

Keep Praying; Don't Stop

Keep Praying; Don't Stop-67

Luke 18:1-8

In Luke 18:1-8, Luke says, "Then He spoke a parable to them..." and here's the theme of the parable "...that men always ought to pray and not lose heart..." or "to faint" "...saying: 'There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, "Get justice for me from my adversary." And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, "Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me."'"

Verse 6, "Then the Lord said, 'Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?..." notice the question mark; this is the first of two, rhetorical questions. Shall God not bear long with them and avenge them? "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" This is the last rhetorical question.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was praying and He invited His disciples to pray with Him. He told them, "Stay here and watch with Me" (Matthew 26:38), and then He went deeper into the Garden. He laid prostrate in the dirt, prayed and "His sweat became like great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). He prayed the classic prayer, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

Then Jesus got up and went back to find His disciples, whom He had just asked to "watch with Me," asleep. He woke them up and said, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" (Matthew 26:40-41). Jesus knew that prayer was absolutely essential for us, His disciples, that we need to watch and pray.

Isn't it funny that you start to pray, you get tired and want to go to sleep. You kneel down by your bed, cup your hands, lay your head on them and as you start to pray, you fall asleep. "Our Father, who art in heaven..." and then you fall asleep. You wake up about an hour later with a big dot on your forehead. "Lord, sorry about that," and you go right to bed.

Jesus knew, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). So He gives us a parable here to encourage us to pray and not lose heart. That's basically what this parable is all about: pray, don't lose heart, be strong, "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).

So this is a parable about prayer. And it does tie in with Luke 17, which dealt with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. He closes the parable in our text, in verse 8, with "When the Son of Man comes..." which is the Second Advent "...will He really find faith on the earth?" Jesus is surely coming, but will He find us faithful, will He find us praying, will He find us persevering in prayer?

There are three, basic sections to this text. Verse 1 is the purpose of the parable. Luke makes a statement, in verse 1, that explains the reason Jesus gave us the parable. "Then He..." that is, "Jesus" "...spoke a parable to them..." and here's the purpose of the parable "...that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" or "not to faint" or "not grow discouraged."

What is a parable? A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It's the Greek word "parabole," which means "to lay alongside." So Jesus takes an earthly story and lays it alongside spiritual truth. And He spoke in parables so that those who want to know the truth would inquire and be drawn in. Those who had no heart for the things of God would turn away and wouldn't get the revelation of the parable. So He often spoke in parables.

Verse 1 says that "He spoke a parable to them." The "them" here goes all the way back to chapter 17, verse 22, where it says, "He said to the disciples...." It wasn't the limited group of 12 but to all His followers.

In verse 1, He continued, "Men..." referring to mankind "...always ought to pray and not lose heart." So the key to understanding the parable is that Jesus is encouraging us to keep praying and not get discouraged. The King James translation has the word "faint" but is better translated "lose heart" or "give up." We say "throw in the towel." And some have translated that "be discouraged."

We all face the temptation to give up. We want to give up in different areas of life. But the danger is that Satan wants us to give up in prayer. He knows that if he can cut us off from God in prayer, he can destroy our walk with the Lord. So we need to be on guard and be careful. We will be tempted to be discouraged.

Satan's strategy is to destroy your walk with the Lord. We will see that this woman had an adversary. We too have an adversary—the devil. The Bible says, "The devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Ian Bounds, who has written eloquently on the subject of prayer, said, "Prayer generally begins at the closet door." In other words, you stop praying. And that is one of the first indications that you are turning away from God. An indication you are falling away from your walk with the Lord is when you stop praying.

One of the reasons we get faint, discouraged, weary and we give up and stop praying is that we feel our problem is too big. "This is just too big for God; there's no cure for this cancer!" "There's no way we can solve this financial problem!" "Our marriage has just gone too far! It's too far gone! God can't heal it!" We just despair, give up, get discouraged and have little faith.

Sometimes we faint when we're praying and give up because our flesh is so weak. We start looking to ourselves. One of the dangers in the Christian life is to look at yourself and not keep your eyes on the Lord. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus this coming year. And don't stop praying! Don't give up! Persevere and continue to pray, even though your flesh may be weak.

And we also get faint-hearted and discouraged and quit praying, because the answers to our prayers are either delayed, denied or different than what we asked for. It's hard for us when we pray and God says, "No." Sometimes we don't know that He says, "No," but He just doesn't seem to answer. So what do we do? We get discouraged and give up. We want answers immediately.

God is going to answer, but He's going to answer in His time. You say, "I don't like that! I need it by Friday at 5 o'clock!" We don't like the delayed answer; we want immediate answers. And we don't like the denied answers.

How about Mary and Martha in John 11? They sent word to Jesus, saying, "He whom You love is sick" (John 11:3). And Jesus tarried before He came, so by the time He got there, Lazarus had already died. Mary and Martha were filled with dismay; their hearts were discouraged. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You" (John 11:21-22). They were just filled with despair. Then Jesus said, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would 'see the glory of God'?" (John 11:40). Sometimes God delays an answer for later glory.

Then sometimes God will give us a different answer to our prayer than what we asked for. I can't tell you how many times I've prayed fervently, persistently for something, and God answered, but not in a way that I thought He would. So guess what I've learned by that? God's answers are always perfect. You say, "I don't know about that, Preacher Boy!" Do we know better than God? God knows best. He's a perfect, loving Father.

So even if there's a denial, we keep praying. Even if there's a delay, we keep praying. Even if there's a different answer.

Remember Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." So hold on to Galatians 6:9: "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."

So whether our prayers are denied, delayed or a different answer, keep praying.

The second section is verses 2-5, where we have the people of the parable. We have the parable itself and the people who are involved in the parable. There are only two people: the unjust judge and the widow. Jesus said, "There was in a certain city..." He doesn't name the city; this is a parable "...a judge who did not fear God nor regard man."

This was a bad judge. And we have bad judges in the land today. And if there is anything you don't want in a judge, it's a judge who doesn't fear God. All through the Old Testament when judges were appointed to rule in the land, they were to pick men who had a fear of God. But this judge did not fear God. Technically, that would have disqualified him from his judgeship; he shouldn't have been a judge. This would have been a civil court, under a tent, and people would come and sit under the judgement of this judge.

But this judge also did not “regard man.” “Did not fear God nor regard man” are tied together. These are two things you don’t want in a judge.

I believe that we need God-fearing judges in America today. We need leaders and pastors and men and women in America who fear God. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). Without the fear of God there is no fear of man. Because the judge did not fear God, he did not regard man; the two are tied together. The reason we have such a low regard for mankind is because we have no fear of God.

Now enter the widow, in verse 3. In the Bible, widows were underdogs. But God takes the side of widows and the fatherless. He cares for them. Widows had a very difficult life in those days. They lived in a patriarchal culture; men ruled the day. A woman had no real rights. So she was a woman, a widow and was poor and destitute. The picture of this widow was quite opposite the picture of this judge.

“Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’” We don’t know what the situation was, but most likely her husband had died, she had no parents or children and no doubt someone was trying to take advantage of her—maybe trying to get the property she lived on and take it from her. So she had a legal case and came before the judge to avenge her of her adversary.

Verse 4, “And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’” This is kind of a comical thing. The phrase “weary me” literally means “give me a black eye.” Most likely this is a figure of speech, which means that she will give him a bad reputation or she will make his name look bad. So self-motivation is what he used to help this poor widow out.

Everywhere he went, this woman drove him bananas. Finally after her pestering and pestering and pestering, he decided to hear her case. Even though he didn’t fear God or give a darn about this woman or her case, she would give him a bad rap or a black eye, so he finally heard her case. This woman finally got justice after she bothered this judge, and he heard her court case.

It’s important that you understand that this is a parable of contrasts. The judge is not like God. The judge is unlike God. God is not like the judge. It is a parable of contrasts; not of comparison. So God is not an unjust judge.

Verses 6-8 is the final section of our text. It is the practice of the parable, or how the parable should be applied. It is that we need to keep praying.

“Then the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unjust judge said.’” It’s interesting that Jesus wants us to listen to what the unjust judge is saying. “And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?” What’s the answer to that? “Yes.” It’s obvious.

When Abraham was bartering with God for sparing the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham said to God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25). And the answer obviously is, "Yes."

I was listening to R.C. Sproul on this text where he was talking about Abraham's question to God. And he said, "I've always said that there are no stupid questions until I read this verse." That's pretty radical; Abraham asked a stupid question. "God, you're not going to be fair and just?" Obviously God is good. Obviously God will be fair.

One of the problems we have is that we think God is unfair. We think God is unjust. We think God is unloving. We think God is unkind. He's not; He's the opposite!

This parable is a contrast. Jesus used the argument of the lesser to the greater in the sermon on the Mount when He said, "Look at the birds of the air; for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Then He gives the argument from the lesser to the greater. "Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26). And He said, "If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 6:30).

So this is a contrast and a lesser-to-the-greater argument. This unjust judge will give justice to this woman, but how much more will your Father who is in heaven give justice to you. The point of the parable is that God is good, and His ways are perfect. He is not an unjust judge.

You don't have to beg God and plead with God and throw a temper tantrum with God to get your way. Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it's laying hold of His willingness. And it's knowing that God answers wisely, prudently and quickly. He takes care of His own children. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). That means that God is immutable; He doesn't change. God only gives good gifts.

Our first four children were girls, and our fourth child was our son. When we just had the girls, I would take one or two of them with me to the grocery store. The store had a cheesy, toy section; they are junk toys. Inevitably one of my daughters would grab a little, funky doll and say, "Oh, Daddy, would you buy me this doll?! I want this doll!" I had already planned to take her to Toys-R-Us after the grocery store and buy her a really nice doll, and I told her that. But she said, "No! I want this one!"

I told her, "It'll be a nicer doll. You have to wait. You have to trust Daddy."

"No!! I want this one!!" But the head broke off before we got to the parking lot! Then she said, "Daddy, can we go to Toys-R-Us?"

"No; you made your choice. It's too late."

How often we can't see far enough ahead. We don't understand down the road. But God does;

we need to leave the choice with God. God gives the best who leaves the choice to Him. It's so important.

Number one, God's character is good. He's your Father in heaven. He's not an unjust judge. You don't have to bug Him to get Him to answer your prayers. He's your loving Father in heaven.

Number two, God's ways are just. If you don't believe that, look at the Cross. God sent His only begotten Son to die on the Cross to take our sins, to take our punishment, so that His righteousness could be imputed to us. At the Cross He put our sins on Jesus, paying for them in full, and then by faith in Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us.

If you haven't trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your faith in Him and receive the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. He is just—always just.

Number three, God's timing is perfect. It's not even in God's vocabulary to say, "Oh, I'm sorry I was late!" I can't tell you how many times I've said that: "Sorry; I'm late." God never says that. He's always on time. His timing is perfect. So don't faint; keep on praying.

So the judge is not like God, and God is not like the judge. God is a righteous, good, loving, caring, heavenly Father.

What about the widow in the parable? Are we like the widow? Yes, in the sense that we do have an adversary. In verse 3, she said, "Get justice for me from my adversary." Our adversary is the devil. The Bible says, "The devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). One of the devil's strategies in using the world and the flesh to attack you is to get you off your knees, to keep you from praying, to keep you discouraged and defeated and giving up on God in prayer.

But we're not like the widow in that we are God's elect children. Verse 7 says, "And shall God not avenge His own elect." That jumped off the page to me this week. Jesus used that title of "elect." What does that mean? It means that God chose you. Ephesians 1:4 says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Before the world was ever formed or created, God was thinking about you.

I know you can't understand, fathom or comprehend that, but that's what the Bible says. You are God's own, chosen elect. You're not a widow, you're not destitute; you're a child of God, you're chosen by God. And here's the point: don't you think that if God chose you, God will sustain you? Don't you think if God chose you, God will take care of you? Don't you think if God chose you, God will keep you?

I like Philippians where it says, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). He started the work in us, and He will complete that good work in us. We are chosen children of God.

The widow came before a court of law, but we, as the Father's chosen children, come to a

throne of grace. This is one of the great contrasts in this parable. The widow had to go to a courtroom and sit under a judge who didn't fear God or man, but as God's chosen, elect children, we come into a throne room where our caring, loving, gracious, good, heavenly Father sits on the throne and rules over all. Hebrews tells us to "Come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

I believe in the sovereignty of God, and that gives my heart peace. I can rest in Him and trust in Him. So the point is that we should not lose heart; don't stop praying.

Notice in verse 8 that the parable concludes. "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." What does that mean? It means that when God does answer the prayer, He does it swiftly or quickly. There will be delays when God's timing is in play, but when God answers prayer, He does it quickly or swiftly.

Then Jesus said, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man..." this title for Jesus is very popular in Luke "...comes..." meaning the Second Coming of Jesus "...will He really find faith on the earth?" A better translation would be "shall He find that kind of faith on the earth?" What kind of faith is that? The faith that keeps persevering and praying.

So basically the whole parable is saying, "Don't lose heart. Don't give up."

If you're discouraged, keep praying. If you're losing heart and ready to give up, keep praying. If you're upset because God hasn't answered your prayers, hasn't done what you want Him to do, when you want Him to do it, don't stop praying. Prayer keeps us in fellowship with God. That's the way God has designed to lift our burdens, to lift our worries, to lift our fears, to lift our anxieties.

You can turn verse 1 around from "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart" to say, "We faint because we don't pray." If you don't pray, you're going to faint, so don't faint by continually praying to God. The Bible says, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:16). That means that we spend every moment of every day talking to God, in communion with God.

In putting this message together this week, I was reminded of a hymn that I like and heard so often as a boy growing up in church. It's titled What a Friend We Have in Jesus. All three stanzas are amazing, but I want you to see the first stanza:

"What a friend we have in Jesus,

All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit,

O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer!"

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank Him for His answers.