

*Text of a message delivered by Caleb Finlayson at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 16th of August 2026.
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Focus

Luke 17:20 – 18:8

A kia ora and welcome back to our Luke series. Last week we celebrated our Lifecare Sunday. It was a great opportunity to practically understand how we are living out what we are reading in the Gospel of Luke. If you were away, I encourage you to return and hear the stories of where the Kingdom of God has come near in our spaces through our community. This lends itself well into our passage today as we continue to think about the kingdom of God coming and our response in that.

How good is your eyesight? Mine is terrible. As a kid, my doctor gave me glasses and said I'd only have to wear them for a little bit until I grew and my eyes too. When they took away my glasses, nothing really changed. I struggle to see things at a distance. Especially when my eyes get tired! A classic example is when I watch the Warriors live, sitting in the stand, a jumbo screen in front of me, with the time and the score and I will still struggle to focus on what it says. Rachel always tells me to go get it sorted, when she sees me, sitting there like this (pulls a scrunched up face) as I try my best to focus and see what is in front of me.

What about you, what's your focus like? What are you focusing on? What naturally draws our focus as we read our passage today?

Now this is a long piece of scripture, so do your best to hold your focus.

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The Coming of the Kingdom of God

20 Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, 21 nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.” 22 Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. 23 People will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. 24 For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

26 “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 27 People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 “It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. 29 But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

30 “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. 32 Remember Lot’s wife! 33 Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. 34 I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. 35 Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.” [36] 37 “Where, Lord?” they asked. He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.” (Luke 17:20-37)

The Parable of the Persistent Widow

18:1 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

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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?” (Luke 18:1-8)

Art and Scripture

Let me ask you what draws your focus? The reason I was inspired to ask this question is because recently, I ran a camp for our senior young people, from Windsor and all across the North Island. We had Paul Jones, the Principal of Carey Bible College, there and he shared with us as image:



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He brought up a painting. Some of you will know this painting and some of you will not. That is fine. He asked our young people a question – “*What comes into focus for you, what questions come to mind when you see this painting?*”

Paul proceeded to talk about the three different worlds.

The World Behind (Who painted it, who is the person, why is she lying there),

The World Within (Colours, distance, body language, Composition etc),

The World Before (How does this make me feel, where am I in this picture, what does the image say about hope or resilience?).

If you do not know this painting it is called “*Christina’s World*.” A famous painter, Andrew Wyeth painted it. It is a depiction of his neighbour, who suffered from some form of disability (suspected polio) that impacted her ability to walk. She chose not to use a wheelchair. And insisted on living life by essentially drawing herself around. He painted it as his depiction of her *persistence, resilience* and *hope* that it brought him as he resonated after suffering personal and health challenges in his own life.

Again, where do you focus? Do you focus **behind** – Who painted this? Do you focus **within** – looking at the texture of the grass and colour of her dress? Or do you focus on the **before** – the feelings it may evoke for you?

We are invited to do the same thing as we read scripture. What is drawing your focus in today’s passage? Are you drawn to the questions of Behind – “*Why is Jesus sharing this story?*” Within – “*Why is there such repetition of “in the days of the Son of Man” language?*” Before – “*What is this passage calling me to do?*” We could spend a long time looking at all these areas, but I want to draw your attention to one theme in particular – Jesus is challenging the disciples and us today, “**Where is your focus?**”

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Good stories have a twist

Luke's account of Jesus teaching as we all know by now is constantly flipping preconceived ideas on their head. The Pharisees, expect the Kingdom of God to come in strength shown in a Messiah who will destroy their enemies and justice that is brought by the sword. Even Jesus' disciples appear to still think this way. When we read the passage, it comes through clear – Jesus says, “*the Kingdom of God...*” is not something to be observed, like a battle, political coup or some apocalyptic event. ***“The kingdom of God is in your midst.” (17:21)***

For them that was experienced as Jesus with them. For us it is the Spirit of God in us. But in both cases, the Kingdom of God is actively present, as God is reconciling all things to himself, He is always missionally on the move. The question is do we see Him at work?

We can be quick to pick on the Pharisees through the gospels, however it would appear that the disciples, people who spent every waking moment with Jesus, still haven't got it. Later in verse 37, they say “Where, Lord?” in what seems like a statement of – “Where is the kingdom coming, where is coup happening, where will the apocalyptic event happen?”

To me this feels like an interesting interaction, between Jesus and those listening to Him teach. It is like Jesus has told a ghostly story around the campfire, and He has everyone leaning in ready for the jump scare - there is always an unexpected twist at the end. But Jesus has already given the twist, they have just missed it.

How often do we lose focus on what it is actually all about, how often do we miss what Jesus is inviting us into?

What in the World?

Let's unpack this a little further:

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World Behind the passage – (Why is He sharing this story?)

This passage is not an ‘end-times predictor.’ This is a perspective shifting opportunity. Jesus is moving people away from centuries of focusing on the Kingdom that comes like an army, to the mind-set that the kingdom that comes in a manger, a kingdom that comes through ordinary people like you and me. In the process of changing the perspective, Jesus is actually calling the people to a greater level of faithfulness to Him and a readiness for what is to come.

The World Within – (focusing on imagery and language.)

This is what got me in my preparation. There is so much in this passage, focusing on the tense, mixing between future and present tense. There is this high repetition around time – “in the time of the Son of Man..., in the time of Noah..., in the time of Lot...” All of this imagery was so vivid but why these in particular? If it was not an “end-time predictor” as we discussed a moment ago, then why use judgement imagery?

Pause for a moment, if I was to get you to think for those who know the stories of Noah and Lot, how would you describe the people in those places and the activities going on? They weren’t good words. In scripture words used for both are along the lines of “depravity, wickedness, corruption and violence.” However, in our passage today Jesus describes both cases like so “Eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage...” and “eating, drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.”

Again, why has Jesus chosen this specific language? If we take this not as an end-times predictor, but instead as Jesus trying to do a perspective shift – Jesus will one day return, there will be no time as the passage says to “go inside and get your possessions.” Therefore, Jesus is calling us to be ready, always. There is a faithful persistence that we are called to each day.

Hence the passage is really asking is where is your focus? Are you focusing the things of this world, eating, drinking, planting, and building, or are you focusing on Him, faithfully, in an unrelenting persistent manner?

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The World Before us – (What is our response?)

Initially I couldn't pick why Jesus follows this Kingdom image up with a Parable of the Persistent Widow. The key is in the first word. "Then." Basic Bible study tip – Any time a verse or a chapter starts with a conjunction of any sort "Moreover, Also, Then, Now" always look at what came before, as it will be connected and hold importance for what is about to be said. In the midst of all the kingdom language and return of Son of man imagery used, Luke records Jesus imperatively saying,

"Then, Jesus told the disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up!"

I will leave the parable for you to go and study in your own time, but I believe this statement is pivotal and it connects Chapter 17 and the start of 18. Prayer is the lens by which we focus our faithfulness. Jesus is who we need to be focusing on. He is calling for a perspective shift and now he is inviting us, calling us and showing us exactly how to do it. To persist in prayer.

The linking of these two shows us Jesus is not simply saying "try harder," but He is in fact giving us a tool to use to continually turn back toward Him. Turning away from the distraction and toward Him. So that we look past the normality of life, toward our saviour, with purpose.

What holds your focus, Eating drinking, planting and building? Or Jesus?

Let prayer be the lens by which we focus our mind on Jesus and that translates into our everyday action. Until the day He returns.

Amen.

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Reflecting on Lifecare Sunday 9th August 2026:

Grant encouraged us in four areas, Notice, Pray Give and Serve. Were you able to engage in one of those areas in the past week? If so what did it look like? If not where could you actively seek to do that in the coming week?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

- What do you consider the “distracting” things in your life?
- Jesus challenge the preconceived ideas of the kingdom of God, what might he be challenging you regarding your assumptions.
- What is an area in your life that you could persist in prayer for?
- If Jesus is inviting us to change our perspective and focus differently to the things of the world, what does that practically look like for you this week?

If you’d like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we’re better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. **Visio Divina – The practice of praying with Art or an Image**

Choose a piece of art, an image or something that surrounds you.

- Gaze at the image you've chosen with openness and simply notice what stirs within you.
- If you had to describe the wonder in this image, what would you say?
- What part of the image draws your attention and how do you feel about it?
- What connection does the image make with your life?
- What might God be saying to you through this image?
- Spend some time resting and responding to God.

2. **The Bible Project – Podcast “The kingdom of God has arrived”**

<https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/gods-kingdom-has-arrived-new-testament-themes-part-1/>