

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

4:1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

4 “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 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? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Crying out to God

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8

We live in a culture where people will always find a way to avoid talking about subjects like God and truth. We seem to be more interested in the more temporary attractions like TV, celebrity culture and weather, or maybe the ever changing arguments around politics which rather than reaching a conclusion seem to go round in a circular motion from left to right and back round. When you have to preach on a regular basis it’s tempting to wonder why you bother when no one seems to be taking much notice. I’ve sometimes noticed a lack of engagement with what is being said. But it might be me of course!

I think Paul in our reading from Timothy is addressing a wider audience than just the believers when he says *3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

We all have a tendency to avoid hard truths about ourselves and just listen to views we agree with – what’s become known as an echo chamber which is something we see a lot of online.

People join Facebook groups or other online communities where they find like minded people to agree with. But they get drawn into what Paul might have called myths. I don’t need to elaborate – today they might be called conspiracy theories. |

But there's a difference between theory and truth. As followers of Christ we should always be concerned with truth, but it's easy to drift away from God if we don't stay in touch with Him, which as Paul is saying involves familiarity with the scriptures but mostly with God.

v 15 from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation. But then we have Paul's challenge: preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. Preach, rebuke, correct and encourage, all things we're familiar with, but I think the key word here is *patience*. We live in a very different world today – at the time the believers faced all manner of persecution and difficulties which we would not cope with, living our comfortable existence. But the one thing which stands out which we still need now is *patience*. There really is a spirit of apathy and in fact extreme disinterest when it comes to what people call 'religion'. If someone realises you're 'religious' they rapidly change the subject. Personally it's the last word I would use to describe myself. Religion describes people's search for God. Christianity is God's search for us. Faith comes when we respond to what God has done for us in Jesus.

Patience goes hand in hand with persistence, and so Jesus' parable in our gospel reading links very well with the epistle. The primary thing is prayer - it's a parable that teaches us we should always pray, and that this should be the basis of everything we do.

It's difficult to read the gospels *without* realising the central part prayer played in Jesus' life, time and again you see him retreat from the action and spend time with the Father. So if we're not following his lead we won't get very far.

Prayer is often frustrating because we seem not to get the answers we want. But if you stop to think you realise that it would be impossible for every prayer of every person to be answered with a yes. There's a scene in the film *Bruce Almighty* where God, in the form of Bruce, who is temporarily allowed to be God, just to save time, answers every prayer by automated email, with a yes, and the world is in complete chaos, it's very funny but also theologically sound! So there has to be patience and persistence. It's as much about prayer forming the basis of our relationship with God as about whether our requests are granted or not. The judge in the parable is a very arrogant person who neither fears God nor cares what people think of him, and Jesus contrasts him with a widow who has to represent herself in court in a very male dominated environment. She is also too poor to offer a bribe so she has to keep returning to try and get justice, which seems to have been previously denied. Purely for self preservation the judge eventually caves in and grants her justice, as she is clearly in the right all along. Jesus is being humorous here although it can easily be missed. Where the judge says she will get justice so that she won't attack him, the word used for attack in the Greek is one from the world of boxing and literally means to beat.

So the image is of a powerful judge being punched by a small and vulnerable woman. Jesus says 'listen to what the unjust judge says' and contrasts him with God. If an unjust judge will give her justice, we're invited to contrast him with God himself. But if God is *unlike* the judge, we must be *like* the widow, and cry out for justice day and night, not just for ourselves but for the whole world. Do we imagine this won't make any difference? I think it will.

Pete Greig has some helpful views on why prayers aren't answered, he says this: "I believe in prayer. If I didn't believe in prayer I wouldn't have a problem with unanswered prayer. There are three reasons why our prayers don't get answered. 1. *God's world* - C S Lewis said miracles are rare because of the laws of physics, the way the world works 2. *God's will* We think we know what is right but Billy Graham's wife Ruth said 'I'm so glad God doesn't answer all my prayers or I would have married the wrong guy 3 times'. 3 *God's war* - suffering is not the will of God, human evil is not God's will. God is love, but people don't always do God's will."

Jesus ends with this challenge - *when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?* Will he find us still crying out for justice like the poor widow? He trusts that because of our faith we will. Amen.