Text: Luke 18:1-8
Title: Keep on Praying: The Parable of the Persistent Widow
Truth: We must pray persistently and not give up because God is kind and just.
Date/Location: Sunday January 5, 2025 at FBC (rev. from May 14, 2017)

Introduction

This parable is like the story of the guy who went to his friend at midnight and asked for bread to share with another friend. This very inconvenient situation highlighted that the friend will, however grudgingly, give what is needed, if for nothing else to bring quiet once again to his house. Similarly with a father whose son asks him for some bread. He will not give something useless or dangerous in reply. The lesson of the stories is highlighted by way of contrast or lesser-to-greater: God is far better than the friend or a human father. Jesus applies that lesson this way: We can pray to God persistently—asking, seeking, knocking—and He will answer with good gifts.

It is very nice for the reader and preacher when the author who wrote down the parable plainly says the purpose of the parable. The setting helps to give some color to the situation: the Lord has just been talking about the obvious, sudden, and catastrophic nature of His second trip to the earth. Before He comes back, there is a time when the world goes on living life and there is a delay before He imposes His kingdom on the inhabitants of earth. During the delay, the people of God may wonder how long until He returns and executes justice. Will we be faithful in prayer in that context?

I. The Lesson, Luke 18:1

A. The point of the parable is plainly laid out in verse 1 so that we do not have to do much deciphering to figure it out. The challenge comes in putting the lesson into practice. Think about this: it is relatively easy to "know" Christian teaching; it is another thing to put it into practice. Talk is easy; walk is hard. Change is hard, but by God's grace and with the help of His Spirit, we can put into practice what the Lord teaches in His word. Now, although I said it is easy to know it, it does take some effort because you have to put yourself in a place where you can learn it (read it, hear it) and you have to give your attention to it.

B. For this message, we should know a few basic truths:

1. God is a personal being to whom we can speak.

2. Speaking to God is called prayer. In prayer we can ask God for things, we can tell Him our feelings, we can worship Him and tell Him thanks, and we can confess our sins.

3. God is not like an impatient person who has no tolerance for your interruptions. He is patient and kind and gentle. He will hear you if you pray in faith, not ritualistically.

4. God may not answer your prayers in the time you want or the way you want, because He always has a better and more complete answer. But He will take care of you if you trust Him.

5. God cannot be wearied by you asking Him things, even if you ask repeatedly.

6. Jesus tells us not to use empty, repetitive prayers, but we can pray for the same thing multiple times, many times, expressing our heart's desire to the Lord.

7. God is just. Eventually, though it may seem too long, He will put things right.

8. You can enter a relationship with God by means of repentance over sin and faith in Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection. When you do so, God promises not only to forgive and cleanse you, but to make you His child, adopted into His family. He becomes then your Father in spiritual life. This confers a special care on you as one of His children, just like any good father cares for, protects, and provides for his children.

C. The idea of "always to pray" is not precisely the same as in 1 Thess. 5:17. There, the idea is to constantly or unceasingly pray, to be occupied with prayer throughout every day.

In this verse, the idea is more to pray consistently for specific things and *not to give up* on praying. You could imagine a pattern of prayer where you pray about lots of things every day but on some matters or many matters you give up and stop praying about them because they seem hopeless. In that case, you have "lost heart." It means that you have lost motivation to continue. This can happen for several reasons. While you are doing good for the Lord it might not seem to be having much impact (2 Thess. 3:13). God strengthens us by telling us not to grow weary in doing good because the season of reaping will come (Gal. 6:9). In light of the great message we have to share, we must not lose heart (2 Cor. 4:1). Tribulations can certainly cause you to lose motivation or give up (Eph. 3:13) but we must resist that and follow this guideline.

D. What kind of prayer are we talking about? This passage applies to all kinds of prayer by all kinds of people at all times and in all places. The parable gives an example of prayer in a specific situation of distress like the widow of the story.

E. If we factor in also verse 8, the clear implication is that we must pray until the return of Christ. Especially around that time God's people should pray because of the deep distress that will befall the inhabitants of the earth. He will come and bring justice.

Meanwhile, until then, we will be tested because it is a long time between His first and second coming. It feels easy to give up because the delay is so lengthy and nothing "big" seems to be happening. "Where is the promise of His coming? Everything seems to be status quo" (2 Peter 3:4). I take it that the Lord's parable here is not limited to teaching us about what will happen when the Lord returns, but that in the intervening time, God is good and will answer our inquiries in the best possible way. Therefore, we should keep on praying. DO NOT give up! And if you have given up, then RE-START!

F. What happens *after* He returns? We are not taught in detail about what prayer will be like after His return during His millennial reign. Since Jesus will be physically present in Jerusalem, and His saints reigning with Him, the situation will look different than it does now.

II. The Parable, Luke 18:2-5

A. There are three parties in this parable. The widow and the judge are the main characters. The third is an unnamed adversary who is somehow oppressing the widow. There is no detail given about how he is oppressing her, but we could imagine several ways that might be the case. The Bible makes clear that God hates those who oppress widows and orphans (Zech. 7:9-10).

B. There is the widow. She is helpless and weak, and because her husband has died, she has no man to protect her, whether father or brother or brother-in-law who can take up her care. This is not a "knock" against widows today or single moms, but I think we can agree that a woman on her own is often (not always) a target of bad people and she would like to have a man to advocate for her. I recently heard of a woman who went into a car dealership with her newborn, and she got ripped off, pushed into a loan with a 27% interest rate. That level of interest should be illegal. Furthermore, it is terribly unethical, and the owner should fire his employee for taking advantage of a single mom.

1. The text says that she kept coming to the judge to seek justice. The Bible uses the "imperfect" tense here to depict an ongoing action.

2. She did not give up.

C. Then there is the judge. Several things did not bother this judge: the existence of God, the shame that could be heaped on him by men, and injustice against widows.

1. He is a man who "does not fear God" and "does not regard man." This means that he is an evil, wicked person, not the right kind of person to be a judge. He is not moved by the fact that He will be judged in the future by God, because He does not believe in that.

2. He is unjust. We could speculate that he took bribes, a practice that is not bothersome among those who are godless. See 2 Chron. 19:6-7.

3. He does not care how his behavior looks to other people. He does not care about others and does not love others. Granted, there is a sense in which a judge must not be swayed by the faces of people, whether poor or rich (Lev. 19:15). But that is entirely different than not caring for people, especially the poor and oppressed. There is a good sense to not caring what people think, so that you can render justice. But this judge obviously does not have that kind of impartiality. He is not at all like God who takes personal care toward His people, even those who seem insignificant in the eyes of society.

4. This judge only cared about one thing: himself! He was self-absorbed. He is not therefore a good judge. This is why character matters in the selection process for judge.

5. When he thought about how the widow kept coming, he acknowledged in himself that he did not fear God nor regard man. This is bold. Not only did he not fear God, but he was also proud of it. He was like a hard-edged atheist with no compassion for other people.

6. He would not be motivated to act by justice or common decency or sympathy or any good motivation like that. Instead, he was moved to act merely because he cared about himself only! He did not want to be bothered, and he could see this widow was not going away anytime soon, until her case was favorably resolved. His selfishness drove him “accidentally” to do the right thing.

7. The unjust judge could have done nothing, or even afflicted the woman so that she would go away.

III. The Conclusion of the Parable, Luke 18:6-8a

A. In verse 6, our Lord tells us to listen to what the unjust judge said. Hear it—he said that *he would avenge her*. He would come to her aid and help her. There was no mercy here, no care, no compassion…but there was favorable action.

B. In a worse-to-better or lesser-to-greater style of argument, in verses 7 and 8 Jesus says basically that God will do at least as much as the unjust judge, and obviously far more and far better.

1. He would never afflict someone in some mean-spirited way to "get rid of them" when they come to Him to ask for help.

2. If the bad judge will do a good thing because of self-interest, how shall not God do even more for his children? God is not absorbed in self-interest, but is loving, giving, forgiving, kind.

3. Compare this to the situation in Luke 11:11-13. The unjust judge is like the evil father who knows how to give good gifts to his children.

C. Think about how God is different than the judge.

1. The judge was unjust; God is perfectly just (1 Peter 2:23).

2. The judge did not care about people; God does care about people (Psalm 103:8).

3. The judge did not care about widows; but God most certainly cares for widows, and He has a lot to say about them. There are 80 Bible verses that mention widows. Exodus 22:22-24 says, "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child." This is just one way that we love our neighbors as ourselves. God gets very angry when people afflict widows. See also: Deut. 10:18; 14:28-29 mentions the tithe that was used to help widows and other poor people; 24:17-21; 26:12-13; 27:19. The man Job cared for widows. Despite being falsely accused to the contrary (Job 22:9), he bemoaned the world's treatment of widows (24:3, 21) and he helped widows (29:13, 31:16-18).

D. So too God will act on the behalf of His elect (Eph. 1:4), who are needy like widows. He will avenge them speedily. This will be devastating against those who persecute Christians and wrong them in this life.

E. Notice that God will avenge, but also His children cry out in prayer day and night to Him. They obviously are asking for relief, for justice from their adversaries. He will hear, and suddenly His justice will come.

F. However, there may be some delay, thus requiring us to keep coming like the widow kept coming. This delay is not because God is unjust. Rather, it has several purposes:

1. It trains the believer in Christ to learn patience, perseverance, and continual prayer.

2. But it also means more salvation for the lost (2 Peter 3:15).

3. Another effect of this delay is that God accumulates more charges against evildoers for which they must be punished. Their "sin is not fulfilled yet" but it will be. Their actions and the believers' persistence in the face of it are manifest evidence in favor of their perdition (2 Thess. 1:5-8, Phil. 1:28).

IV. Closing Question, Luke 18:8b

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find (the) faith on the earth?

A. Several different interpretations of this question have been offered, not necessarily mutually exclusive or contradictory:

1. Will the Lord find many believers? No, not in the numbers that we would hope. Will he find people who care about His second coming? Again, not as many as we would hope, given a world population of 8.2 billion people. I believe, however, that this question among other means such as the persistent ministry of God's servants in the intervening centuries will mean that there are more than a handful of people faithful to the Lord—more than in the days of Noah and Lot.

2. Will the Lord find faithfulness in the matter of prayer? Generally not, but among His elect He should. Given that the Lord has taken a long time to return, and this necessitates persistence in prayer, are His people actually going to keep it up, or are they going to lose heart?

3. Will the Lord find **the kind of faith** that this widow had? Again, not too much of this kind of faith exists now, much less near the end when the love of many will grow cold (Matt. 24:12). The definite article in front of faith indicates the kind of faith that He just illustrated: the kind of faith that the widow has; the kind of faith that always prays and does not grow discouraged. In other words, this kind of faith keeps on believing and praying amid distress.

B. The question is both rhetorical and a challenge. It is rhetorical because it implies that there will not be much of the widow's kind of prayer left on the earth. It is a challenge because we want to be in the praying group

when Jesus returns. We are thus challenged that every person in every generation should be a person of faithful, persistent prayer.

C. We must continue to pray until the return of our Lord at the rapture.

D. In practical terms, this means we must be diligent in our practice of prayer both individually, in our families, and corporately as a church.

On the latter, I am 100% convinced that churches must pray together. Let us face it: we often falter at prayer in our homes because we are distracted by many things. Setting aside time to come apart to pray helps with that, even though it takes time, and gas money, and moving our bodies from one place to another. Is that really an "inconvenience"?

The New Testament gives examples and instructions about church-wide prayer. Examples: Acts 1:14, 2:42, 3:1, 12:5, 12:12. Even non-Christians gathered for prayer (Acts 16:13)! There are many injunctions to the "plural you" to pray (some are Romans 15:30, Eph. 6:18, Col. 4:3, 1 Thess. 5:25, 2 Thess. 3:1, Heb. 13:18).

Frankly, I believe many of our people are in some level of spiritual danger because they do not participate in corporate prayer or prayer more generally.

When the Lord returns, if He does in our lifetimes, I would really like for Him to find us doing what we He has asked us to do, and among those things is praying (growing, evangelizing, disciple-training, leadership training, church planting).

Conclusion

So why can we pray and not give up? Because Christ is coming. Because God is just. Because God will hear our prayer and answer. Because God will suddenly avenge those who do wrong. Because God deeply cares for His people.

Do not be discouraged! You cannot weary God with true, heartfelt prayer. Pray "morning, evening, and noon" (Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10), and all other times during the day. God is good and will respond somehow.

Prayer helps us express our dependence on God, reorients our priorities, and focuses us on the needs of others. May we keep up prayer!

MAP