

## **Luke Chapters 18-19: The Parable of the Persistent Widow**

### **From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Luke**

In the parable of the persistent widow, a poor, powerless person persists in nagging a corrupt, powerful person to do justice for her. The parable assumes John the Baptist's teaching that holding a position of power and leadership obligates you to work justly, especially on behalf of the poor and weak. But Jesus focuses the parable on a different point, that we are "to pray always and to not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). He identifies the hearers — us — with the woman. And he identifies the prayed-to person — God — with the corrupt judge, a strange combination. Assuming that Jesus doesn't mean that God is corrupt, the point must be that if persistence pays off with a corrupt human of limited power, how much more will it pay off with a just God of infinite power.

The purpose of the parable is to encourage Christians to persevere in their faith against all odds. But it also has two applications for those who work in positions of leadership. First, the juxtaposition of a corrupt judge with a just God implies that God's will is at work even in a corrupt world. The judge's job is to do justice, and by God, he will do justice by the time the widow is finished with him. Elsewhere, the Bible teaches that the civil authorities serve by God's authorization, whether they acknowledge it or not. So there is hope that even in the midst of systemic injustice, justice may be done. A Christian leader's job is to work toward that hope at all times. We cannot right every wrong in the world in our lifetimes. But we must never give up hope, and never stop working for the greater good in the midst of the imperfect systems where our work occurs.

The second point is that only God can bring about justice in a corrupt world. That is why we must pray and not give up in our work. God can bring miraculous justice in a corrupt world, just as God can bring miraculous healing in a sick world. In the parable of the persistent widow, God does not intervene. The widow's persistence alone leads the judge to act justly. But Jesus indicates that God is the unseen actor. God will grant justice for the ones who persist in reaching out to him, day and night.