

## Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Genesis 32:22-30

*Jacob Wrestles With God*

**22** The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. **23** He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. **24** And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. **25** When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. **26** Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." **27** And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." **28** Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." **29** Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. **30** So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."

**32:22** *the same night* – Jacob and his caravan had reached the Jabbok, a stream that flows into Jordan from the east just midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. (PBC)

*two female servants* – Bilhah and Zilpah. (TLSB)

*Jabbok*. Today called the Wadi Zerqa, flowing westward into the Jordan about 20 miles north of the Dead Sea. (CSB)

Eastern tributary of the Jordan River, 25 mi N of the Salt. (TLSB)

Jabbok means "wrestler." (Leupold)

**32:23** *sent them across the stream* – After leading family and flocks south across the Jabbok under the cover of darkness, Jacob himself went back across the stream, apparently to spend some time alone with the Lord in prayer. (PBC)

**32:24** *left alone*. As he had been at Bethel (28:10–22). (CSB)

The solitude of the night his thoughts naturally turned to prayer again, for he was a godly man. (Leupold)

*a man*. God himself (as Jacob eventually realized; see v. 30) in the form of an angel. (CSB)

As he began once again to pour out his heart to God, he suddenly became aware that out in the darkness some one had grabbed hold of him and was wrestling him to the ground. The mysterious struggle continued – for hours – until the first streaks of dawn appeared in the eastern sky. In commenting on this passage, Martin Luther said: "This text is one of the most obscure in the OT." (PBC)

There is no commentator who can so expound this experience as to clear up perfectly every difficulty involved. This much, however, is relatively clear: Jacob was praying; the terms used to describe prayer make us aware of the fact that the prayer described involved a struggle of the entire man, body and soul; the struggle was not imaginary. (Leupold)

*wrestled*. God wrestled (*ye'abeq*) with Jacob (*ya'aqob*) by the Jabbok (*yabboq*)—the author delighted in wordplay. Jacob had struggled all his life to prevail, first with Esau, then with Laban. Now, as he was about to reenter Canaan, he was shown that it was with God that he must “wrestle.” It was God who held his destiny in his hands. (CSB)

Jacob may have thought at first that his rival was Esau. However, cf v 30. Luth: “The wrestler is the Lord of glory, God Himself, or God’s Son, who was to become incarnate and who appeared and spoke to the fathers. For God in His boundless goodness dealt very familiarly with His chosen patriarch Jacob and disciplined him as though playing with him in a kindly manner” (AE 6:130). (TLSB)

Jacob was struggling with God in earnest prayer. This struggle involved spiritual striving with God for His blessing, but it involved a physical struggle as well. Jacob’s opponent, referred to as “the man,” later identified himself as God. (PBC)

There can be no doubt about it that the motivating power behind Jacob’s struggle is faith and the desire to receive God’s justifying grace; and the means employed is earnest prayer. (Leupold)

**32:25** *did not prevail ... touched his hip socket*. God came to him in such a form that Jacob could wrestle with him successfully, yet he showed Jacob that he could disable him at will. (CSB)

This statement does not impugn God’s omnipotence, but it does effectively portray the power of prayer. God does allow the prayer of men to be mighty in His sight. God must oppose because the sinful will of those that pray often is not yet reduced to full accord with the divine will. As the will of man learns ever more perfectly to submit to God’s will, God can no longer “prevail” against such a one. (Leupold)

The struggle continued until Jacob’s divine opponent, by merely touching Jacob’s hip, threw the entire hip socket out of joint. Now Jacob couldn’t continue the painful struggle any longer, so he threw his arms around his opponent and held on to him. (PBC)

Hints that Jacob’s opponent was more than human. (TLSB)

We are not informed whether this infirmity was permanent or only for a few days or weeks. (Leupold)

**32:26** *I will not let you go*. Jacob’s persistence was soon rewarded (v. 29). (CSB)

*unless you bless me*. Jacob finally acknowledged that the blessing must come from God. (CSB)

Jacob recognized that his adversary was no mere man, but God Himself. (TLSB)

God didn’t want Jacob (and He doesn’t want us) to be timid with Him. He delights to let us win victories over Him on the basis of humble believing prayer. Jacob clung in faith to God and to God’s promise, and he received the blessing he desired. (PBC)

**32:27** *what is your name?* – The Lord asked him, not because He had forgotten, but to remind Jacob that he had been a “heel-grabber,” one who took unfair advantage of a rival. That old name no longer fit this man and so God gave him a new one. (PBC)

He asked not because He did not know it, but in order to give Jacob a new name. (TLSB)

**32:28** *Your name shall no longer be Jacob.* Now that Jacob had acknowledged God as the source of blessing and was about to reenter the Promised Land, the Lord acknowledged Jacob as his servant by changing his name (see 17:5 and note). (CSB)

*Israel.* † Israel means he struggles with God.) Here in Father Jacob/Israel, the nation of Israel got her name and her characterization. God later confirmed Jacob's new name (35:10). (CSB)

Luth: "Israel [means] a prince or God's fighter, that is, he who wrestles with God and wins. This happens through that faith which holds so firmly to God's Word, until it overcomes God's wrath and obtains God as the gracious Father" (WA DB 8:137). (TLSB)

Bible names often serve as more than convenient labels for people. Here Jacob's new name describes the new nature and character the Spirit of God had patiently and painstakingly created in him. Jacob had learned to lean on God. (PBC)

**32:29** *Why...ask my name?* † God did not answer the question because he had revealed his name sufficiently by what he had done. (CSB)

Jacob wanted absolute proof of his rival's identity. Apart from the revealed Word, we should not ask for or seek a hidden name of God. (TLSB)

According to the Hebrew idiom, the name is the index of the character or personality. (Leupold)

*there he blessed him* – For Jacob another blessed fruit of the mysterious struggle was that he was free from the terror that had gripped his heart when he learned Esau was coming for him with 400 men. But now, with the Savior's promise ringing in his ears, he was ready to meet Esau, ready for whatever surprises the new day might bring. God still appears to His people on occasion as though He were an opponent. Each of us has known dark hours when we were unable to see God's mercy, but saw only a face that was angry. Jacob held on to God even when He appeared as his opponent, and he won a blessing. We will have that same experience when in faith we learn to say "My Savior, I will not let you go unless you bless me." (PBC)

He repeated the blessing He gave Jacob earlier (28:13–15). (TLSB)

Luther's supposition is that this may have been the great patriarchal blessing concerning the coming Messiah through whom was Jacob's "seed" all the families of the earth were to be blessed. (Leupold)

**32:30** *name of the place Peniel* – Means "face of God." (Leupold)

Luth: "For through faith, in the struggle of the cross, one learns to recognize and experience God rightly" (WA DB 8:137). (TLSB)

*I have seen the face of God...yet my life has been delivered.* In His assumed human form. (TLSB)

The sight of God is usually a destroying fire (cf Heb 12:29). (TLSB)

Spared (natsal) means "delivered" or "preserved." God did more than let no harm come nigh Jacob; He again restored him, who otherwise would surely have perished. Luther gathers up this idea in "recovered" (genesen). (Leupold)

*All Scripture Is Breathed Out by God*

**14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

**3:14** *continue in what you have learned* – Timothy had learned well. He had acquired strong convictions. He should stand by them and not let himself be shaken from them. This is also the only way to resist and overcome the evil men. (PBC)

*from whom you learned it.* Perhaps a reference to Paul as well as to Timothy’s mother and grandmother (1:5). (CSB)

Timothy’s mother, grandmother (1:5), and Paul (vv 10–11). (TLSB)

Timothy had had reliable teachers. Paul himself. Earlier Paul had referred to “the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses” (2:2). There were also Timothy’s grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. (PBC)

**3:15** *from childhood you have been acquainted with sacred writings.* A Jewish boy formally began to study the OT when he was five years old. Timothy was taught at home by his mother and grandmother even before he reached this age. (CSB)

*make you wise for salvation* – Through the Scriptures (OT) Timothy had been brought to faith in the Christ, the promised Messiah. What makes the Holy Scriptures so important is that they and they alone reveal the way of salvation, which is through faith in Jesus Christ. (PBC)

Knowledge is often used as a synonym for faith in the Scriptures. Cf Ti 1:1. (TLSB)

**3:16** *All Scripture.* The primary reference is to the OT, since some of the NT books had not even been written at this time. (See 1Ti 5:18; 2Pe 3:15–16 for indications that some NT books—or material ultimately included in the NT—were already considered equal in authority to the OT Scriptures.) (CSB)

*breathed out by God.* Paul affirms God’s active involvement in the writing of Scripture, an involvement so powerful and pervasive that what is written is the infallible and authoritative word of God (see 2Pe 1:20–21 and notes). (CSB)

An allusion to creation. Words are formed by breath, and breath is synonymous with life. Aphrahat: “If the days of a man should be many as all the days of the world from Adam to the end of the ages, and he should sit and meditate upon the Holy Scriptures, he would not comprehend all the force of the depth of the words. And man cannot rise up to the wisdom of God” (NPNF 2 13:411). (TLSB)

*profitable* – They are useful in that they thoroughly equip “the man of God,” the pastor, teacher and every Christian. (PBC)

*teaching* – When Jesus gave his disciples the great commission to “make disciples of all nations,” He said they should do this by “baptizing them” and by “teaching them to obey everything I have

commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). This “everything” is what God has given us in the Holy Scriptures. (PBC)

Imparting of knowledge/doctrine. (TLSB)

*reproof* – That is, to expose, to reprove, to convict of sin. (PBC)

The call to repentance over sin. (TLSB)

*correction* – That is, for restoring or improving those who fall. They need to be brought back to the straight and narrow way. (PBC)

Through the Word. (TLSB)

*training in righteousness* – Training raises the picture of a child that need to be disciplined and corrected, guided and encouraged if it is to grow up as well-manner useful citizen. Similarly the Christian during his life on earth needs ongoing training to attain to the righteous life (sanctification) that is part of being a Christian in this world of sin. (PBC)

Made righteous by God’s grace, we live out righteous behavior. (TLSB).

*training*. Gk *paidea*, childhood discipline and instruction. (TLSB)

**3:17** *man of God*. The pastor or other called servant of the Word. (TLSB)

*complete, equipped*. Possessing both the personal aptitude and the proper training needed for the pastoral office. See p 2080. “We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and norm according to which all teachings, together with <all> teachers, should be evaluated and judged [2 Timothy 3:15–17] are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament alone” (FC Ep Sum 1). “Faithful shepherds, as Luther says, should do both things: (1) feed or nourish the lambs and (2) resist the wolves. Then the sheep may flee from strange voices (John 10:5–12) and may separate the precious from the worthless (Jeremiah 15:19)” (FC SD Sum 14). (TLSB)

**3:10–17** Paul points to himself as an example for Timothy. He speaks about the great work the Gospel has produced within him. Our fellow Christians want to learn the faith from us, and they watch us in the same way that Timothy watched Paul. God speaks His Gospel of forgiveness and peace to us, not only through His preached Word, but also through the example and teaching of our fellow Christians. Luther called this the consolation of the brethren. • O Lord, allow me to be an example for those who believe, as was Paul to Timothy. Through Your powerful Word, train me in righteousness, that I may be equipped for every good work. Amen. (TLSB)

*Preach the Word*

**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.**

**4:1** *I charge you.* Paul states his charge to Timothy, aware that he does so in the presence of God the Father and of Christ, who will judge all men. He is also keenly aware of the twin facts of Christ's return and the coming establishment of God's kingdom in its fullest expression. Timothy was to view a charge so given as of utmost importance. (CSB)

Possibly recalling Timothy's ordination vow, Paul now summarizes the duties of Timothy's office by giving him this command. (TLSB)

*Christ who is to judge* – Timothy is to do his work mindful that the Lord Jesus on the Day of Judgment will appear again as the glorious king he is. From Him on that glorious day Timothy will want to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." (PBC)

Paul has spoken the charge, but Christ will judge Timothy's faithfulness on the Last Day. (TLSB)

*appearing.* Christ's return in judgment will fully reveal the kingdom He established by His suffering and death, in which Timothy now works as a pastor. (TLSB)

*kingdom.* Not an earthly realm but one ruled by Christ. (TLSB)

**4:2** This verse contains the simplest summary of every pastoral duty and responsibility—administering the Sacraments, admonishing the erring, and comforting and visiting those in need—and all flow from the preaching of the Word. (TLSB)

*preach the word* – A preacher is a herald. A herald is vested with authority to proclaim publicly the official messages of a king or high official. (PBC)

*be ready.* Be ready in any situation to speak the needed word, whether of correction, of rebuke or of encouragement. (CSB)

*in season and out of season* – There is no "out of season" for the pastor. (PBC)

At all times. (TLSB)

*reprove.* Persuade by showing evidence (in this case, from the Scriptures). (TLSB)

*rebuke.* Speak God's condemning Law to the erring. (TLSB)

*exhort.* Comfort the penitent sinner with the Gospel. (TLSB)

*complete patience and teaching.* Literally, "long-suffering and doctrine." Doctrine (the teachings of the Scriptures) is the pastor's only tool for reproof, rebuking, and exhorting. Yet, doctrine must be taught with long-suffering, knowing that people will not always accept what is taught or that acceptance might take a long time. (TLSB)

**4:3** *sound teaching.* It is sound or healthy in that it says what God wants said. It comes from Him, and it produces spiritual health. (PBC)

*itching ears.* Ears that want to be "scratched" by words in keeping with one's evil desires. (CSB)

Desiring to hear something new and entertaining. (TLSB)

*teachers to suit their own passions.* Teachers who tell them what they want to hear, rather than what God declares in His Word. (TLSB)

By looking around long enough and going from teacher to teacher they will find teachers and churches who say what they want to hear. (PBC)

**4:4** *myths.* Ultimately, every false doctrine is a “myth.” (PBC)

**4:5** *sober-minded.* Aware and focused on the task at hand. (TLSB)

Be level-headed, keep a clear mind. A pastor must not permit himself to become confused or carried away in these situations. This will bring him hardship which he will endure.

*Do the work of an evangelist. This is addressed to those the Lord calls into His service.* (PBC)

*Rather than being swept away along with those mentioned in vv 3–4, Timothy must faithfully pursue his service.* (TLSB)

*evangelist.* Lit, “one who proclaims the good news.” (TLSB)

## GOSPEL – Luke 18:1-8

### *The Parable of the Persistent Widow*

**And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” 6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”**

Between the ascension and the Last Day, disciples will desire to “see one of the days of the Son of Man” (17:22). Jesus has made it clear that there will be a period of time between the inbreaking of the eschaton *now* at his death, resurrection, and ascension, and the full coming of the eschaton *not yet* at the last judgment (17:20–37). Therefore, he now encourages his disciples to continue in prayer and not to lose hope if the delay seems long. This parable goes well with the preceding pericope, with its themes of vindication and the coming of the Son of Man. But it also shares the theme of prayer with the next parable, the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9–14). Luke is a first-rate narrator, and in his orderly account the two parables that begin Luke 18 both look back on Jesus’ eschatological teachings (17:20–37) and look forward to his final teachings and miracles before he enters Jerusalem (18:15–19:27). This parable is more about Christian life in the kingdom than about the (first) coming of the kingdom. In light of Christ’s coming in flesh and grace, and in view of his coming in judgment, the disciple is to pray continually, “let your kingdom come” (11:2). Persistence in prayer is the church’s posture until the parousia. (CC pp. 670-671)

This parable of the unrighteous judge may have a literary precedent in Sirach 35:14–19. There also seems to be a parallel to Jesus’ teaching on prayer in 11:1–13, particularly the parable of the friend at midnight in 11:5–8. In K. Bailey’s chiasmic arrangement of the Lukan journey narrative, 11:1–13 balances 18:1–14 with the theme of prayer (see K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 80–82). (CC p. 671)

The pericope is easily divided into the evangelist’s introduction (18:1), the parable (18:2–5), and the Lord’s interpretation (18:6–8), which concludes with an anxious question. (CC p. 671)

K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 131, 137, points out the twice-repeated order of judge, God, man, widow in 18:2–5 and the frame of “vindication” around the cries of the elect and God’s long-suffering in 18:7–8. (CC p. 671)

**18:1 a parable** – The central point of this parable is “let us persist in prayer.” (Aho)

*they ought always to pray* – τὸ δεῖν—Following a passion prediction where δεῖ is used (17:25), Luke introduces a parable that speaks about the necessity of continual prayer. On δεῖ, see comments at 4:43 and 9:22. δεῖ is also used at 2:49; 13:33; 24:7, 26, 44. (CC p. 669)

Lukan introductions are always significant, but this one is especially important. Here the evangelist shows his catechetical interests by not only identifying this as a “parable” but by telling us the point of the parable, that is, “to show that they [the disciples] must always pray and not grow weary.” “Always pray” (πάντοτε προσεύχεσθαι) is *not* to pray continuously, that is, uninterruptedly and without ceasing, but continually, that is, regularly and with perseverance from the moment of Jesus’ ascension to his second coming. Prayer for the coming of the kingdom (11:2) is part of the divine necessity (δεῖ) of the disciples’ participation in that kingdom. As they pray, the disciples are not to become discouraged or give up if their petitions are not answered immediately. Here is a thematic link with what went before, and Luke will conclude this parable with another link to Jesus’ eschatological teaching (18:8b: “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he even find the faith on the earth?”). The addressees here (αὐτοῖς) are the same as that of the previous section: the disciples (17:22). There will be a shift in audience back to the Pharisees in the next parable (18:9). (CC p. 671)

*not lose heart* – They would soon be discouraged by their weaknesses and the death of Jesus, who urges them to prayer. Augustine: “Faith pours out prayer, and the pouring out of prayer obtains the strengthening of faith.... So far temptation advances as faith gives way: and so far temptation gives way, as faith advances” (*NPNF* 1 6:454). (TLSB)

**18:2 there was a judge** – From OT times the gate area of an Israelite city was the central place for commerce and the dispensing of law. There judges – often the wise elders of the community, who had many civic responsibilities – would hear cases and administer justice fairly. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

The parable itself is simple and straightforward on the surface, but several subthemes run through the story. In the first part (18:2–3), the basic setting of the narrative is presented: an unrighteous judge has a persistent widow pestering him for vindication against her opponent. In the second part (18:4–5), the hearer sees the results of the woman’s persistence: the judge vindicates her! But in this simple narrative lie several issues to be resolved. (CC pp. 671-672)

*neither feared God* – One difficulty is to sort out the relationship between the judge and the widow. There could not be a greater contrast than the one between these two people. The judge holds all the cards; the widow, particularly in ancient society, is helpless.



Isolated in arrogance, the judge fears neither those above nor below him. (TLSB)

Luke shows a great concern for widows in his gospel and in Acts: Lk 2:37; 4:25–26; 7:12; 20:47; 21:2–3; Acts 6:1; 9:39, 41. The only other place “widows” occur in the other gospels is in Mk 12:40–43 and in the *Textus Receptus* of Mt 23:14. (CC p. 672)

The interaction between these two people on opposite ends of the sociological spectrum helps illustrate the theme of persistence in prayer until there is vindication. The hearer must ask, “What does it mean that the judge does not fear God or respect people?” especially since this is stated twice, once in each section of the narrative (18:2, 4). Jesus will later call the judge “unrighteous” (18:6), the same word he used of the unrighteous steward (16:1–8). By saying the judge does not fear God, Jesus is telling the hearer that the judge is a pagan, for throughout the OT “the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 1:7). One who fears God is part of Israel’s faithful remnant. (CC p. 672)

“Fearing the Lord” is regularly used to describe the pious in the Psalms (LXX 14:4; 21:[24]; 24:12; 32:18, etc.). Luke uses the expression “God-fearers” for Gentiles attracted to Judaism in Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26. In effect, the man is not religious and has no scruple. ... Any “God-fearing” jurist would feel obliged by Torah to take special care of her [the widow] (see Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19–21; 26:12–13). ... Doing justice for widows becomes shorthand for covenantal loyalty among the prophets (Mal 3:5; Isa 1:17, 23; 10:2; Jer 5:28 [LXX]; 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 22:7; Ps 93:6 [LXX]). In contrast to those who fail this obligation, God is judge who will come to the aid of widows (LXX Ps 67:[6]; 145:9). This motif is developed fully in Sirach 35:14–18, which some readers think underlies the present parable. (CC p. 672)

*nor respected man.* Unconcerned about the needs of others or about their opinion of him. (CSB)

His sin of callousness is especially serious because judges were to represent God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

More perplexing is the statement that the judge does not respect people. What would such a statement mean in Palestinian culture? Many have observed that honor/shame is a major motivational factor in life at the time of Jesus. The judge’s lack of respect for people manifests itself in a *lack of shame* in his relationships with others. In other words, he operates outside of the normal social patterns of his day to the extent that he observes neither Torah (doesn’t fear God) nor the basic social mores of his day. This widow cannot influence him because he is not ashamed to ignore someone whom his society and God require that he take notice of and help.

K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 131–33. See also the parable of the friend at midnight and Bailey’s translation of ἀναίδειαν at 11:8 as “avoidance of shame.” In 20:13 the same concept occurs in the parable of the workers in the vineyard. (CC p. 672)

The widow’s behavior is also unusual, but in that culture, a woman could act as she does, pestering the judge.

See K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 134–35. He says: “How did the *widow* get attention? Obviously her shouting was different from [that of] the others. In traditional society in the Middle East women are generally powerless in our man’s world. But at the same time, they are respected and honored. Men can be mistreated in public, but not women. Women can scream at a public figure and nothing will happen to them” (p. 135; emphasis Bailey). (CC p. 673)

Her behavior tends toward shamelessness, but not so thoroughly shameless as the judge's. (CC pp. 762-673)

B. Malina and J. Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts," 63, note: "In 18:1–8 we are told of a widow who is becoming shameless. Evidently there is no male to defend her, no husband and no son; and so she is defenseless and at the mercy of her adversary. So desperate has she become that she publicly badgers the city's 'judge' to defend her interests (18:3). Her public reproach to the judge indicates shameless behavior." (CC p. 673)

**18:3** *a widow*. Particularly helpless and vulnerable because she had no family to uphold her cause. Only justice and her own persistence were in her favor. (CSB)

She was vulnerable because she had no companion to advocate for her (Ac 6:1; Jas 1:27). (TLSB)

*kept coming to him* – ἤρχετο πρὸς αὐτόν—The imperfect verb accents the widow's persistence. (CC p. 669)

In both testaments widows often suffered abuse at the hands of those better off. This widow has an adversary, an opponent in the matter of justice. Perhaps she had been defrauded or victimized by a scam, as many elderly are today. Her husband was dead, and she apparently had no relative or friend to intercede in her behalf. She "kept coming" to the official whose business it was to adjudicate matters of that kind the durative imperfect of archeto in this verse implies that she returned again and again. Her plea was for justice. In this context, the verb ekdikew probably means that she wanted the judge to force her opponent to pay her restitution (compensatory damages) for what she had suffered, and perhaps also to fine or imprison him (punitive damages). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

So this story of persistence and vindication pits against each other two shameless people who are stepping outside of the expectations of their society. The surprise is that the helpless widow wins! (CC p. 673)

*give me justice* – Her plea could include reparation for her as well as punishment of the wrongdoer. (TLSB)

**18:4** *said to himself* – εἶπεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ—This self-reflection is common in the Lukan parables, e.g., the rich fool (12:18–19), the prodigal son (15:17–19), the unrighteous steward (16:3–4), and the Lord of the vineyard (20:13). (CC p. 669)

Like the rich fool in ch 12, the judge does not share his thoughts with others. (TLSB)

**18:5** *because* – γε—Although left untranslated, its presence in the Greek shows the contrast between the judge's lack of fear for God and respect for people and his decision to vindicate the widow. (CC p. 669)

*so* – ἵνα—It is often difficult to distinguish between "purpose" and "result" clauses with ἵνα; the judge's "intended result" is his "purpose": that she stop bothering him! (CC p. 669)

*eventually* – εἰς τέλος—"Until [the] end" may refer to the end of the woman's harassment. It complements the notion of persistence from 18:3. However, the reference to Christ's second coming in 18:8 and 17:22–37 may suggest that Christ's return is the "end." (CC p. 669)

*not beat me down* – ὑπωπιάζει—"Wear me out" (RSV) is a weakened sense. The literal meaning, "strike under the eye," "give a black eye" (BAGD) captures the pathos of this scene and the shame this

widow would give the judge if she continued harassing him. This is probably not to be understood literally as a physical blow to the face, but metaphorically (as also the English idiom has it), that she would “blacken” his reputation. See comments at 11:8. L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 270, also translates “end up giving me a black eye” and notes that “in this case, the literal rendering of *hypopiazō* maintains the delicious ambiguity of the original. She may in fact give him a sock in the eye! The term may also mean to damage the reputation, as it does in English. Although the judge has ‘no regard for humans,’ he may depend on some sort of reputation to continue being a judge.” See I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 673–75, for an exhaustive treatment of the meaning of this word in this context. (CC pp. 669-670)

The judge waits for a long time before he acts, but *even though he does not fear God nor respect people*, he decides to vindicate this poor widow on account of her persistence “with the result that she not keep coming until [the] end and give me a black eye” (18:5). This is a remarkable statement for a man who does not feel appropriate shame. He seems to be worried about the embarrassment the harassment of this woman is causing him. Contrary to what he has said about himself and what the narrative has confirmed, he *does* care what other people think about his behavior. Could he even fear God too? And so the story ends with the judge’s intent to vindicate the widow as a result of her persistent pestering of him *who does not want a “black eye.”* At the end of the parable, *the reputation of the judge* is also an issue. (CC p. 673)

Her persistence is the key feature of this parable. (TLSB)

**18:6** *unrighteous* UNJUST – ὁ κριτῆς τῆς ἀδικίας—The genitive τῆς ἀδικίας is adjectival, describing the judge as “unrighteous.” (CC p. 670)

The unrighteous judge himself gives the parable’s application. (TLSB)

**18:7** *will not God give justice . . . ?* If an unworthy judge who feels no constraint of right or wrong is compelled by persistence to deal justly with a helpless individual, how much more will God answer prayer! (CSB)

God is not an unrighteous judge. But if even an unrighteous man will give justice to the persistent, how much more will our righteous God do so? (TLSB)

οὐ μὴ ποιήσῃ—οὐ μὴ with the subjunctive in a rhetorical question expects the hearer to answer “yes!” (CC p. 670)

And so an apparently straightforward story ends with a note of ambiguity. Thinking that the parable is about the widow’s persistence as a model for the disciples’ persistent prayers as they wait for God’s final vindication, the hearers are surprised to find themselves focused on an unscrupulous judge who is finally broken down by a widow because she is beginning to undermine his reputation. At this point Jesus provides words of interpretation (as he did in the parable of the unrighteous steward in 16:1–9). He calls the judge “unrighteous” (as he did the steward; 16:8). And then he gives this parable a new depth of meaning as he compares this unrighteous judge to God and concludes with a veritable *crux interpretum*. (CC p. 673)

The difficulty is that the *unrighteous* judge is the God figure in the parable. A similar difficulty appears in 16:1–13, where Jesus might be seen as praising the dishonest steward, and in 19:12, where the severe king is the Christ figure. But in this pericope, the point of comparison between God and the judge is not, of course, their unrighteousness. Rather, the point of comparison between the two is that character trait that motivates eventual vindication because one’s *reputation* is at stake. As much as it may appear to

himself and his society that he does not fear God nor respect people, the judge, when pushed by a shameless widow, *does* care about his reputation. In a similar way—and this involves moving from the lesser to the greater (*a minori ad maius* or an *a fortiori* argument)—God will be true to himself and his Word: the time of vindication for his faithful saints will come. Even though vindication is delayed, it will come because God is merciful and long-suffering. If the human judge in the parable, whose reputation is that of shamelessness, finally succumbs to the widow’s persistence and vindicates her, how much more will God, whose reputation is one of mercy and compassion, vindicate his elect. The judge finally gives vindication because he is harassed and doesn’t want a black eye; God will eventually give vindication because he has promised salvation to the elect, who cry to him day and night. (CC p. 673)

As do the parables of the prodigal son and the unrighteous steward, this parable teaches us about *the fundamental characteristic of God: his compassion and mercy for sinners*. (CC p. 674)

*elect who cry to him* – ὧν βοώντων αὐτῷ ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός—These words modify “his elect” (τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν αὐτοῦ) and describe what God’s chosen people do when they are suffering. They cry out to God. (CC p. 670)

The first of three keys to the parable is the verb “to be long-suffering” (μακροθυμέω). With Sirach 35:19 in the background, many translate μακροθυμεῖ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς as “will he delay long over them?” (RSV) This question could well be in the minds of the Lukan readers, who long to see “one of the days of the Son of Man” (17:22). However, that understanding takes μακροθυμεῖ as a Law term since it would imply that God is indifferent or unresponsive to the cries of his elect. Elsewhere in the NT, the term is always in Gospel contexts of God (or his people) being patient and faithful, leading to the translation “[will he not] be long-suffering to them?” This coordinates the two verbs in this rhetorical sentence: “will not God make vindication?” and “be long-suffering to them [the elect]?” It also captures this essential characteristic of God that lies at the heart of the parable.

On μακροθυμεῖ, L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 270, notes:

The overwhelming use of *makrothymeo* and its cognates is within the context of judicial restraint and long-suffering, or tolerance (cf. e.g., Jer 15:15; Prov 19:11; Sir 29:8). It is a quality most associated in the LXX with God (see Sir 18:11), so that *makrothymios kai polyeleos* (“long-suffering and rich in mercy”) are regular attributes of the Lord (e.g., Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 7:11; 85:15; 102:8; 144:8; Wis 15:1).

This goes beyond the interpretation of BAGD, 3, relying on Sirach 35:19. (CC pp. 674-675)

God will vindicate the elect who cry to him day and night in their suffering, not because of their persistent prayers and cries, but because he is merciful and compassionate. God has every right to punish the elect because of their sins, but he is long-suffering as they journey from Baptism to death/judgment as *simul justus et peccator*. God’s elect are declared holy in Christ, but sin dwells in their mortal bodies and produces transgressions. As they await the coming of the Lord, they cry out to him continually (“day and night”) because of the suffering they undergo by living in a world that is still in bondage to sin, sickness, death, and the devil.

J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 871, notes:

The reference to God being long-suffering remains obscure until we look at how that verb is used of God in the OT. There we find that it expresses an aspect of the generosity of God in his dealings with his People. He does not lash out at the sins of his People, but rather exercises restraint (the word involved is often translated “slow to anger” in the OT). On a strict scale of

justice, God's own People may not deserve the vindication that they crave. But, while God may well discipline his recalcitrant People, he works for their vindication in the end. (CC p. 675)

They pray “let your kingdom come” and “forgive to us our sins” (11:2, 4). (CC pp. 674-675)

*delay.* God will not delay his support of the chosen ones when they are right. He is not like the unjust judge, who had to be badgered until he wearied and gave in. (CSB)

καὶ μακροθυμεῖ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς—This phrase can complement ποιήσῃ τὴν ἐκδίκησιν (“and he will be patient/long-suffering to them”) or introduce an adversative or concessive thought (“but he delays over them” or “indeed, will he delay over them?”). The participial form of the variant reading does not resolve the problem. See BAGD μακροθυμέω, 3; I. H. Marshall, *Luke*, 674–75; and the interpretation below. (CC p. 670)

**18:8** *speedily* – The most decisive act of God in vindicating His elect, namely, Jesus’ death and resurrection, was near. (TLSB)

ἐν τάχει—This is translated “quickly,” the most common meaning, i.e., after being long-suffering with his faithful for what seems an endless period of time, God will act *quickly* without warning. (CC p. 670)

And they pray confident of the coming of God’s vindication—“quickly.” Here is a second key phrase at the end of Jesus’ interpretation: ἐν τάχει. The parable carries on the eschatological tension in Jesus’ teachings about the last things by pointing to Jerusalem as a revelation of God’s final justification. God’s vindication does indeed come “quickly” at Christ’s atonement:

But, in regard to the faithful, how does God vindicate them? ... must it necessarily mean the distant future? This passage is in Luke 18. The beginning of the passion story is only a few verses away. Jesus’ enemies are gathering strength for the final act of their opposition. Will God vindicate *him*? The reader is given a clear answer, but what an answer! Yes, God will vindicate His Son who also prays to Him day and night, but that vindication *will be seen in resurrection and will come by way of a cross*. ... Where is God’s vindication? And surely the right answer is that God’s vindication of *this* prophet far exceeded his followers’ wildest dreams. He was vindicated at an empty tomb, and the path to that empty tomb led across Golgotha. If such was the vindication of Jesus, what of his disciples? (CC p. 675)

If God’s vindication would be accomplished “quickly” (from this point of view) in Jesus’ death and resurrection, it will also be certain and quick for the disciples who are hearers of Luke’s gospel in the time of the church.

The long-suffering God who vindicates quickly wants his elect to pray constantly and confidently. That is what this parable is about on the surface: the persistent prayers of the saints who cry out to God in their suffering. The principal character, finally, is not the judge or the widow, but God. And the underlying reality is the Good News that God is merciful and long-suffering and he will deliver his elect in Christ. The prayers of the disciples fit into that construct. Why are they to pray continually? The answer is given in Jesus’ final words: “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he even find the faith [τὴν πίστιν] on the earth?” (18:8b). (CC pp. 675-676)

*when* – ἀρα – ἄρα—This interrogative particle, “even,” suggests the deep anxiety with which the question is posed. (CC p. 670)

*will he find faith ... ?* Particularly faith that perseveres in prayer and loyalty (see Mt 24:12–13). Christ makes a second application that looks forward to the time of his second coming. A period of spiritual decline and persecution is assumed—a time that will require perseverance such as the widow demonstrated. (CSB)

Rhetorical question, urging faithfulness, which is the key ingredient in the prayers of the saints. (TLSB)

τὴν πίστιν—It is a surprise to find an article with πίστις. This is translated “the faith” to describe the faith of the community that awaits the coming of the Son of Man to judge the living and the dead. (CC p. 670)

A third key, τὴν πίστιν, could mean either “this faithfulness,” i.e., disciples’ loyalty of this sort, expressed in their *faithful* praying; or “the faith,” i.e., *the* faith of the church, encompassing both *fides quae creditur* (the objective faith or doctrine that is believed) and *fides qua creditur* (the subjective faith by which Christians believe; faith in the heart).

While this is therefore also “saving faith” (W. Arndt, *Luke*, 378), it is foreign to the context to interpret this anxious (ἄρα) question as expressing fear that at the parousia no one will be saved, there being found no one with “faith” (*fiducia cordis*, the faith that is found in the hearts of believers). The *elect will be vindicated*, and the days at the end will be shortened for the sake of the elect (Mt 24:22). It is, moreover, quite permissible to understand πίστις as “loyalty” that results from saving faith and that is (or is not) evident in behavior, as in 2 Tim 2:13, where Paul contrasts εἰ ἀπιστοῦμεν, “if we are unfaithful,” with God, who remains πιστός, “faithful.” (CC p. 676)

There is no need to choose, for the first meaning opens up into the second. The persistent prayers of the saints that God’s kingdom come to relieve them from their suffering is a sign in the world of *the faith* of the church. Will there be a faithful community awaiting at the coming of the Son of Man? Persistent prayer of loyal disciples is evidence of the community’s faith in God’s faithfulness as she watches for Christ’s coming. Jesus’ question alerts the hearers to the urgency of listening carefully to Jesus’ catechesis so that they will be found in the praying, believing community (with people like the widow). (CC p. 676)

**18:1–8** If even an unworthy judge responds to persistence, God certainly hears His people’s faithful prayers. Pray without ceasing (1Th 5:17). God will answer speedily as He has promised in Christ. • Lord, grant me enduring faith and persistence in the face of every trouble. Amen. (TLSB)