ones on trial, not God. When Jesus comes again, will he find us faithful people? To link that back to verse 1, that's going to be faith expressed in perseverance in prayer.

When Jesus comes back, whenever that is, will he find us persevering in prayer or will he find us having given up? The danger for us is that we get so caught up in our discouragements and our questions that we cease to be prayerful and dependent.

That, Jesus says, would be to miss out on the kingdom when it does come. If and how we pray for the kingdom to come, shows us what we really think of Jesus' words and his promises.

Do we have faith to persevere until the kingdom comes or we just focus on what we get now? If I find that I won't pray or stopped praying because I didn't get the answer to a prayer that I wanted, then where is my faith?

I simply can't argue with the Lord about timescales of the kingdom. Instead, I must humbly submit to him in prayer. In doing so, we will hold on to the fact that one day justice will be done in full and it will be absolutely wonderful.

[19 : 52] Just think forward to that day of no suffering and no pain. It all being fully resolved. There will never be a single question again of whether good will be done because it is and it will.

And that's a day worth praying for and waiting for. And that should be a great hope to us in painful days, especially in the coronavirus time when it just feels like things are slowing down and this world just feels quite a painful place to be.

Hopefully it lifts our hearts and minds to remember that one day there will be a kingdom totally free from disease and death, free from fear and anxiety and pain. Do you believe that?

I hope you do. Jesus sees it as essential to the life of a disciple, to persevere in that belief and keep praying for it and keep praying until the kingdom comes.

And that even means praying to the very end of our days. Will we keep praying until our very last breath? Because you know it will be proved on the day of his coming that none of those prayers were wasted.

[20 : 58] We just have to trust the words of the Lord Jesus. So, we're back at our breakfast tables on Monday. We've got our time to pray.

What's going to have changed? Well, I'm going to be reminded that prayer is an exercise in dependent discipleship. That my prayers are never wasted and every little detail will have been understood and heard and in the end they really will have been answered.

God's justice will be absolutely complete when the kingdom comes. So, though I still struggle, I will keep praying with real purpose and energy. I'm not throwing words into a vacuum, thank goodness.

I'm worshipping my heavenly father who cares for me and praying for his kingdom of perfect justice to come. This longing and knowledge that no prayer has ever wasted is what's going to keep me praying persistently when I'm discouraged, when I'm tired and by the grace of God keep me praying until my very last day.

In light of that then, the only way for us to respond to this passage is to pray. So let's pray together. Let's take some time to come before the Lord in our own hearts in quiet.

[22 : 13] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Help us to persevere in praying for your kingdom to come. Lord, let us never lose hope even in the most painful and discouraging of times that your kingdom of total justice will one day come.

Lord, we long for it and we ask that it would come soon. But keep us patient and persevering until that day. And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.