

Luke 18:1-8

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[0:00] So Luke 18. I think if you ask me what is my favourite chapter in the Bible, I'd say Luke 18. If I'm asked to preach on it, it's normally the chapter that I go to. I think I preach on it more than any other chapter in the Bible.

All of life is here. The rich and the poor. The widow and the kids. The blind and the see-in. The religious and the scum. They're all here. They're all there in Luke chapter 18. But the problem is, isn't it, when you know a chapter like Luke 18, where do you come to it and you think you know what it's going to say? And so many of us are like that. And I think when we come to Luke 18 verses 1 to 8, I think this week is the first time I've really begun to understand it properly. So Luke 18, you've heard it. The widow went to the nasty judge and she nag-nag-nag, nag-nag-nag. And Jesus tells us that story so that we will pray and not give up. So what do we do? We go to God who gives and we nag-nag-nag, nag-nag-nag. The only problem with that is Luke 18 follows Luke 17.

[1:14] And I don't think I'd realised that before. Well I had, but not properly. So that's what I want to try and show you today. So people are training, aren't they? You've seen them around for the London Virgin Money London Marathon.

You've seen them. Through the long winter months, they've been trotting out for runs. In the dark, in the rain, after a day at the desk. As they shut the door and shout to their wife, I may be gone for some time dear.

And they've headed out, haven't they, to eat up more miles. And when you're training for a marathon, you've just got to get the miles in. And you eat them up. Pounding along the pavements of unsuspecting London boroughs.

You know that they're London marathon runners because occasionally you see them overtaken, don't you, by an old lady shuffling past with a heavy shopping bag. Or by ewes hanging out at the bus stop shouting at them.

And you think, ah, that person is so slow, they must be training for the marathon. Now, we want to say thankfully, don't we, that the Christian life is not like training for the London Marathon in every respect.

[2:17] But what the London Marathon training and the Christian life have in common is that they are both hard. They are. They are both hard.

And if you are someone who is becoming a Christian, or thinking about becoming a Christian, it's important that you know that. And if you are somebody who is already a Christian, then you will know that from experience that Christian life is hard.

It has many, many benefits. It really does. But it is hard going. It is certainly not the path of least resistance.

It's a battle against a world that is indifferent and sometimes hostile. It's a battle against a sinful nature. Which is the fifth column inside of us.

And it's a battle against a devil who is a powerful and intelligent enemy. Who is on the prowl 24-7. So why bother? Why bother?

[3:18] Being a Christian is such hard work. Well, why bother with marathon training? Why do people put themselves through it? Why do they go out every night in the dark and the rain and pound the streets?

Well, they do it because of April the 13th. Virgin Money London Marathon Day. April the 13th. And it's that goal, isn't it, that makes all the training worthwhile.

Now if you go to the London Marathon website, it's got some training tips. And under the heading, Setting Goals, is written this, the following. Be specific.

That's what it says when you're thinking about a marathon. Be specific. Choose the exact marathon that you want to run. Which I would have thought was pretty obvious advice. Register for the event as early as possible and train hard for it.

Isn't that great advice? Because the organisers know that you need a goal, don't you? You need a goal to keep yourself going in training. And so does the Christian.

[4 : 19] Now one of the recurring themes of Jesus is the day when he will return to judge the world. And we've seen that, haven't we, again and again in Luke 14 to 17.

Again and again it's come up. Jesus is going to come back to judge the world and to rescue his people. There will be a day of judgement. There will be a day of salvation. A day when people are sent into an eternal hell and when others are sent for eternal life.

And that prospect keeps the believer going. It keeps us going. And that prospect is the focus of this section in Luke's account.

And that's what I don't think I'd seen before. So look at Luke 17 verse 20. Jesus is asked to me about the kingdom of God. When is the kingdom of God going to come?

When will the kingdom of God come? And Jesus responds by teaching them about what he calls the days of the Son of Man. It's the same thing. And so in today's story in chapter 18, that same theme continues.

[5 : 26] The chapter divisions are not in the original. So four times reference is made to God giving justice. Look at verse 3.

Give me justice. Verse 5. I will give her justice. Verse 7. Will not God give justice?

Verse 8. I tell you. He will give justice. And so what it is about, for short hand, it is about what will happen on that day. It's about what will happen in the future.

That God will one day establish his justice. One day he will rescue his people for heaven. And he will overthrow all evil. And the prospect of that day keeps the Christian running.

Do you ever get weary waiting for Jesus to return? Do you ever get weary? Do you ever wonder if that day is ever going to come at all? Jesus himself acknowledged that that is going to be an issue for Christian believers.

[6 : 32] Look at chapter 17 and verse 22. The days are coming. The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man. And you will not see it.

Well, if you long for that day. If you're looking for that day. If you're desiring that day. And it doesn't come. What is the temptation? Well, after a while.

You say, stuff it. I'm going to give up. You lose heart. It's a bit like waiting at the checkout at Lidl. Or any sub-supermarket.

But particularly Lidl. I've been to Lidl the last three Saturdays. With two children. And without money to pay a trolley one day. Anyway. And you stand in the till.

This great long till. Queue. At Lidl. And you get nowhere. And after a while. You say, stuff it. I'm going to try another till. Don't you? And you move from one till.

[7 : 31] From one great king to another one. Well, it's now been 2,000 years, hasn't it? 2,000 years since Jesus promised. 2,000 years since Jesus said he would return.

It can be tempting, can't it? To lose heart. And give up waiting. Now that is what chapter 18 and verse 1 is about. It is not particularly about your longing for whatever it is.

That you've been praying for day after day after day. It's not about that really. It's about the justice. Let's come and look at 18 verse 1. He told them a power to the effect that they would always pray and not to lose heart. On the home page of the London Marathon.

They not only have the date in big and writing. In very large letters. But they also have a countdown clock. The time remaining. Till Marathon Day.

17 hours. 17 days. 19 hours. 44 minutes. And 13 seconds. When I checked it earlier this week. And they do it. So they'll keep on training.

[8 : 35] Now there is no website of Jesus' return. And on it a countdown clock. Well actually there probably is somewhere, isn't there? And I wouldn't pay any attention to that sort of website at all.

Alright? And if you're looking at all the websites. Come and see me after. And so we might wonder, might we? If that time is ever going to come.

Is it ever going to come? And we begin to lose heart. And that is natural. Jesus told this story to encourage you. To encourage us to keep going. And not to lose heart.

And given the focus on the day of his return. What we've seen before this story. This story is an encouragement. Not just to keep praying in general. Of course it is. Of course it is that. But more specifically.

It is an encouragement. For you to keep praying for. And for us to keep looking for the day of Jesus' return. To pray for that day. Lord come quickly.

[9 : 33] To keep trusting that it will happen. And so to keep going in the Christian life. And to encourage us to do that. Jesus tells us a story. It is a well known story about two characters. It is about a judge and a widow.

If when you hear the title judge. The picture comes to your mind. Of an upstanding. Exemplary member of the establishment. You've got to try and put those. Associations to one side for a minute. The judge in the story. That you'll see from verse 2. Is the kind of character. That you'd expect to find in the dock. Not on the bench. Verse 2. We read.

In a certain city. There was a judge. Who neither feared God. Nor respected man. That is not a great epitaph. Is it? To have inscribed on your tombstone.

Is it? Would you want that inscribed on your tombstone? Neither feared God. Nor respected man. And it's not a great combination. In a judge. They are on the ideal qualities.

[10 : 36] If you're heading up an extortion racket. Or you're heading up a violent gang. They have great qualities to have. Then it would be good. But not the sort of person that you want having. Peering over.

The bench. As you bring your case to court. But the other character is not put off. Look at verse 3. There was a widow in that city.

Who kept coming to him and saying. Give me justice. Against my adversary. Now we know. Don't we? Some of you know. That being a widow. Even today. Can be difficult. And being a widow. Is lonely. Even today. And in many many societies.

It's very very difficult. But in fact. Jesus society of the day. To be a widow. Was far worse. To be a widow. Was to be totally helpless. To be totally helpless.

[11 : 31] And that is a theme. We will see all the way through. Luke 18. She had no financial support. She was right at the bottom. Of the social ladder. And it's very very easy. Praise.

That you see that. All the way through. The New Testament. Very easy. To pray on widows. Those who wanted. To take an advantage. They had a field day. With widows. Well this particular widow. Is being victimised. By someone. And she brings her case. Before the judge. But although the judge. Is a nasty piece of work. Notice she is persistent. Can you see that. Verse 3.

She kept coming. Verse 5. The judge laments. That she keeps bothering me. And at the end of verse 5. He speaks of her. Beating him down.

With her continual coming. This woman. Will not take no. For an answer. And you can just imagine. Can't you. On one of these beautiful mornings.

[12 : 27] Her outside the judge's house. Every morning. To catch him. On his way to work. You can imagine. Her hanging around. The courthouse. To accost him.

When he pops out. For a sandwich. At lunchtime. When he's on his way home. Just as he's leaving work. She hands him a flyer. Which says. Give me justice.

Against my adversary. And even when the judge. Is sitting with his wife. In a restaurant that evening. The widow's face. Prashes against the window. Of the restaurant. And she shouts. Give me justice.

Against my adversary. Help me. There was a Nobel prize. For nagging. This woman would win it. And in the end.

It works. And she gets her way. Look at the judge's. Reluctant response. In verse 4. He slams down his knife and fork. In the restaurant. And he says. Though I neither fear God.

[13 : 22] 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. Such constant nagging. Nag.

Nag. Nag. Nag. And nagging. Can really wear you down. In the end. Can't it? I know this from experience. Listen.

Wait. Wait for the function. From our holiday. When I was a child. And you know. If you've been on holiday. You go to the beach in France. Or when you're in Kenya.

It happened. But when you're on the beach in France. Isn't it? Those people would come and sell you. Try and sell you. Leather belts. And leather hats. You see that? And they're there.

And they follow you. Along the beach. And they will not take you. Take no for an answer. And the hat. Stinks. Doesn't it? Of leather. I don't know whether you bought one. But in the end.

[14:19] You buy. When you buy a wallet. Or you buy a hat. Or you buy a belt. Just to get rid of the people. Just to get them. Or feel back. And the judge. Finally gives in to the widow.

Just to get rid of the woman. It's the same. You've bought those goods. In the house. From those people. Just to get rid of them. Well that is the story. What's the point of the story?

Look at verse 6. The point of the story is this. Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect.

Who cried him day and night. Will he delay long over them? I tell you he will give justice to them speedily. So there's two things.

Last week. Didn't we? The son of man. He will come slower than you think. He will come quicker than you think. They're both there in Luke 18. And this is a how much more line of argument.

[15:18] It basically goes like this. If diddly dee. Then how much more diddly done. If such and such. Then how much more such and such.

If an unrighteous judge grants the request. Of a nagging widow. Just to get the woman off his back. How much more will God. Give justice to his people who cry out to him. It works on contrast.

Doesn't it? The story does. As for the judge. He is unrighteous. But God. He is perfectly righteous. And just. So if an unrighteous judge.

Grants a request. How much more will God who is righteous. And whereas the person bringing the request. In his case. Was just an annoying widow.

Nag nag nag nag nag. By contrast. God's people. Could not be more dear to him. The contrast works on both of them. Alright. Not just on the judge. So God's people could not be more dear to him.

[16:19] Verse 7. There is that beautiful word. Isn't there? There is that beautiful word. He refers to them as his elect. As his chosen ones. As the people.

He is chosen from before all eternity. His chosen people. You put the two together. And what do you get? The righteous God. And his chosen people.

What do you get? You get certainty. Certainty that the God who is righteous. Will most certainly bring justice. For his dear people. The day will come.

When God will send Jesus back. To rescue his people. And to overthrow all evil. And this world will be brought to an end. And God sets up his eternal kingdom.

The new heavens and the new earth. The day of salvation. And the day of judgment. Is going to come. Of that we can be assured. He's not going to ignore the prayers of his people.

[17:17] As they long for that day. Well that is the point of the power. And that is good news for Christians. It is good news. For Christians who are finding the Christian life.

Hard going. And let's be honest. It is hard going. Here are just a few snapshots. Of life as a Christian. In different parts of the world.

Let me give you them. A youth leader in Tanzania. Was killed in a brutal machete attack. While leading an overnight prayer session. In the Lamella district.

The Mwanza province. Elijah Meshach died on the spot. While two other Christians were injured. Nepal. Lift up to the Lord please. Ganga Lama Tamang.

Lamba Bahadu Tamang. Lamba Bokta. And Bikram Lama. Four converts to Christianity. Whose homes in Nepal. Were torched on the 23rd of December. Blasphemy laws continue to cause distress.

[18:16] And hardship. Among the country's vulnerable Christian community. Cuba. Cuba. A pastor and his family in Cuba. Have been subjected to a campaign of harassment. By the authorities.

In what seems to be an attempt. To confiscate church property. Violent and abusive mobs. And be sent. Somalia. Pray for the grieving wife and children.

Of Abdakani Hassan. A Christian father in Somalia. Who was shot dead by gunmen. Suspected of belonging. To the Islamic militant group. Al-Shabaab. And so it goes.

Those examples are just taken from the prayer diary. Produced by the Barnabas Fund. There's a website on your notice sheet. That's just five days this week. Four days this week. The Barnabas Fund.

Prayer diary. Now what do you think. The believers are praying for. In those sorts of situations. What are they praying for in Somalia.

[19 : 15] In Nepal. In Cuba. In Tanzania. What are they praying for? You can bet that they pray. For the Lord to return soon. They pray don't they. Every day your kingdom come. For that day of both salvation. Yes.

And of judgment. As well as for the strength. To keep going in the meantime. Well this story in Luke 18. That Jesus tells. Is a great assurance for them.

Isn't it? And a great reassurance for them. But also for us. The opposition that you face. In our culture.

Is tame by comparison to that. Isn't it? But it is nonetheless real. And anyway. As you go on in the Christian life.

[20 : 09] You realise. Don't you. That it's not just the opposition. From other people. That makes the Christian life hard going. It's not just outside influences. That make the Christian life hard. For some of you.

And for all of you. It's what's in here. Isn't it? And so don't you. Don't you long for the day. When you will no longer. Face temptations.

Don't you? Don't you long for the day. When you will not have a battle. With sin. Don't you long for the day. When you will no longer. Live in a world.

Where there is so much evil. And injustice. That goes in check. And so much suffering. Don't you long for the day. When your heart. Will be cleansed. When your memory.

Will be wiped clean. Of all the bitter regrets. That you have. And Jesus says. That day is going to come. And it's going to come soon. Look at verse 8. Speedily.

[21 : 08] I tell you. He will give justice to them. Speedily. The coming of that day. Is 100% guaranteed. And that is the encouragement. And the challenge is this.

It's will you be found ready. When it does come. Will you be found ready. When it does come. And that is the note. That Jesus closes on. Isn't it?

In verse 8. So it is very interesting. Verse 1. He wants to reassure you. And he wants you to keep going. He doesn't want you to lose heart. How does he do that?

Verse 8. He challenges you. Nevertheless. When the Son of Man comes. Will he find faith on earth? Come he surely will.

But will we be ready. When he does come. Will he find faith on earth? Will he find faith in us? But why does Jesus suddenly mention faith?

[22 : 08] Why does he say at the end of verse 8. Will he find you praying? When he comes on earth. Why does he mention faith? How does it tie in.

With what he's been saying? Well firstly this. Two ways. The future focus. Is a sign of faith.

The future focus. Is a sign of faith. The future focus. Is a mark of true faith. What faith involves. Is explained. In the stories that follow.

In the rest of Luke 18. It's a chapter about faith. But for now. Just notice. One mark of faith. That we see in today's story. What is the mark of God's people. In this story?

What is the mark of faith? It's that they persist. In crying out to God. For justice. As the widowed it. Jesus describes. God's chosen people. In verse 7.

[23 : 05] As those who cry out to him. Day and night. For that day of justice to come. So you see. That future focus. Is a mark of faith.

We look to that goal. We long for it. We pray for it. Your kingdom come. That shouldn't be. Just a line.

That we repeat. In the Lord's prayer. Day by day. Rather it should be. The whole orientation. Of our lives. Your kingdom come. Such hope.

Is a mark of true faith. We are looking. Are we? Beyond the next holiday. We're looking beyond.

The next work deadline. We're looking beyond. The next project. We're looking to this.

Most distant. Horizon. Or do we have that. Hallmark ourselves. Are we longing. For the coming. Of the kingdom.

[23 : 59] Is our living. And our praying. Characterised. By this future. Perspective. Because this future hope. Is a mark of true faith. And that's why. Those illustrations. From last week. In chapter 17.

Of the days of Noah. When Noah. And his family. They lived in the light. Of the coming. Of that great day. But the people around them. They didn't. They mocked it. And they laughed. And Lot's wife. Who did not persevere. She looked back. Not looked forward. It's so helpful. The future hope.

That we have. Is a mark. Of true faith. That's one way. It ties in. Persevering. With this future focus. As well as being. A mark of faith. It encourages faith.

So it keeps us going. So this is. The last point. Really. How does it help. It's a mark of faith. But the future focus. Fools. Faith.

[25 : 02] The future focus. Fools. Faith. If you're going to tell them. That moment after the service. Eat two digestive biscuits. I'm trying to say that. Very quickly. The future focus.

Fools. Faith. It's a mark of genius. Now it is this focus. On that final day. That enables you.

To keep going. When the going gets tough. It is this future focus. That will keep you going. During the hard times. And that brings us. Is it full circle. Of where we began.

Think of the London Marathon website. Think of the date. And the countdown clock. Without that future perspective. Without that confidence.

Without that certainty. We are bound to give up. And that is why Jesus wants to remove. Remove any doubts. That you may have. About whether or not. That day is going to happen.

[26 : 00] I have a Vauxhall Astra car. In the car park. And it runs on petrol. And lead it. But faith. Runs. On this future focus. That is what keeps it going.

This confident expectation. Of Jesus return. Keeps the car of faith running. I came back from holiday once.

And I can't remember where we'd been. But I decided that I was going to get fit. And we were living in Camberwell at the time. And I wasn't Mr. Chubby. At the time. But I went running.

I got up. I bought a new pair of trainers. I got about half past seven. And I went running. I ran once around the park. I threw up. I walked home. I saw two people from the church.

On the way home. It was totally humiliating. And I never went running again. I've never done it. But I gave up. Because I didn't really have a goal. I just wanted to get fit.

[27 : 01] But I didn't have a goal. And without the goal to go for. You lose heart. And you give up. And it's the same in the Christian life.

The kingdom come. Thy kingdom come. And it needs to be at the heart. Of every Christian's praying. And every Christian's living. If they are going to keep going. And they're not going to lose heart.

The future focus. Fools faith. When the Son of Man comes. Will he find faith on earth? Will he find faith in healing?

Well only those who've kept their eyes on that goal. The goal of the day of justice. When Jesus will finally bring salvation for his people.

And judgment for his enemies. Let's pray.