

Stories That Change The World

“On Prayer: The Parable of the Unjust Judge”

Luke 17:20-18:8

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on August 6, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please turn to Luke 17.
- Why should you keep praying when it seems that God is silent? I remember when our oldest daughter, Emily, was four years old. There was a week of time where she would cry every night. She told us that she did not want to be in her room because bad thoughts kept coming into her mind about people who steal kids.
 - One night I said to her, ***“Have you prayed and asked Jesus to take away your bad thoughts Emily?”*** ***“Yes daddy, but they are still there.”*** Trying to help her fears I said, ***“Emily, Jesus is in your room with you all the time.”*** She said, ***“But daddy, Jesus is invisible.”***
 - There are many reasons why people lose heart and stop praying but Emily perfectly expressed what are probably the two most common reasons.
- First, we often lose heart and stop praying because it seems that God is silent and does not answer our requests. When God seems silent to your request to heal your marriage, to heal your family, to heal your illness, to bring salvation to your family, to provide a spouse, or grant you a baby, it is easy to lose heart and stop praying. Though we might not say it out loud we feel like God is uncaring.
 - We cry out with David in Psalm 22, ***“Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.”***
 - ***“Yes I prayed daddy, but the bad thoughts are still there.”***
- Secondly, we can also lose heart in prayer because the spiritual world can often feel less real than the physical world. ***“But daddy, Jesus is invisible.”***
 - How do you keep praying when it is so easy to lose heart? Jesus knows our weakness. He is gracious with us. He knows we are children and does not berate us for our lack of maturity. Rather, he tells us a parable to encourage us to pray.
 - In this passage there are three reasons why you should not lose heart; three reasons why you should be encouraged to keep on praying.

PRAYER KEEPS THE FIRE OF FAITH BURNING

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First, do not lose heart! Be encouraged to keep on praying because persistent prayer keeps the fire of faith burning. Before we can look at the parable itself there are two things in chapter 18 that tell us that we cannot rightly understand it without first looking at chapter 17.
 - First, notice 18:1 says, ***“And he told them a parable.”*** That little word ‘and’ indicates that this parable assumes an understanding of what has already been said.
 - Secondly notice the last half of verse 8. **READ 8b** - ***Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*** Chapter 17 spoke of this event when the Son of Man will come. So the parable is to be read in light of what was said about it in chapter 17. So what is chapter 17 about?
- In a nutshell Jesus taught that a cataclysmic day is coming to the earth for which we must make sure we are ready. This day will be so devastating that scripture simply calls it ***“the Day.”*** It will be the day of all days, for when it is finished nothing will be as it was.
 - The Day is of course the return of Jesus. On that day He will separate all people into two camps – those who are his people and those who are not.
- So here is Jesus’ point to us today: your eternal destiny depends upon whether you are ready for the return of the Son of Man. The big question is, ***“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”*** Will he find men and women loyal to him?

- The answer, for the most part, is ***“no, he will not.”*** Verses 26-30 describe what people will be like just before He comes. It will be the same as in the days of Noah and Lot. ***READ 26-30 - Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸ Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, ²⁹ but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all— ³⁰ so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.***
 - Now were these people involved in what we would call blatant sins – murder and the such? No. They were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building – all good things. Why were they judged then? Because they had completely removed God from all aspects of life. They did not worship Him who gave them food. They did not love Him who gave them financial success. ***“Although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him.”*** They lived in God’s world without any reference to God.

THE LOVE OF MOST WILL GROW COLD

- Now Jesus has said all of this to warn us how difficult the last days will be. In the struggle to live for Him we are in danger to start living like the world, in danger that our faith will grow cold and on his return the Son of Man will not find us ready.
 - Jesus states this danger in Matthew 24. Listen to this carefully - ***“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”***
 - Before Jesus returns things will be difficult for those who love Him. In this time wickedness will increase and because of this the love of most will grow cold. Most will not endure and most will not be saved.
- Listen, the danger is that as we strive to keep the coals of our faith burning hot, we are doing it in arctic conditions. The world’s icy winds blow strong against our little campfires attempting to freeze us out.
 - This all sounds rather discouraging but Jesus says it to warn us and to provoke us to then ask, ***“Jesus, I want to persevere. So, how can I keep my love from growing cold in the difficult days before you return?”***
- As we walk through the door from chapter 17 to 18 we see that Jesus immediately gives us the answer. The key is hanging right on the door in verse 1. ***READ 1 - And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.***
 - The key is a life of prayer that does not give up praying. Prayer is what stokes the coals of the fire of faith. Persistent prayer is what keeps the coals of faith burning while the world tries to freeze us out. When Jesus asks, ***“When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on the earth?”*** he is really asking,
 - ***“When I come will I find people devoted to prayer?”*** Don’t think of life devoted to prayer as those who spend 2 hours on their knees. A life of prayer is one that seeks his face, that calls up to him during the day with what is going on, that admires Him and expresses that admiration, that thanks Him and adores him. It is living communication with God.
- So the first reason why you should not lose heart but rather to be encouraged to keep on praying is because persistent prayer keeps the fire of faith burning.
 - Now Jesus tells his parable because he knows that we often lose heart in prayer because we feel like God is distant and, in not answering our prayers the way we think, we feel like he does not really care about us. This causes us to lose heart and stop praying.
 - In one short parable Jesus tackles all of this, changing our perspective and motivating us to keep praying. Let’s enter into this parable together.

THE DAMNABLE JUDGE

- This is a very basic parable. There are two characters, one in a position of authority, who we will call ‘the damnable judge’, and the other in a position of powerlessness whom we will call ‘the desperate widow.’ We read about the damnable judge in verse 2. **READ 2** - *He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man...”*
 - Some people, although having no fear of God, at least try to please other people because they care what the think. Not so with this man. He lives strictly for himself. This is a wicked man.
- Now in those days the courtroom was not a building. It was a tent that was moved from place to place as the judge covered his circuit. The judge set the agenda. Anyone could watch the proceedings from the outside but only those who were approved could have their cases tried. This usually meant bribing one of the assistants so that he would call the case to the judge’s attention.
 - But this was a perversion of all that God desired for his people. In Deuteronomy 16:18 God commands the people, *“Appoint judges and officials...and they shall judge the people fairly. Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.”*
 - Jesus means for you to feel disgusted by this man. He is the exact opposite of what a judge should be like and what a judge should do. Desiring to bring a case before this damnable judge is a desperate widow. **READ 3** - *And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.*

THE DESPERATE WIDOW

- This woman is not seeking revenge. She wants justice for she has clearly been defrauded in some way. Truth is on her side but sadly everything stands against her getting justice in the court.
 - First of all she is a woman and is not permitted in the court. Second, she has no one to speak for her. Her husband is dead and evidently she has no family member, no brother-in-law, uncle, or cousin to help. Third, she is so poor she cannot afford the bribe. But worst of all, the judge who, of all people, should help her get justice is totally indifferent and has no compassion towards her.
 - This woman has nothing going for her and nothing in her favour. So she uses the one thing she does have: persistence. And she uses it to get what she needs. Look again at verse 3.
- **READ 3** - *And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.* She hounded this judge with the one weapon she had. Everyday she was there perhaps waiting as he left the tent saying, *“Give me justice. Hear my complaint. Give me what is mine. Vindicate me.”* But consistent with his character we read in verse 4 that *“for some time he refused.”*
 - But every morning the judge showed up there she was again, *“Grant me justice.”* And this went on for some time. But then we read in verse 4 and 5, **READ 4-5** - *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.’”*
 - Literally the language means, *“to blacken the eye.”* Metaphorically the widow has so beaten him down with her persistence that he gives in. In life it is often the squeaky wheel that gets the grease and so it was in the case of the widow. What the judge would not do out of justice or compassion or reverence for God, he would do out of sheer frustration with her incessant pleading.

THE POINT OF THE PARABLE

- Now that is the story but what is the point? What does this teach us that will encourage us to pray and never give up in the difficult days before the coming of the Son of Man?
 - We learn one point from the judge and one point from the widow. We have already seen that should be encouraged to pray because persistent prayer keeps the fire of faith burning. But now

from the judge we learn this: **(SHOW SLIDE)** Do not lost heart! Be encouraged to keep praying because God is kindly disposed to his people.

- **READ 6-8a** - *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.* So in this story we are the widows and God is the judge. But why would Jesus choose a damnable unjust judge to represent God?
- Is it not because we often view God this way: as a judge who is uncaring, whom we bring requests before only to have him not answer us, as an unfeeling God who is distant from us and does not care that the illness still remains, that the marriage is still hard, that we have lost the baby, that we cannot have a baby, that our loved ones are still not Christians, that the pressures in life are too high.
 - The fact is we lose heart in prayer precisely because we start to think of God in this way. We stop viewing him as a loving Father and see him as an unjust judge who does not care.
 - We may not say it out loud but our lack of prayer clearly demonstrates it because the only reason a child would stop communicating with their father is if they think he no longer cares for them.
- But this parable completely shatters the view of God we have built in our minds. This parable teaches us to keep praying because God is favourably and kindly disposed toward us. You see, the parable does not *liken* God to the unjust judge; it *contrasts* him to the judge. Jesus is saying that the judge of the universe is the exact opposite of this man.
 - This is an argument from the lesser to the greater. Jesus is saying, ***“Look if in earthly matters a wicked and unjust judge will eventually give a widow what she persists in asking for even though he cares nothing for her, how much more will God, who is your Father and who cares for His chosen people, give justice to them when they cry out day and night.”***
- But how do you know that God is kindly disposed toward you? Because if you in Christ you are one of His chosen ones. Chosen refers to God’s electing love. To be chosen is to be known by God and loved by God.
 - Ephesians 1 says, ***“God chose you before the creation of the world...in his great love for you he predestined you to be adopted as his children in Christ.”*** As his child, God is kindly disposed to you. Do you lose heart in prayer because God seems uncaring? Then let me ask you, ***“What more can God do to prove his love for you?”***
 - While you were his enemy God sent His most beloved Son to die in your place that you might come back to God. While you were a slave caring nothing for God, He set his love on you and redeemed you from the slave market of sin. While you were a slave with nothing to commend yourself to God for, He adopted you in Jesus. While you loved your sin, God struck His Son down on the cross that you might not face eternal wrath and damnation. While you were helpless before the bar of God’s justice with no one to speak for you, God sent His Son to be your Mediator in giving his life a ransom for you.
 - Why do you lose heart in prayer? What more can the Judge of the universe do to prove He is kindly disposed to you?
 - So dear Christian who has lost heart in prayer, be encouraged. From the judge we learn that we should be encouraged to keep praying because God is not like the unjust judge but is kindly disposed toward you.
 - The last thing that we learn as we look at the widow is this:

GOD DESIRES YOU TO PERSEVERE IN PRAYER

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Do not lost heart! Be encouraged to keep praying because God desires you to persevere in prayer. **READ 1, 7** - *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart . . . And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?*

- Here was a woman who had every reason not to persevere. All the odds were stacked against her. The judge cared nothing for her. Yet she persevered. If this woman can persevere in difficult days how much more should we persevere in prayer in the difficult days before Jesus' return knowing that all the odds are stacked in our favour.
- Like any good father, God may not always answer your requests the way you think he should but as a father I know that the only reason I do not answer my children's requests is because out of love for them I see that it is not for their good or that they need to wait. What governs all my thoughts for them is love that would see them grow into disciples of Jesus.
 - I would be very hurt though if in not answering one of my children's requests they stop talking to me and withheld their love from me. Child of God, do not lose heart in prayer. God has proved his love for you! Keep praying.
- The top movie in the world right now is *Dunkirk*. It is an incredible movie and a true story from WWII. It is 1940 and Nazi Germany has invaded France. Almost 400,000 Allied soldiers retreat to the seaside town of Dunkirk in Northern France. The entire British army is there and completely surrounded. The situation seemed utterly hopeless. People were losing heart as Britain was considering a conditional surrender to Germany.
 - The movie captures all of this in amazing ways but there was one major piece missing of the story missing from the movie. Let me read to you from an article that tells of this missing piece.
 - ***"In desperation George 6th called for a National Day of Prayer to be held on 26th May 1940. In a national broadcast he instructed the people of the UK to turn back to God in a spirit of repentance and plead for Divine help. Millions of people across the British Isles flocked into churches praying for deliverance. . . . Two events immediately followed. Firstly, a violent storm arose over the Dunkirk region grounding the Luftwaffe which had been killing thousands on the beaches. And then secondly, a great calm descended on the Channel, the like of which hadn't been seen for a generation, which allowed hundreds of tiny boats to sail across and rescue 335,000 soldiers, rather than the estimated 20-30,000. From then on people referred to what happened as "the miracle of Dunkirk". Sunday June 9th was officially appointed as a Day of National Thanksgiving."***¹
- Brothers and sisters, there are many situations that seem hopeless – in our personal lives as well as in our country. But let us turn to God in prayer. Let us persevere in prayer.
 - Pray throughout the day calling upon God to enable you to live for him. Pray for your workplace. Pray for your colleagues. Pray for our country. Pray for your children and grandchildren.
 - If you do not have a regular formal time of prayer begin with just 5 minutes a day when you get up in the morning. As a church, let us be committed to prayer.

CONCLUSION

- Friends, the days before Jesus returns are difficult. Because of the increase of wickedness the love of most will grow cold. Stoke the fires of your faith. Do not lose heart in prayer thinking that God is uncaring.
 - Let this parable work itself through your soul. Do not lose heart! Be encouraged to keep praying because God is kindly disposed toward you. When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on the earth?

¹ <http://www.anglican.ink/article/national-day-prayer-time-dunkirk-1940>