

Sermon Notes, Luke 18:1-8, Sunday 23rd August 2026

We live in a culture that values the instant (messaging, access, credit, coffee – no!) We're not good at waiting. Even if the British turned queuing into an art form, we hate delays. "Train now departing at ..."

Harder is waiting for a situation to be resolved. Medical tests. Reserved judgement in a court. Exam results.

Get delays with Jesus as well, and that can be hard.

Some people become Christians with the promise of instant improvement – to their wealth, a health problem sorted, fixing character flaws, stamping out certain sins, resolving broken relationships.

Then it doesn't happen straight away. The world stays broken, and your place within it. It feels like Jesus has failed.

At that point, there are three easy moves to make. 1. Stop (just stop believing, stop coming). Give up. 2. Drift (enthusiasm slowly slips). 3. Resign (keep coming, lose all hope things will get any better)

Delay in Luke's Gospel

In the second half of Luke, Luke tells the story of Jesus and his disciples on a journey with purpose. 9:51. He's predicted his death twice, and is about to do it a third time. The journey towards his place of execution. Jesus is teaching his disciples what it looks like to follow him along that road.

Luke breaks up the journey with markers of where they've got to. Today's parable comes between 17:11 and 19:28-29a. Last leg of the journey. One theme in their conversation at this stage: There will be a delay. Not all the benefits of Jesus kingship will come at once, certainly not the minute they arrive in Jerusalem. 17:20. 18:11.

This parable is all about the need to wait for things. If you don't like delays, you're not going to like Jesus. Not that he's late / misses his own deadlines. But you will need to wait, and things could take longer than you'd like.

So we get our parable – 18:1.

Story of a widow and a judge

Judge: Verse 2. Doesn't care what God thinks. Or people. It's not that he won't be swayed. That would make him a good judge. He doesn't care if he does a good job, if people think he's just.

Widow: Verse 3. Very poor. No benefits system. A woman in a court means she had no male relative to represent her, so no income.

Things are as bad as they could be. Her adversary keeps coming after her, she has no money to live off, and the town judge does not care.

Then the judge changes his mind and decides to help. Verses 4-5. He's extraordinarily self-aware. Verse 4b. Wonder if he wrote that down in his

judgement?! Hasn't decided to care about her or God. It's in his own selfish interest to help. Verse 5. Maybe she'll literally attack. I'm told it's boxing language for a blow to the head. She's giving him a headache, so it's time to give her justice.

Always look for what's odd in a parable. In this one: She actually wins. She comes out on top. You wouldn't see that coming. This is a story of someone who gets justice, completely unexpectedly.

And that's the comfort for us.

How is this story like our situation?

Jesus gives us the lesson from this story in verses 6-8a.

We are like the widow, but God is not like the judge.

Like the widow we are helpless. We need God to make things right. You may not feel helpless, but there are all sorts of things you cannot fix yourself, you need God. If you do feel powerless, know that Luke deliberately records situations where people who are disadvantaged meet kindness in Jesus. The more your situation makes you feel powerless, the more this story will resonate with you.

But God is not like the judge. The judge does not care for justice, or for what God thinks. God does care for justice, and God cares for what God thinks. His own character and moral standards matter to him. Here's the point: It can sometimes feel that God is like the judge. Jesus' point is that if a judge this corrupt will give the widow justice, we can be absolutely sure God will look after us. Even if it feels impossibly unlikely.

How do we respond?

That's why Jesus told this story, but how does he want us to respond?

We don't have to guess. Verse 1. Verses 7-8. He told it so that we would pray and not give up., And so that, when Jesus comes, he will find us to be people of faith. He'll come to find us trusting him.

This means three things in practice.

Keep trusting when it's dark

The disciples are nearly at Jerusalem. Things were about to get very dark, and it would feel that God is like the judge in this story. They'd feel hunted by adversaries, wondering where God had gone. They need to pray and not give up. You might remember that they didn't keep praying in the Garden of Gethsemane; they fell asleep!

But Jesus would come. He'd rise from the dead. Which tells us this phrase, "the Son of Man comes", is not just a reference to the second coming. There will be dark seasons for the Lord's people, when we need to live by faith, keep praying and not give up.

Back to trains: We like the update screens. (Another "instant" – instant updates). Get them at bus stops. Or on an app. In the old days, no information. Bus or train was late, nothing. How it sometimes feels with Jesus. Things are tough. No specific word on why, how long it will last, when he'll bring relief.

The Son of Man will come. Keep trusting him.

Keep praying when nothing happens

This is a call to pray. There are two ways to say the same thing. Verse 1: We should always pray. Verse 8: We should have faith.

Faith in Jesus is invisible. You can't see whether someone's faith. But if having faith and keeping praying are the same thing, then you can. Prayer is faith made visible.

It's so easy to feel guilty when we talk about prayer so I'm treading carefully. Jesus is saying our prayer lives are windows into our souls. Whether it's work, money, friendships, the future: You use the resources God has given you to navigate life. But do you pray about these things? That will tell you if you depend on Jesus, or you just navigate life with your own resources?

So pray and not give up. One day Jesus will come. The question is: Do we trust him?

Most things in life, if there's no evidence it's doing any good you don't keep doing it. Lawn feed. Grass not improving. Why keep doing it? Medication to cure a specific pain. Still hurting. Why keep taking it? Praying about the things on your heart. Nothing happens. Why keep praying?

God loves to hear your voice. Do you still pray for the things on your heart? Or have you begun to give up already? It's so easy to start to think it never does any good, so what's the point?

Keep waiting for Jesus to return

Although Jesus will come to your aid in lots of ways, the fullest meaning of "when the Son of Man comes" is to the day when Jesus will return in all his glory to judge the living and the dead.

How will he find you on that day? Will he find you to be a person of faith? Will he find you still praying, trusting him.

Jesus says: Remain confident he will come back. He isn't promising to give us everything on our wish-list. But he saying he'll give justice. One day, everything wrong will be put right.

That much is absolutely certain. The question is: Will he find us trusting him when that happens?