

Heaven—A Tight Fit for the Rich

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 18, where we are going to be looking at a very famous passage, one that is so tempting to camp out on for a long time. As I was preparing this sermon, I kept adding things, and saying, “Oh, my sermon is too big,” and I’d cut it down. I kept adding and chopping and then it just ended up like it was to begin with.

The story [in Luke 18:18–27] is of the rich young ruler. Jesus has some really amazing things [to say], and when you study [this passage], you learn things about the story that you don’t really get upon first glance. When you look at the Scriptures, you discover there are rich people, [such as] Abraham, David, or Zaccheus, [who] we will be encountering in Luke 19, who [were] very wealthy and yet they were believers. They will be in heaven with us. But [with] wealth, a lot of times people [can’t] avoid certain traps. It is irresistible for some people who have great wealth to stay away from those worldly things that God hates. A lot of times, though [they] can purchase Bibles, support missionaries, go to seminary, and buy good books to read and music to listen to, those who have great wealth are just drawn into things that captivate them and they often become proud and trust in their riches above God. It is very difficult for somebody with great riches to be humble, trust in the Lord, and use their riches for His glory. Usually, if they have an abundance, they want more. They want to increase their empire, their

holdings, and their net value. Very few of them are able to have much and use much for the glory of God.

[In] Luke 18, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. [In this chapter], Luke has assembled different little stories and parables [with] a common thread. That common thread is heaven: how to get to heaven, or how not to get to heaven, in the case of our story this morning. In the previous story, Jesus talked about the little children—“the kingdom of heaven belongs to little ones such as these” [see Luke 18:16] because little children are trusting. They rely upon the Lord. They are very careful to just do what their parents say. They don’t know any better. They have this complete, honest trust and hope that their parents are going to take care of them.

Well, if being like a child is how *to* get into the kingdom of heaven, the story before us this morning teaches us how *not* to get into the kingdom of heaven. It is kind of a sad story at the beginning, but it gets good at the very end. It is kind of like reading the Book of Revelation, if you’ve ever done that. I remember one time deciding I was going to read a chapter [from Revelation] to my wife every night as we were going to bed. After several nights of judgment and fire and a third of the earth’s population dying, [we were ready for some good news]. Toward the [beginning] of the book, it is pretty sobering and woesome, but it gets really good at the end. That’s [what] this story before us today [is like].

Christians, a lot of times, are deceived into thinking that their money really makes no difference. But it is a huge topic in the Scriptures. It is a topic that we need to consider. God mentions and talks about it a lot in His Word. Jesus talked about it a lot in His earthly ministry. In Jesus’ day, just as in our day, many felt they were going to heaven because they had wealth. They wanted to be right with God [and] do those things that pleased God so they could escape the judgment they knew they deserved. [Similarly], many Christians, or professing Christians, today will come to church, read their Bible[s], and go through the basic motions of Christianity, but many of them don’t know Christ. They say they do, they think they are Christians, but Jesus says that “Many in that day will come to Me and say, “Lord, Lord,

have we not. . .” [see Matthew 7:22] and they talk about the good deeds they’ve done—incredible deeds, as a matter of fact—and then they hear those terrifying words, “Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you” [see Matthew 7:23]. Imagine that. Imagine knowing Jesus is Lord, calling Him your Lord, working in the church for what you think is His glory, only to get to heaven to discover that He is going to reject you because you have not known Him.

The story before us this morning is one of those terrible, sobering stories of a man who got a hairsbreadth away from heaven and then walked away. We don’t know if he ever came to Christ after this or not, but the end of the story is [that] he walked away. Please follow along in your Bibles as I read Luke 18:18–27.

A ruler questioned Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, ‘DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.’” And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” When Jesus heard this, He said to him, “One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. And Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” They who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But He said, “The things that are impossible with people are possible with God.”

Please pray with me. Father, we want to ask You to help us understand this text. We want You to help us apply this text. We realize that all we have

is from You, that nothing that we have has not first been given to us, and [that we are] not to trust in those things, rely upon those things. You give us things to be stewards of, not to hope in, or to idolize. Father, we want to use our wealth for Your glory. We don't want things to get in the way of our salvation. Father, I pray that as we look at this text this morning, a text of a man who walked away from his own salvation, that we would examine our own hearts, that we would look deep within us, and your Holy Spirit would move through Your Word, that each of us would leave here not merely with a story in our minds, but, Father, with changed lives and moved hearts. Father, we pray all this in Christ's name, Amen.

From this narrative, I want to show you six facts that, if heeded, will help you navigate your way to heaven, avoid a perilous pitfall, and gain assurance concerning your own true spiritual state. The first [fact] is: A question you should ask. Look at [Luke 18:]18: "A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This story appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So, both [of] the other synoptic gospels have it. [We know] it's an important story because it appears three times. Mark tells us that Jesus was just getting ready to set out on a journey [see Mark 10:17]. So, in other words, Jesus is in the village, and He is getting ready to head on to the next place. As He is getting ready to head out, Mark tells us that this young rich ruler comes running up to Him [see Mark 10:17]. You can tell he is young because he is running. When you are a young man, you run everywhere because walking is just way too slow.

He runs up to Jesus, he's breathing hard, and he says, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This is the situation. It's really the same question that the lawyer in Luke 10:25 asked Jesus. You remember that: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus quotes [to the lawyer] the two great commandments: "Love God and love your neighbor." The man realizes, I think, that he hasn't been loving his neighbor [as] he should, so he then tries to justify himself, and says, "But who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus tells the parable of who is my neighbor, more commonly known as the

parable of the Good Samaritan, to teach him that anyone in need that you can help is your neighbor.

As we come here [to Luke 18:18], the rich ruler refers to Jesus as “Good Teacher,” a pretty unique title, which is pretty much unfound in all of the rabbinical writings. He asks the question of all questions: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” I don’t know about you, but I’ve only had a few times when people just out of the blue have asked me that. It’s kind of like gospel T-ball. Usually you’re thinking, “OK, I need to witness to this guy. How am I going to break in? How am I going to talk to the guy?”

[You start out with], “So, how about them Mets?”

“Oh, yeah. [They’re] fine.”

“How about Jesus?” You’re trying to get [the conversation] around so you can talk to him about the gospel. “Do you ever think about God?”

It’s pretty easy for me because I just say I’m a pastor, and [people think], “Oh, he’s probably going to get religious.” I try not to disappoint them.

But, you know how it is. Sometimes you’re thinking, “OK, I’m on this plane. I’m sitting next to this person. I just really want to sleep. I want to read this book.” This person is there and you don’t know them, and they don’t know you, and you’re trying to break in.

[Our passage] is one of those situations [in which] somebody runs up to Jesus and puts the ball on the tee and says, “How can I inherit eternal life?” so Jesus can just thwack it out of the park. It’s the question of all questions. I wish more people asked this question, but what we’re finding out in America is that a lot of people don’t have this question [in their minds]. They don’t even care to ask it. They’re not even interested. Most of them don’t even believe in eternal life. They’ve bought the lie of evolution. They think they’re going to die and disappear into nothing. Most are only concerned about today, pleasure, and making money so they can have things so they can make more money and have things, and [then] die. It’s pretty sad. They play right into Satan’s hand, who wants to distract them with the things of the world and deceive them with lies so they don’t wake up to the reality of things until they’re in hell and their eternal future is unalterable.

Teenager[s] think they're going to live a long time. You can talk to teenagers and all of them think they're going to live a long time. [You ask], "How long do you think you're going to live?"

"Oh, seventy, eighty years. I don't know." One of those same teenagers could be riding [his] bike, get hit by a car, and be in hell for eternity. A businessman at the top of his game, who is making money hand over fist, all of a sudden drops dead at a lunch meeting from a heart attack and finds himself in hell. [Or imagine] some housewife who has gone to a liberal church, spent her life loving her kids, being very moral, teaching them to be upright, going through the motions, loving her husband. Now she is ninety-eight years old, she dies, and finds out she is on her way to hell. These are realities. The Scriptures teach us realities. The way is narrow [see Matthew 7:14]. It is a tight fit and it is an especially tight fit for the rich, as we are going to find out.

Many people are unconcerned about asking that most important question: What shall I do to inherit eternal life? The question is: Have you asked it? Have you found the answer? You can find a lot of answers. There are a lot of cults out there. There are a lot of people out there who will tell you their way is the right way, but the fact is [that] there is only one right way, and that is Jesus, "the way the truth, and the life" [see John 14:6]. [With] the rich young ruler, we have to applaud him for his eagerness, his tenacity, his ambition, and for asking the most important question that all of us need to be asking: How can I inherit eternal life?

[Our] second [fact is]: There is a reality here [to which] you should admit. Look at [Luke 18:]19. Remember, [the rich young ruler] just called Jesus "Good Teacher." "And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.'" Think about that statement. That is kind of an interesting response, isn't it? We know Jesus is God. He is the sinless one. You might be thinking, "Well, since Jesus is sinless, and since Jesus is God, then He is good, right? So, why does He say that? Why doesn't He say, 'Well, thank you,' or just not say anything? Why does He say, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone'?"

G. Campbell Morgan laments that many interpreters miss what is going on here. He says that Jesus “meant one of two things. He either meant, ‘I’m not good,’ or He meant ‘I am God.’”¹ That’s exactly right. Either Jesus is saying, “I am not good,” or He is saying, “I am God.” Now, remember, the rich young ruler just asked, “What can I do to inherit eternal life,” and Jesus gives him the first important thing [he needs to know]: “You need to know that I am God.” That is one of the cardinal things you need to know to be saved: Jesus is God incarnate. Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah is God become man. Many who have been deceived that Jesus is not God will perish in hell for eternity. There are many cults [that] deny the deity of Christ. If you [have] studied cults at all, [you know] that pretty much all you have to do is go to Jesus and you find out they’re broken there because that is the one thing Satan knows: If he can get somebody to believe in a Jesus that isn’t the real Jesus, he can damn them to hell [while all the while they’re] thinking they are on their way to heaven.

Jesus, when speaking to the Pharisees in John 8:24, made it clear when He said: “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” When He says, “I am” there, He is talking about *the* I AM, the Lord, what is referred to in the Hebrew as Yahweh, as the Ineffable Tetragrammaton, the unutterable four-letter name. That’s why, when you read your Old Testament you see “Lord” in [small] caps—that [represents the unutterable name of God]. [Jesus] says, “Unless you believe that I am the eternally existing one, you are going to die in your sins.” Then He goes on in [John 8:]58 to make that crystal clear because He says: “Before Abraham was born, I am.” If you deny the deity of Christ, you can’t get to heaven.

The first thing [Jesus] wants the rich young ruler to realize is who He is. “I am the I AM.” Then, secondly, think about this: He tells the rich young ruler, “No one is good except God alone” [Luke 18:19]. So, what does

¹G. Campbell Morgan, “The Young Ruler,” *The Sermons of G. Campbell Morgan*. Available at: <http://www.gcampbellmorgan.com/sermons/112.html>.

that make the rich young ruler? [It makes him] bad, sinful. If only God is holy, then what does that make the rich young ruler? [It makes him] sinful. That's another thing you need to learn if you're going to be saved. You need to know who Jesus is, that He is God incarnate, and you also need to know that you are a sinner. Yes, we may be good in society's eyes, but compared to God, who is infinitely holy, we're not good at all. "There [is] none righteous, no not even one" [see Romans 3:10]. We might even [think], "Didn't Paul say, though, in Philippians 3 that he, according to the Law of Moses, was blameless?" [see Philippians 3:6]. Well, yes, but surely that is Paul's estimation of himself in his delusion before he got saved because all the way through the New Testament and in his books, he talks about [how] he is the "chief of sinners" [see 1 Timothy 1:15], the foremost of sinners, and he talks about how sinful he is.

In Romans 7:7–9, [Paul] talks about coveting, [and] says, "Man, as soon as the Law came, and it said, 'Thou shalt not covet,' there was this principle in me, this drive in me, to covet everything I could." He says, "Man, sin just sprang up in me. I was like a field of sin, and pretty soon I realized, 'I deserve to die.'" So, Paul wasn't deluded into thinking he was sinless. Yes, when he was a Pharisee he was deceived, just [as the] rich young ruler [was deceived], but after [Paul] came to Christ, he saw things all too clearly. Paul was no perfect law keeper. He was like the rich young ruler, deceived into thinking he was righteous. So, we must consider, all of us, who Jesus is, come to believe He is God, and secondly, we need to realize that since only God is good, that makes all of us sinners in need of salvation.

[Our] third [fact is]: There is an impossible standard you can't keep. Jesus knows the rich young ruler is self-righteous and has an idol he worships. Contrary to what we might expect, He throws out something kind of shocking, especially for us, you know, who are familiar with the New Testament and the writings of Paul. You would think that Jesus would say, "OK, you want to inherit eternal life? This is all you need to do: repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." I mean, that is it, right? But He doesn't do that. You [might wonder], "Well, why

doesn't He do that?" [It is] because, first of all, [the rich young ruler] didn't get the first hint that [Jesus] was God and didn't get the second hint that he, [the rich young ruler], was bad. The rich young ruler is not quite connecting, and Jesus is trying to bring him to a place where he sees he is a sinner in comparison with a good and holy God so that he needs salvation. Jesus only came to save sinners.

Jesus, then, [in Luke 18:]20 says: "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" Jesus rattles off five of the Ten Commandments that relate to loving your neighbor. If you've ever studied the Ten Commandments, [you know that] the first four relate to loving God directly [and] the last six relate to loving God indirectly by loving your neighbor. [Jesus] rattles off five of those [six commandments]. Matthew's account tells us [that] Jesus also included the command to "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" [Matthew 19:19]. Mark's account also says [that] He said, "Do not defraud" [Mark 10:19]. All of these commands relate to loving your neighbor. What's really interesting [is that] Jesus left off the command, "Thou shalt not covet" [see Exodus 20:17], which is certainly this man's problem.

So, why does He do this? Why does He rattle off these commands? [It is] because He is trying to get the rich young ruler to [realize], "Oh, yeah. You know, I've done pretty [well] on those, but I haven't kept [them] perfectly. I guess that does make me a sinner." [Then] Jesus could say, "Well, if you believe in Me, your sins are forgiven."

But, look at [Luke 18:]21: "And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." Really? Think about that. [The rich young ruler says], "Yeah, yeah, from my earliest days I learned the commandments. I have kept them perfectly." Really? "Yeah, well, it was a little [tough], but I got through it. I'm doing [well]."

He's like the Pharisee in the previous story, who stood up and said, "God, I am so thankful I'm not like this wretched tax collector" [see Luke 18:9–14].

Henry Ironside said:

Certainly there was nothing to be said against his moral character, but his life had been a selfish life; he had vast possessions; he had great riches, and men and women were living in poverty all about him; yet he continued to go on as he was and did not realize that God had entrusted him with this wealth that he might use it for Him. If God entrusts wealth to you, he makes you a steward, and you are to use your riches to the glory of God and the blessing of mankind.²

The rich young ruler doesn't realize he just said he kept a standard impossible for anybody to keep. He's actually saying, "I'm good like God is." Until a person sees [himself] as a helpless, hopeless sinner in need of salvation, [he] can't be saved. So, Jesus, now, has attempted three times to get this rich young ruler to see important facts that are necessary for salvation: [first], Jesus is God incarnate, the Messiah, [second], [the rich young ruler] is a sinner. [Those facts] didn't work. [Jesus then tries] the commandment route. How about loving-your-neighbor commands? Let's throw them out there. [The rich young ruler responds], "Oh, yeah, I've done all those."

Jesus decides [that] He is going to go after the guy's idol. Our fourth [fact is]: An idol you should avoid. Look at [Luke 18:]22, where Jesus gives the rich young ruler the first task he must do. Remember, he asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" I think the guy is honest. I think he [has] very good intentions. He's young, he's ambitious, he has money, power, [and] influence. He's [thinking], "What do you want me to do? Start an orphanage? What do you want me to do? What task do you want me to do? Do you want me to give money? Do you want me to build a synagogue? I'm willing to sacrifice quite a bit. I've got means, I've got stuff. What do I need to pay? What can I do to make sure I've paid my dues to get into heaven? What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²Henry A. Ironside, *Gospel of Luke* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 2000), 555.

So then Jesus says, “OK, [there is] one thing you still lack,” after [the rich young ruler] says, “Oh, yeah, I’ve kept all the commandments.” There’s a bit of irony here [in Jesus’ saying], “OK, there’s just one little thing.” I’m sure the rich young ruler was very excited at this point. He’s [thinking], “Oh, yeah! What is it, man? I’m doing it.” Look at the middle of [Luke 18:]22. Jesus says, “Sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven.” This must have hit that rich young ruler like a bolt of lightning out of a clear blue sky. He was phenomenally wealthy, and surely he was thinking, “Part with *all* my money? Sell *all* my possessions? Give it *all* away to the poor? You’ve got to be kidding! No! I mean, come on! I’m willing to do quite a bit to get my salvation acquired, but You’re asking way, way too much here.”

He needed to sell all and buy the field with the hidden treasure [see Matthew 13:44]. He needed to sell all to acquire the pearl of great price [see Matthew 13:45]. He needed to realize that this world is passing away with all its stuff and that there is no profit in “gaining the whole world and then losing your soul” [see Mark 8:36].

But Jesus wasn’t through with him. Look at the end of [Luke 18:]22. Not only do[es he] have to part with all [his] riches, sell them, and give them to the poor, Jesus says, “And come and follow Me.” [He is saying], “Not only do I want you to sell all your stuff, which requires you to lose your position, power, [and] influence among your money-loving friends, but since you’re not going to have a house to live in, I want you to leave all your friends and your hometown and come follow Me.” It is a brilliant stroke by Jesus. He is not, as you might think upon first glance, teaching that salvation is [achieved] by having a vow of poverty. That’s not it at all. He is trying to get the rich young ruler to see that he has an idol in his life. The commandments didn’t work, so He’s trying to say, “OK, there’s something between you and God. There is something that comes before God in your life, and that is your wealth. What I want you to do is to part with all that.” He is trying to get [the rich young ruler] to see in his own mind, “Oh, I do love my riches more than

God.” If [the rich young ruler] could just come to that place, Jesus could then give him the good news.

If you step back from the text a bit, and say, “What is Jesus really asking the guy? What does He really want from him?” Think about it: “Believe in who I am and turn from your idol.” Repent and believe—that’s all He’s asking. He’s still trying to answer [the rich young ruler’s] question. The guy can’t see his sin, he can’t see who Jesus is, and so he can’t be saved.

Look at [Luke 18:]23: “But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.” Matthew and Mark tell us “he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.” [Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22]. You just need to see him as he turns his back on Jesus, the Savior of the world, and he walks away. He was eager, moments ago. He was willing to sacrifice, moments ago. He wanted to get into heaven, moments ago. He asked the most important question anyone could ask, moments ago. And now, he has turned his back on the Savior and he is walking away because he won’t part with his idol.

There are many professing Christians in the church today who are just like this rich young ruler. The pastors encounter them. Maybe you do, too. They have problems [and] issues. We talk to them, and say, “Listen, pal, this is the gospel. This is what you need to do. You need to turn from your immorality. You need to move out, quit shacking up with your girlfriend,” and a lot of times you can see in their minds [they’re thinking], “Whoa. I can’t do *that*,” and they turn away.

Sometimes it’s, “You know what? Your job is wicked. You need to quit your job and find a new one.”

“Well, the pay is really good.”

“You have to turn on that thing.” They’re like this rich young ruler; they just can’t do it. [But], they want eternal life. They’re actually in the office [talking to pastors]. It’s great. They come for a T-ball session, to hear the gospel. They know we’re going to get religious on them, and we don’t disappoint them—we’re pastors. We do religion, you know? We tell them about Jesus. “So, how about Jesus?” That’s what we do. Some of

them just don't want to part with their power, lust, [or] possessions. There is something in their [lives that is keeping them from accepting Christ as their Savior].

Right now, you may be sitting out there, thinking, "I know what it is in my life." I'm sure some of you are thinking that right now. "I know what's between me and God." You need to get rid of that. You need to turn from that. Are you going to let that thing damn you to hell forever because you won't turn from it? Is it really going to be worth that much in the long run that you would put your eternal soul at risk because of whatever it is you're thinking about?

J.C. Ryle says of the rich young ruler and those like him: "Like St. Paul and his companions aboard ship, he must throw overboard his cargo if he is to save his life."³ [This is] speaking of when [Paul and his companions] got shipwrecked on Malta [see Acts 27:14–28:1]. That's exactly how it is. When you come to Christ, you have to be willing to pitch all overboard. The irony of it is if Jesus knows you're willing to give it all, He says, "Leave it on deck," unless it's sinful. But sometimes He even says, "Give it all," because He knows it's an idol to you, and He knows you won't part with it. Are you willing to do that, to get rid of the cargo on your deck that's keeping you from coming to Christ? You need to cast it overboard. You need to turn from it all. You need to let nothing stand in your way.

We [have] talked about the text [in which Jesus is describing] John the Baptist [that] says, "Of those born of women, there isn't anyone greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" [see Matthew 11:11; Luke 7:28]. Do you remember what [Jesus] said after that? "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force" [see Matthew 11:12]. You're [probably] thinking, "What [does] that [mean]?" [These are] people who are willing to pitch all overboard to follow Christ, to sell all to get the field, to get the pearl, to get Jesus—whatever it

³J.C. Ryle, *The Gospel of Luke*, available at: <http://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/116.htm>.

takes, Lord. You know what? You find that every Christian comes to a place like this in [his] life, where it's just like, "I don't care. I don't care."

Thomas Watson, in his book *Heaven Taken by Storm*, says, "If our dearest friend should stand in the way, between us and heaven, we must either leap over them, or trample them under foot."⁴ You don't let anything get in your way. Heaven is the most important thing. That's why Jesus keeps talking about it over and over and over again. For this rich young man, money was in the way, and it had to go.

Hebrews 13:5 says: "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU.'" Jesus [knew] that the rich young ruler's money was like Achan's wedge of gold [see Joshua 7:16–21]. It was a wedge between him and God. Beware of the idol of money. It is so deceptive. So many people will not part with their money. They'll do good deeds, do a little bit for God, but their money is the first and foremost god in their lives.

Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:10: "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." [The] literal [translation of "pierced themselves" means that] they impaled themselves. Picture in your mind a big wooden stake with a sharp point on it and me just jumping on it. That's how it is. People [obtain] riches, and pretty soon they get more riches and they start finding the power and the pleasures of riches, and they just jump on it. They impale themselves when they fall in love with it. That's what has happened to many in the world today. That's what happened to the rich young ruler, and he turned his back on the Savior and walked away. What's interesting is that in [Luke's] account it says that Jesus watched [the rich young ruler] walk away [see Luke 18:24, NLT].⁵

⁴Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm* (Orlando, FL: Northhampton Press, n.d.), n.p.

⁵You can find this version of the verse here: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/nlt/luke/18-24.html>.

This brings us to the fifth [fact]: A truth you should [not] deny. Look at [Luke 18:]24: “And Jesus looked at him,” we know as he was walking away, “and said,” and we know from the other gospels that He is talking to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” Compared to the rest of the world, almost everyone in America is rich. We have so much abundance here, we don’t even know what poverty is. That’s why everybody needs to go on a short-term missions trip to some third-world country to get [their] act together. [Once] you see four people shacking up in literally a tin, dirt-floor shack with no running water or electricity, and they’re happy and they’re singing hymns in front of their house, it’s a whole wake-up call. Southern California is an expensive place to live, and if you would take what it costs to live here and move somewhere else, you could live like a king.

But I think [in this passage] Jesus is not talking about general wealth in comparison to the world, but wealth in comparison to the culture [in which] you live. I think He is talking about those with great wealth. Those would be the people with the big businesses, huge property holdings, and who have a lot of wealth. Jesus says of them, “How hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” And then He gives a little comparison: “Do you know how hard it is? It’s like trying to stuff a camel,” [Luke 18:]25 says, “through the eye of a needle.” Now, some people—rich people—have tried to interpret that, [saying], “Well, that’s the Needle Gate.” No. The word for “camel” means “camel” in the Greek, and the word for “needle” means “needle.” And you know what? When you get to the humps on the camel, it’s exceedingly difficult to get them through the rest of the way.

You [might be] out there [thinking], “Well, that’s it. That’s impossible.” That is the whole point. It is impossible for rich [people] to try and purchase, gain, do philanthropy to get themselves into the kingdom of God. You can’t do it. As a matter of fact, no one can. Even if you’re dirt poor, you can’t do anything to gain eternal life.

Ryle writes:

Riches incline people to pride, self-will, self-indulgence, and love of the world. For another thing, the rich man seldom sees his soul as it is in reality; he is surrounded by people flattering him and fawning on him. Few people have the courage to tell him the whole truth.

His good points are greatly exaggerated; his bad points are glossed over and excused. This results in his heart being choked with worldly things while his eyes are blind to his own real condition. Why are we surprised that so few rich people find salvation?⁶

I have had people tell me, “Listen, I want to do this,” or “I want to do that,” or “I want you to let me do this.” [These are] people with a lot of wealth. I just tell them, “No,” and then they leave. I had somebody offer me \$300,000 if they could do a little thing in the church and I said, “No,” so they went and gave it to a liberal church. There are people who have money and they want to use their money to control things, to intimidate people. There are too many pastors who are sitting there, [thinking], “No, I better not [say this]. I know he doesn’t believe in predestination. If I do, he’ll probably get mad and leave the church. Maybe I should just skip over that verse.” Then “the fear of man brings the snare” [Proverbs 29:25].

The fact is, it is not only impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, it is impossible for anyone on their own apart from Christ to enter the kingdom of heaven. You need to come poor, blind, naked, destitute, realizing that you are a hopeless, helpless sinner. It is the only way you can get in. No one gets in any other way. “Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me.”⁷ You come without one plea. “Nothing in your hands you bring, simply to the cross you cling.”⁸ You need to ask

⁶Ryle, 235–236.

⁷Charlotte Elliott, “Just As I Am,” *Voices in Worship* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2003), #614.

⁸Adapted from Augustus M. Toplady, “Rock of Ages,” *Voices in Worship*, #275.

yourself, are you trusting in your riches, your intelligence, your parents, your heritage, your church attendance, your Bible reading, your service, your philanthropy? Nothing will do. You're a sinner and Christ is the Savior and that is all that matters.

[Our] six[th fact is]: A hope [to which] you should cling. Look at [Luke 18:]26: "They who heard it," the disciples, "said, 'Then who can be saved?'" What's going on here? In that culture, it went like this. They had a little retribution theology going on. [They believed that] if your life [was] good and you [were] healthy, then God like[d] you. If you [were] poor and destitute, obviously you [had] sinned. They [thought], "Everything we have is given to us by God. Therefore, if I have a lot, God obviously likes me because He has given me a lot. Therefore, the rich people are just a shoe-in to the kingdom of heaven because look at how much they have!" That is why the Pharisees worked so hard to accumulate wealth and devoured widows' houses [see Matthew 23:14; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47]. They told everybody, "Everything that I have belongs to the Lord." Why did they say that? [They said that] so they didn't have to honor their parents and take care of [them] in their old age. They let their parents starve so they could keep a lot of wealth so people would look at them as blessed by God. Think about that.

When Jesus says, "How hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of heaven," the disciples are [thinking], "Really?" Then when He says, "It's like trying to pass a camel through the eye of a needle," [the disciples say], "You're kidding me! Well, then, if that's the case, who can be saved? I mean, if the wealthy people can't get saved, who can be saved?" Mark's account says they were ["amazed"] [Mark 10:24], but Matthew's account says "they were *very* astonished" [Matthew 19:25, emphasis added]. They're [thinking], "You're kidding me!" It strikes them. We probably think, "Well, that's not a big deal. That seems pretty clear," but to them, in that culture, if you [were] rich, man, God [was] blessing you. It [was] like a visual indicator that [they were] on [their] way and Jesus ha[d] rolled out the carpet. [They were] walking right into heaven." Jesus then tells them the exact opposite and they're just shocked.

But as sad and astonishing as it is, that it is impossible for the rich and the powerful to purchase their way into heaven, look at [Luke 18:]27, where Jesus gives us an incredible word of hope: “But He said, ‘The things that are impossible with people are possible with God.’” Isn’t that great? The resources of the rich are insufficient to atone for their sins. They can’t buy their justification. They can’t buy forgiveness. They can’t sanctify themselves. They need to come, empty-handed, clinging to the cross, asking for grace, and God will save them.

It doesn’t matter how much you have sinned. It doesn’t matter how many idols you are [worshipping] or have worshipped. It doesn’t matter how many sins you have committed. Christ will forgive you right now if you come to Him in faith. Like the song we [sang says], “Our God is mighty to save. He is forever the author of salvation. He is mighty to save.”⁹

Some people think, “Oh, but Pastor Hughes, I come to church not because I think I can ever get to heaven but because I like hearing the encouraging words and being around the nice people. I know that for me it can’t happen. You have no idea what I’ve done. I have sinned in such scary ways I don’t even want to tell you.”

I just tell them, “That is Satan lying to you. Your sins are not greater than God’s grace.” One of the most godly kings of Israel who ever lived was Hezekiah. Hezekiah was one of the godliest kings who ever reigned in Israel. He was on the verge of death, and he begged God, “I don’t want to die. Please don’t let me die.” God says, “OK, I’m going to let you live fifteen more years.” Then right after that, [Hezekiah] had a son, Manasseh. Manasseh became the most wicked king in all of Israel’s history. Listen to what 2 Kings 21:2–9 says about him:

He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his

⁹Adapted from Hillsong, “Mighty to Save.”

father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, “In Jerusalem I will put My name.” For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. He made his son pass through the fire. . . [2 Kings 21:2–5]

What that means is he worshipped Molech, and he threw his babies onto the fire as sacrifices. He

practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD provoking Him to anger. Then he set the carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the LORD said to David and to his son Solomon, “In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever. “And I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers, if only they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them.” But they did not listen, and Manasseh seduced them to do evil more than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the sons of Israel. [2 Kings 21:5–9]

Whoa! You’re talking evil. That guy, he didn’t just worship an idol, he brought the whole collection of them into the temple. Then he seduced the people into worshipping [the idols]. He led the whole nation into sin. You might think to yourself, “That guy is going to be fuel for the fires of hell. There is no hope for him.” [But] 2 Chronicles 33 describes how the Assyrians capture[d] Manasseh, bound him with bronze chains, and took him to Babylon.

When he was in distress, he entreated the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God. [2 Chronicles 33:12–13].

If you know Christ, when you get to heaven, you're going to see Manasseh—the most wicked king that ever lived—in heaven, by God's grace. I know you haven't sinned that [much]. God will save you. "Jesus paid it all. All to Him you owe. Sin has left its crimson stain, but He washed it white as snow."¹⁰ He will wash your sins away, too. His atonement is sufficient.

Ryle warns:

Let us beware of supposing that our own salvation is impossible because of the hardness of our position. That is too often a suggestion from the devil and from our own lazy hearts. We must not give way to it. It does not matter where we live, so long as we are not following a sinful calling; it does not matter what our income is, whether we are burdened with riches or pinched with poverty. Grace, and not place, is the thing on which our salvation turns. Money will not keep us out of heaven if our hearts are right before God. Christ can make us more than Conquerors; Christ can enable us to win our way through every difficulty.¹¹

You need to believe that! It's true. Paul writes to you who think that maybe salvation is out of reach, and he says this [in] Romans 10:8 and following:

¹⁰Adapted from Elvina M. Hall, "Jesus Paid It All," *Voices in Worship*, #568.

¹¹Ryle, 236.

But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. [Romans 10:8–9]

That’s what the Scriptures say. [Paul continues]: “For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED” [Romans 10:10–11]. Are you “whoever”? Yeah, so believe in Him and do not be disappointed. “There is no distinction,” [Paul] says, “between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED’” [Romans 10:12]. That is you. Don’t let your sin, your money, your idol get in the way of you and eternal life. Christ will forgive you. He wants to forgive you. He invites to forgive you. He commands you to “repent and believe” in Him [see Mark 1:15]. If you do, you will be saved, for “whoever calls upon the name of the Lord, that person will be saved” [see Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13]. It is a lie from Satan that you’re too sinful to be saved. [Jesus] will save you. He will change you [2 Corinthians 5:17]. He will adopt you [see Ephesians 1:5]. He will wash you whiter than snow [see Psalm 51:7]. He will bring you into heaven. He will give you what the rich young ruler walked away from: eternal life. “The things that are impossible with people are possible with God” [Luke 18:27], so turn from your sins, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Let’s pray.

Father, we are grateful for Your kindness to us in this story. Father, we all need to be reminded and all need to hear these truths. If we aren’t careful, idols can get in the way between us and our Savior. [We know] that trusting in our own resources, Father, riches, things, relationships, intellect, position, power, or history [we will fail]. Father, nothing, *nothing* saves but faith in Christ and Christ alone. Father, I pray for anyone here who doesn’t know

you. May [he] call upon the name of the Lord and be saved. Save [him], Lord, as only You can. For the rest of us, may we never doubt that Your gospel and Your grace [are] sufficient to save all sinners and that no one can sin beyond your reach. We thank You and praise You for saving us because we know we are sinners. In Christ's name, Amen. This morning we [are moving] into Luke 18, so if have your Bibles, you can turn there. We are going to be looking at [how] persistent prayers pay off, but probably not in the way you think. There are some great things in this passage because it's got a few little puzzles in it, and we will try to untangle them so you can see some practical things about prayer.

I think we'd all agree that prayer is one of the most important of all the godly disciplines, if not *the* most important. Jesus taught His disciples to pray and in the book of Acts, when the Church is exploding and the Hellenistic widows need somebody to take care of them, the apostles are torn: should we meet these physical needs or should we pray and focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word. They assigned people [to take care of the widows] so [the apostles] can do those higher priority things [see Acts 6:1–4]. Peter was quickly imprisoned, and they prayed, and he was released [see Acts 12:5–19]. Paul writes to the churches, telling them to pray at all times, to “pray without ceasing” [1 Thessalonians 5:17], to pray in everything, and to pray for him.

It's very clear from the Scriptures, and I think we would all readily agree, that prayer is really important and needs to be a priority in our [lives]. The problem is that a lot of times Christians don't pray what they profess to believe. We can *say* that prayer is a priority, but we don't make it a priority. The fact is [that] a healthy spiritual walk with the Lord is concurrent with the degree of [the Christian's] prayer. There is no such thing as a vibrant walk with the Lord that doesn't include lots of prayer. They go together. The same is true about healthy churches. Healthy churches can be discovered by the volume of prayers being offered up to the glory of God.

If you don't have any prayer going on in your life at all, then you're spiritually dead, surely. [Prayer] is like breathing—when somebody quits

breathing, [he's] dead. When somebody quits prayer, [he's] dead. Even if you're praying a little, then you're kind of in [the] ICU, spiritually speaking. The same is true of a church. A church that sees very little need to pray is really a church that's saying, "We don't have faith in God. We don't believe His Word. We don't want to honor Him. We don't want to love Him." So, prayer is very critical.

There is an alarming lack of prayer in churches and, along with that, a great ignorance of what prayer is, what it is not, how to pray, why we should pray, and how prayer works. I hear people saying things that are really superstitious about prayer. They are not just misunderstandings, they're not even anywhere to be found in the Scriptures. These mystical, superstitious thoughts about prayer, for some reason, keep getting handed down from one generation to the next. We need to step back and look at what the Scriptures say so that when we pray, we pray for the right reasons, in the right way, expecting the right thing, understanding why we are to pray.

I'm going to rattle off twelve bullet points about prayer to get you thinking. If, [as I read these bullet points], you're thinking, "Boy, I wish you'd talk more about that," I have. You can get on [to] our website and type in "prayer" in the Google search box and it will bring everything up on our site [about] prayer—articles and everything.¹² Here we go.

[One]: let's talk about a definition of prayer. You think, "How would you define prayer?" Generally, prayer is talking to God, but the best definition I've ever discovered is from Bingham Hunter's book *The God Who Hears*. He defines prayer in this way: "Prayer is the means by which God gives us what He wants."¹³ Think about that. Prayer is the means [by which] God gives us what *He* wants. [Two]: Prayer is not for getting what *we* want, but for getting God what He wants. A lot of Christians don't understand that. "If we ask anything *according to His will*"—what God wants—"He hears us" [see 1 John 5:14]. [Three]: God doesn't hear the prayers of the wicked

¹²Follow this link (<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org>) and then type the word "prayer" into the Google search field at the top of the page.

¹³W. Bingham Hunter, *The God Who Hears* (Nottingham, England: IVP Press, 1986), n.p.

[or] even the prayers of Christians living in unconfessed sin, unless it is a prayer of repentance and confession. David writes in Psalm 66:18: “If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear.”

I think a lot of times we have sin in our [lives] and we kind of pretend that we [can] just segment that part of our [lives] off. We’re not going to confess it to God, we’re not going to deal with it, we’re not going to be reconciled, or whatever [the sin] is, and then we’re going to have this vibrant prayer life. No. [Four]: More people praying doesn’t increase your chances of getting your prayer answered like you want. Sorry. Five: Prayer at a certain time doesn’t increase your chances of getting what you want. [Someone says], “They’re going to have the operation at nine. Let’s pray at nine.” Well, praying at nine is fine, but there’s not a greater chance [that your prayer will be answered] if you pray at the [specific] time. Six: Prayers are always answered. They’re always answered. God always answers: “yes,” “yes but wait,” and “no.” Those are the answers. You always get one.

Seven: Believers don’t always know how to pray as they should. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit “intercedes. . . with groanings too deep for words. . . according to the will of God” [Romans 8 26–27]. It makes our prayers fail proof, even when [we] don’t know how to pray. The Holy Spirit is there to intercede for believers. He twists our prayers so that we pray according to the will of God. Think about that.

Eight: Prayer is for our blessing and God’s glory. It is a demonstration of our humility. It is a demonstration of our trust [in], faith [in], love for, dependence upon, and obedience to God. Nine: Prayer magnifies glory and praise to God. We pray, He answers, we tell people, and more people praise Him because of the answers. Ten: God may not answer your prayers in the way you wish He would, but He always answers them in the way that is best for you. Eleven: Prayer is not a waste of time. Not praying is a waste of time. Twelve: Believing God is sovereign is no excuse not to pray. It’s the very reason why we pray. Why would you pray to a God who [isn’t] sovereign?

God commands us to pray. Though God is sovereign, His sovereignty includes means to accomplish His will. There [are] a couple errors that

people make. Usually they over-amp on sovereignty to the neglect of our responsibility, or they over-amp on our responsibility and ignore sovereignty. The two go together. God is absolutely sovereign and in His sovereignty He uses means. That is, He uses what theologians call instrumentality—tools—to accomplish His sovereign will.

Let's say you share the gospel with somebody, and the person repents, believes in Christ, and [is] born again. Do you go away and [say], "Man I just saved somebody"? No. What do you say? "Christ saved [him]."

"I thought you shared the gospel?"

"I did."

"Haven't you been praying for [him]?"

"Well, yeah."

"Then why did you say Christ saved [him] if you shared the gospel and have been praying for [him]?"

"Because the gospel and prayer are instruments, the means by which God accomplishes His will."

Prayer is one of those means—one of the primary means. Prayer is not about controlling God, but about us moving ourselves into the stream of God's will. God has a perfect plan. He declares the end from the beginning [see Isaiah 46:10]. God is not up there [saying], "I wish somebody would pray so I'd know what to do." He knows what He's going to do. He just wants you to pray according to His will so you can get in on the blessing.

As we come to Luke 18, it follows on the heel of Jesus' discussion of the judgment that would come upon the wicked at the end of the Tribulation in the last half of [Luke] 17. Jesus, having talked about the judgment of the wicked, now knows that there will be believers during the Tribulation who will suffer greatly. He wants to encourage those who end up finding themselves in this period of great tribulation, and He wants to instruct them in prayer. Follow along in your Bibles as I read Luke 18:1–8. We read this:

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, "In a certain city

there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’” And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

I want you to know, there is some really fun stuff in there, especially that last phrase. We have these little discussions in our office and I ask the other guys, “What do you think that means?” I don’t like to read the commentaries until I decide on what I think [a passage] means, and then I read all my commentaries. But, that last little sentence there is really something, isn’t it? You’ll see, it fits in perfect[ly].

From this text, five elements of prayer emerge to encourage us to pray and not lose heart as we pray. The first is: Pray at all times. [Luke 18:]1 says: “Now He was telling them,” the them is referring to the disciples. He’s still having the same discussion with the disciples about the end times—the Second Coming. We know that, especially from [Luke 18:]8, where it says so. Right at the very beginning [of Luke 18], we are told the twofold purpose of the prayer.

There are only two parables like this. They both appear in Luke, where we’re just told [the purpose of the parable]. J.C. Ryle quotes an unnamed Puritanist saying, “the key to this parable hangs in the lock on the front door.” That’s so great, isn’t it? Sometimes you read a parable, and you think, “What is that?” but here, the key is in the front door. Notice what [Luke 18:]1 says: “He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought

to pray.” Just stop there. I think we all know that we need to pray. David says in Psalm 55:17: “Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, And He will hear my voice.” In Psalm 62:8, he says: “Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.” The whole idea is that God is waiting; He is a refuge. Go to Him in prayer and just unload on [Him].

Jesus said in Matthew 7:7: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” Paul says 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.” In 1 Thessalonians [5]:17, he says: “Pray without ceasing.” John the Apostle says in 1 John 5:14: “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” Think about those [verses]. There are so many more we could discuss.

We are to pray at all times. It couldn't be any clearer. When you wake up in the morning, the alarm goes off, or you wake up [on your own], or however [it] happens, do you pray? When you get up and you're getting ready, are you thanking God for your clothes and asking Him to help you with your day? As you're eating your breakfast, are you thanking Him for your food? As you're getting in your car, are you asking Him for travel mercies? As you're listening to whatever you are [listening to], are you praying? When you get to work, are you asking God to help you be a good witness, to be a good employee? As you're working throughout the day are you shooting up little bullets to God *at all times*?

[This verse] is not just talking about those formal times [we] might have in a quiet time, where we're sitting down in the morning with our Bibles, and a cup of coffee, reading and praying. [It is talking about] all times. [It is to be] a constant communion with God, talking with God, speaking with God, saying, “Can You help me here? Could you bless this person?” You're stopped at a stoplight and you see an old woman, [and you] say [a quick prayer], “Lord, I just pray that woman there would come to know You if she doesn't know You, and if she does know You, may You bless

her.” [It should be] a constant outpouring of prayer. This is the Christian life: constant communion with God.

[Second]: Not only are we to pray at all times, but Jesus also wants us to know that we shouldn’t lose heart in praying. Look at [Luke 18:]¹ again: “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.” The word [translated] “not to lose heart” literally means “to grow faint or weary, to give up.” Have you ever prayed about something for a long time and God hasn’t answered the prayer? Maybe you’re still praying and He hasn’t answered the prayer. You prayed for your child’s salvation [and he hasn’t] come to the Lord. You prayed for somebody to get healed; [he hasn’t] gotten healed. You prayed that God would deliver you from some atrocious catastrophe and convulsion in your life. All these circumstances are just weighing you down and He hasn’t rescued you. You look in the Word of God, and you’re thinking, “Lord, I think I’m praying according to Your will. I’m saying, ‘Not my will, but Yours be done’ [see Luke 22:42], and I think this is what You want. It seems like what You want. It seems like I’m in line,” and [an answer] doesn’t come. What’s the temptation? [The temptation is] to lose heart.

The longer you have to endure the trial, waiting for the answer, the greater [is] the temptation to lose heart. You pray and pray and things keep getting worse and worse. It doesn’t seem like God is listening, and then the temptation comes. Satan begins to whisper in your ear, and says, “Listen, you’ve trusted Christ in vain. Christianity is a myth. Nobody even ever existed by the name of Jesus. You’re praying into the air. Even if Jesus did exist, He obviously doesn’t care about you. I mean, look how many times you’ve prayed. Look how you’re suffering! Look how you prayed according to His Word and here you are, still suffering. How could He love you? How could you even worship a God like that?” You know [that] every Christian has had to deal with temptations like that, right? It really gets down to this: Are you going to believe God or not? Are you going to trust God or not? Are you going to live the Christian life of faith in God or not?

Do not doubt. God is faithful and God will answer your prayer. Don't think that "no" or "wait" is a sign that God doesn't love you. [Imagine] your child comes up to you, [and says], "Mom, can I have a piece of chocolate cake?"

You say, "Listen, dinner is going to be in fifteen minutes." Why don't you give him the cake? You want to give him the cake. You're going to give him the cake [eventually], but not before dinner.

[Or, imagine] you are a coach [of] a [sports] team. You've been working [the team] hard all season long, and it's approaching the finals. You want to give them a break. You want to cut back, and say, "You know what? Take several months off. Just rest up and we'll see you next season," but you've got to finish the season. Now is not the time for resting.

[Or, imagine] you go to the doctor, and the doctor says, "You know what? I wish I could tell you [that] you could eat this and do that, but you can't. It wouldn't be good for you. You're going to have to wait." He wants to give you it, but it's just not the time.

[Or, imagine] you have somebody faithfully serving in ministry and you want to see that person put in a place of leadership, but [he] need[s] to grow, to be tested, to mature, to understand the Word better. You can't just throw [him] into places of leadership beyond what [he is] able and have [him] fall into the snare and condemnation of the devil, as Paul says [in 1 Timothy 3:7].

God wants good things for you. He wants good things for His children. He only gives them good things. All good things come "down from the Father of lights" [James 1:17], and He is going to bless you. He loves you. When you pray and you aren't getting that answer you wish you could get, don't lose heart. Just because it may be long in coming doesn't mean it's not coming.

[Do] you remember what happened when Jesus [got] a little message, "Your friend, Lazarus, is dying! Your buddy," [in John 11:1–46]? Martha and Mary sent the messenger. "He's on the verge of death. Come quickly

so you can heal him!” And so, what does Jesus do? He delays. He loiters, plays backgammon, I don’t know. He waits.

What do you think Martha and Mary are doing back in Bethany? “Ahhh! Where is Jesus? Did you tell Him? Did you tell Him how urgent it was? Did you tell Him how sick [Lazarus] was?”

“Yeah, yeah, I told Him all that.”

“Oh, no! [Lazarus] is on the verge of death!” [Lazarus] dies and then they stick him into a tomb. Then Jesus shows up, several days later. By that time, the King James [version] says, “[Lazarus] stinketh” [see John 11:39]. What happens when Jesus shows up? Mary and Martha lay into Him. “If you [had] been here, he wouldn’t have died! If you [had] come... We have seen you heal all manner of disease and sickness. We know you could have healed him. You could have healed our brother! You could have healed your friend, and then he wouldn’t have had to die. Now he has died because You delayed.”

Jesus even wept, didn’t He? If you were to ask them, pull[ing] Martha and Mary aside, “So, what do you think about this?”

“Oh, Jesus blew it.”

“Why?”

“Well, He should have come.”

“Why?”

“Because we wanted Him to. Because it was the only way for Lazarus to live.” They had no idea. Jesus [then went] in to where Lazarus’s body [was], stinking, starting to decay, and restore[d] it to perfect life and [brought] him out. Whoa. He put His own power on display, the power of God on display. He [taught] Mary and Martha a lesson they [would] never forget, that nothing, nothing is impossible with God [see Luke 1:37] and that God’s timing is always best. Don’t doubt God. Don’t lose heart. Just keep praying. He knows what’s best.

Third: Be persistent in prayer. Now we come to the parable. The word “parable” means “to cast alongside.” What’s odd about this parable is [that] God, who is perfectly holy and just, is cast alongside the unjust judge,

which is kind of strange. The Christian who has a very deep and intimate relationship with God is cast alongside the widow who has no relationship with the unjust judge at all. This parable is a parable of extreme contrast. This is one of those parables that is [a] “how much more will God” type of a parable. We need to keep that in mind.

Look at [Luke 18:]2. Jesus was saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man.” Just stop there. The judge is out for himself. He is not a righteous judge. He doesn’t fear God. He doesn’t fear man. He doesn’t care what people think. He’s just out for himself. He is nothing like God.

Look at [Luke 18:]3: “There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’” Several things can be learned here. First, the widow is poor. How do we know that? [We know that] because she can’t even afford a lawyer. She goes directly to the judge. Second, she has no wealthy benefactor. She is alone in the world. Otherwise that benefactor would have stepped up and got her a lawyer. Instead, she goes to the judge and wants the judge to be her lawyer, judge, and protector. It is a huge request and very unorthodox, but she sees no other option. Third, we can see she is persistent and relentless in seeking help from the unjust judge, who she probably doesn’t know is unjust.

We’re not told the details of her case, but you can kind of read in between the lines of what it probably is. Since she doesn’t have any cash, she’s probably land poor—she probably [has] a cute little house in a perfect part of town that a lot of guys would like to have. Somebody has figured out a way to scam her and take her house and land from her. That’s all she has. Remember, Jesus describes in Luke 20:47 [people who “devour] widows’ houses.” What does that mean? They’d figure out a way to scam widows. This has always been a prime target for wicked and cowardly men—to go after widows. This is why the Law of Moses contains so many regulations to protect [widows]. Exodus 22:22–24 says:

You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the word, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

He says, “Listen, if you oppress a widow, I’m going to make your wife a widow and your children orphans.” In Deuteronomy 27:19, God says: “‘Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’” This is very clear. There [are] a lot more [Scripture verses on this subject] than [what we just read]. It is very likely that some jackal of a guy has now found some way to try and manipulate and steal this woman’s land from her. So she comes to the judge, since she doesn’t have any money, looking for legal protection. The judge, though, since he is unjust, says, “Scram! Get out of here!” but she doesn’t take “no” for an answer.

Look at [Luke 18:]4: “For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’” Notice in [Luke 18:]3 [the phrase] “she kept coming,” [and] here in 18:4, the phrases “for a while,” “but afterward,” “because this widow bothers me,” and “continually coming.” [These phrases] teach [that] this woman is dogged. She is persistent. She has no other recourse, and she is going after this judge to make sure he gives her legal protection for free. She doesn’t have any money. Who would do that? The request is huge.

I want to be very clear at this point because I believe many people have misunderstood this parable and taught the exact opposite of what Jesus wants this parable to teach. Remember, this is a parable of extreme contrast, a “how much more so” type of parable. God is nothing like the unjust judge. His relationship with His children is nothing like the relationship between this needy widow and this unjust judge. God, unlike the unjust judge, is eager to answer the prayers of His children. [He] wants to answer, *loves* to

answer, [and] commands His children to come to Him. He is so eager to bless you, to answer your prayers, to have you in His presence [that] He commands you to do it just in case you might be tempted not to. He wants you to be close to Him, trusting Him, talking to Him every day, all day long. He is *nothing like* the unjust judge. God loves His children, and if you are one of His children, He loves you.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:7–11:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

The whole point is: Oh, how much more so! If you're a good father and you have the means, how are you going to bless your son? Think about this. If there is an extreme contrast between a good father, who has means to bless his son, and God, how much more of a contrast [is there] between the unjust judge and God Himself, who is holy and perfectly just and [who] loves those children who come to Him, needy, with requests. The widow had to keep going back to the unjust judge, but in extreme contrast, God's children do not need to harass Him. They don't need to beg Him.

God isn't up there reluctantly saying, "Oh, it's you again. Yeah, My Son died for you. What do you want?"

"Well, could You please get [me] this. Could You get me that, if it's Your will? I'm just asking."

"Yeah, [but first] sleep in that bed of nails for a month. Crawl on that broken glass. Maybe I'll open My hand and throw you a few crumbs." That's

not God. That's [what] Satan wants us to think God is [like]. God is nothing like that. He is nothing like the unjust judge.

[I am] not say[ing] that God doesn't want us to pray without ceasing. He *does* want us to pray without ceasing. I know [that] at this point you may be thinking, "OK, Pastor Jack, I'm confused. Let me see if I can get this right. I need to be persistent in prayer, but not because it increases my chances of getting my prayers answered." True. "But I am to be persistent in prayer." Yes. "But Jesus, didn't He say not to just repeat yourself in prayer? Isn't there a Scripture that says, 'Don't do that'?" Yes. In Matthew 6:7, Jesus said: "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words." Here, Jesus is condemning the false notion that you have a better chance of getting your prayers answered if you use more verbiage, [like the thought that] fifty Hail Marys is better than twenty-five. No, it's not. [A larger] number of words will not increase the likelihood of a favorable response from God. Persistent prayer is good, but not for those reasons. The parable teaches persistent prayer, but not for those reasons.

We read all those Scriptures that talk about praying at all times. So you say, "Why should we pray at all times and not lose heart?" Let me just give you five reasons. One: Prayer is a demonstration of humility, isn't it? We all need more of that. [Two]: Prayer is an act of faith in God. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God" [see Hebrews 11:6]. The only reason we pray is because we believe in God. We believe He exists. We believe He is listening. We believe He's going to answer. [Three]: Prayer is an act of obedient love to God. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments" [see John 14:15]. He commands us to pray. So, it is a way we show love to God. Four: Prayer is the means God uses to give us what He wants for us. Five: Prayer magnifies praise to God. Those are biblical reasons to pray.

Please do not think, "Listen, man, I [have] to go there. I just [have] to keep pounding, and pounding, and pounding, saying, 'Man, just open up. Just give me what I want.'"

God is up there going, “Oh, another person, another one of my children [is] hassling Me.” It’s nothing like that. It’s nothing like that.

Back to the parable. Look at the end of [Luke 18:]5 again. Do you see the phrase there “wear me out”? In the Greek, it is literally “give me a black eye.” Think about that: a black eye. We use that idiom today, don’t we? If somebody does something that damages [his] reputation, we might say, “Oh, that person has really given [himself] a black eye.” In other words, [he has] done something [that] people can see that has damaged [his] character. [Luke 18:5] could be translated, and I think *should* be translated, “Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection. Otherwise, by continually coming, she gives me a black eye.”

Picture it in your mind. The widow comes for legal protection and is sent away. She comes again. She stands in line with all the other people who are doing all their legal stuff, [just as in] any other court of law. She waits, and waits, and waits, and waits, and comes to the judge again, and he sees her, and [says], “Didn’t I talk to you yesterday?”

“Yes. You need to give me legal protection.”

He says, “I’m not giving you legal protection. Get a lawyer.”

“I don’t have the money.”

“Good-bye.” She leaves. The next day she comes back. She gets the same answer. The next day she comes back.

Pretty soon, people begin to recognize this needy widow and say to [each other], “Hey, do you see that widow over there? She has come to the judge every single day for three weeks.”

Somebody else says, “Yeah, you know why? [It’s] because he’s not giving her legal protection.”

Rumors begin to circulate and the judge realizes, “Uh oh. They’re realizing that I’m not giving this woman justice. It is harming my reputation. People are going to figure out that I’m not a just judge. As soon as they figure out I’m unjust, my whole judgeship is going to be over, isn’t it? This woman is going to ruin my reputation. She’s going to expose me for what I

really am and, therefore, I'm going to give her legal protection, unless by continually coming, she gives me a black eye in front of all these people."

Have you ever run into a pole [or] a branch? (Why are you laughing?) [Have you] hit your head on the cupboard, fallen on your face, given yourself a black eye, or mangled your face a little bit? [When you do something like that], everybody is going to be able to see what happened. Everybody is going to ask you, "So what happened to you?" Then you have to tell all those people [what you did]. Especially in church, it's bad. There are so many people at church and, since they're Christians, they have to care for you, so they have to ask you, and then you have to tell them the embarrassing story [of] how you hit yourself in the face with a hammer. [Rather than having to tell everyone about it], you may try to hide the injury. You [might] put on extra makeup or wear sunglasses, or kind of hide at home until it goes away and heals up.

The unjust judge realizes his deception, his delusion, is being put in jeopardy because this widow keeps coming and people see her continually being sent away and not receiving justice. So he gives her, reluctantly, legal protection. He is nothing like God. He says, "Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will give me a black eye, ruin my reputation" [see Luke 18:4–5].

Do you see this huge difference here? God is concerned about His reputation, isn't He? Yeah. In that way, He is like the unjust judge. Both the unjust judge and God are concerned about their reputation[s], but for totally different, antithetical, reasons. The unjust judge is concerned about maintaining his false delusion of what he really is. God, on the other hand, is interested in letting people know what He is. There is no façade. There is no deception. There is no scam. While both are concerned about their reputations, the unjust judge is concerned because he wants to continue to deceive.

[Do] you remember in the Book of Exodus when God took Moses up on the mountain? While he was up on the mountain, He gave [Moses] the

two tablets of stone [on which] He carved the Ten Commandments with His finger. The people are down below, these people He has made a covenant with to be [His] people. He would be their God. These are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the Abrahamic covenant was spoken to over and over again. “Through your seed, all the nations of the earth will be blessed” [see Genesis 18:18]. They all know this. All of a sudden, God says this in Exodus 32:7 and following: “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt. . .” I like that. “The people *you* have brought up.” He even blames Moses for bringing them up [out of Egypt].

“Your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.” [Exodus 32:7–10]

The problem is [that] God had made promises—lots of promises—that these stubborn, stiff-necked people would be made into His people. This is why Moses prayed the way he did in light of what was spoken to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. [Moses] said in Exodus 32:11: “O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?” Moses puts it back on God: “You did this.”

“Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from Your burning anger

and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people. [Exodus 32:12–14]

Let me just ask you: Did God not know what He was going to do? Did He actually have a plan, fix His eternal decree, change it, and then change it back again? No. So, the question is: Why did this happen? Was it for God’s sake or for Moses’s sake and our sake? [It was] for our sake and Moses’s sake. When we pray according to God’s will, He hears us. When God makes a promise, He cannot break it. He is the God who cannot lie, Paul says in Titus 1[:2].

God is not pushed around by your prayers. He is not a slave of your prayers. He’s not up there in heaven [thinking], “What am I going to do? Would somebody pray and tell me?” He knows what He’s doing. He’s infinitely wise, all-knowing, [and] sees the end from the beginning [see Isaiah 46:10]. Nothing takes Him by surprise. God is like the unjust judge in that He is concerned about His reputation because He wants people to know what He’s really like. The unjust judge, of course, is worried about his reputation because he *doesn’t* want people to know what he’s really like. God doesn’t want to receive a black eye either. That’s why He has to fulfill His promises to you in regards to prayer. You can bank on that.

Fourth: Don’t fear injustice from God when you pray. Look at [Luke 18:]7. This is so encouraging. He says: “Now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?” [This] is [a] great section. When it says [that] they cried “day and night” and will He not bring about justice to them, keep in mind [that]

He's talking about the end of the Tribulation, right before Christ returns, which He's going to mention in a second. But the principles still apply.

The whole point is this: When those people are in the Tribulation, they have suffered, and suffered, and suffered, and suffered, and they are longing, aching, for Christ to come back. He's not coming back, and things are getting worse, and the world is falling apart. Two-thirds of the people on the planet have been killed in the plagues, hail, earthquakes, tsunamis, and all the [other] stuff that is ravishing the earth because of the judgment of God. [Christians] are all praying out, never stop[ping] to think, "God's not going to give us justice. He's just going to let us suffer. He is going to let us just suffer, and the wicked are going to get away with this." No. After [Jesus] asks that question "Will He delay long over them?" He answers it. Look at [Luke 18:8]: "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly."

Who are God's elect, and how is it that He brings justice for them quickly? The [word] "elect" [is] just another way of describing Christians—all true Christians, truly saved Christians. I mean [they are] truly saved in that [they are] not those who just call themselves Christians, who think they are Christians, or who pretend to be Christians, but those who are actually born-again believers, who are new creatures in Christ [see 2 Corinthians 5:17], who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and then [are] transformed, or regenerated. Those people are God's elect. They are also called His chosen or those who are predestined by God.

I know that the doctrine of predestination makes some of you [nervous] because you don't quite understand it. You understand the concept, that before the foundation of the world, He predestined us to adoption as sons, as Paul says in Ephesians 1[:4]. But listen, don't ever let predestination hinder your prayers [or] hinder your evangelistic efforts to preach the gospel to the lost. Predestination is a doctrine—listen to me—to encourage believers only. Predestination is written to people *after* they believe. It's never a doctrine that should be applied to those who don't know Christ. There is a message for those who don't know Christ, and that is [that] Jesus died on the cross for your sins, He was buried, and rose again on the third day. If you turn

from your sin, if you place your faith in Christ and what He did on the cross, you will be saved. That's the message for an unbeliever. The message for the believer is: You were chosen, predestined, before the foundation of the world. You are one of God's elect.

But, of course, as soon as somebody finds out about this doctrine, the first thing [he] want[s] to do is apply predestination to who[m]? [He wants to apply it to] unbelievers. Then he can't make [the doctrine] work. Well, it's not supposed to work [that way]. There is a message to unbelievers: repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. There's a message for believers: You're the elect, chosen before the foundation of the world.

You say, "Well, yeah, but I don't understand. How do I know if I'm one of the elect?" Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and I'll tell you. "Yeah, but what if I'm not elect?" Well, there's a message for you. That message is: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. "But how can I know?" Believe and you'll know. I don't know, but if you believe I'll know. Then, once you know, God encourages you.

[In our passage in Luke 18], Jesus is saying, "God is not going to delay long, but He will bring about quick justice for His elect during this time of incredible tribulation that is coming upon the earth." Notice, [Luke 18:]7 also stresses persistent prayer again, when it says they "cry to Him day and night." He will not delay long over them, but bring about justice quickly.

This may cause a little wonder in your mind. You're thinking, "You know what? I've prayed prayers for a long time, and God has not brought justice quickly." Well, keep the context in mind. He's talking about the end of the Tribulation. [He's talking about the end times] from [Luke 17]:22 all the way down to this text. Do you remember what happened in the days of Noah? They were eating and drinking, and then what does the text say? [It] says that in that day, they were [Luke 17]:27: "marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." [It is] a quick, sudden judgment.

We could use Lot [to make this point as well]. "In the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they

were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all” [Luke 17:28–29]. Justice came and it came swiftly. That’s what Jesus is talking about [in our text]. He’s not saying God answers all prayers quickly. Though God is slow in bringing about judgment, He will bring it. He is longsuffering, but He is not ever-suffering. Peter talks about it. There [are] the mockers who come, and say, “Oh, when is [He] coming? Ever since creation, people have been saying, ‘He’s coming! He’s coming!’ He’s not coming. Everything has continued as it has always been!” [see 2 Peter 3:3–4]. Do you remember the Flood? That was a little hiccup in world history [when] things did not continue as they have always been.

Then [Peter] says, “Yes, God is not slow about His promises. Some count it slowness, but He is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance” [see 2 Peter 3:9]. God is going to be harvesting those people whom He desires to save, and then justice will come quickly. Paul describes it this way in 1 Thessalonians 5:2–3:

For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

In Luke 21:34, Jesus describes His Second Coming as coming “suddenly like a trap.” Have you ever had a mouse in your house? Yeah, they’re kind of irritating. You find little traces of mice in places where you keep your food, and you don’t like that. So, you decide that you’re going to set a trap, but by that time the mouse is gone. So you just set [a trap] and put it under your sink and forget about it. Maybe it’s there for six or eight months, or a year, and then a bunch of rain comes, and a mouse decides to take refuge under your house. He’s crawling around in there looking for something, and he finds a little crack next to a pipe. He gets up into the wall and finds himself under your sink.

That trap has just been sitting there, right? It hasn't caught any mice. There hasn't been anything going on. But it's waiting. It's waiting to execute justice for that loiterer coming into your house, getting [under] your sink. You don't believe in house mice. [You] like outside mice. [The mouse] goes to get a little nibble, and then down comes the steel bar and it's over. It comes quickly. Though it may be long in coming, when it comes, it comes quickly. That is what Jesus is talking about. So, we don't need to fear injustice from God. He'll bring [justice] about, and He'll bring it about swiftly.

Fifth and finally: Live the life of faith. Look at the middle of [Luke 18:]8. After Jesus promises quick justice upon the wicked at His Second Coming, He then asks: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" This is a rhetorical question. Jesus is not looking for information. As a matter of fact, this question is designed to drive home the main two points of the parable, which are: At all times we should pray and not lose heart.

You say, "How is that? How is 'However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth' [an indication of those two main points]?" [It is] because prayer is an act of what? [It is an act of] faith. Trusting God and not losing hope is an act of what? [It is an act of] faith. Christians pray because they believe God is going to listen and answer their prayers. Living out your faith is to live out a life of prayer. Listen carefully: Prayer is the primary demonstration that you believe there is an invisible God. You talk to Him.

Granted, it seems weird to people. I was just talking to one of the elders, saying, "Yeah," I said, "sometimes I go for walks, and when I'm going for a walk, [I] just want to pray, but there [are] so many [other] people walking. I'm thinking, 'What are they going to think if I'm walking around talking, [saying things like], 'So, Lord, I've got these issues'?' I'm talking and [people are] walking by, [thinking], 'Oh, [he's] one of those guys who has done a [few] too [many] illegal substances.'" I said, "Maybe I should get one of those giant bluetooth things on my ear so they'll think I'm talking on the phone or something." I *am* talking to somebody.

Your prayer life is a demonstration that you have faith in God, isn't it? [Imagine] a father calls his son from work, and says, "Son, when I come home is the yard going to be mowed?" What does he mean? Mow the lawn, that's what he means, right? Jesus says, "When I come back in glory, am I going to find you living by faith?" the context being prayer. What is He saying? "Make sure you pray and don't lose heart." So let's pray.

Father, we thank You that we have learned some great truths in this text. [We have learned] that we should pray at all times because You want to hear from us. You're eager to hear from us. You love us and love to give Your children good things. [We learned] that we should not lose heart when we don't get the answer we want in the way we want or the time we want, knowing that Your timing is perfect and You know better than we do. [We learned] that we should be persistent in prayer not because it is a means to twist Your arm, but because You love to hear from us—all day long, every day—because You want to have a deep relationship with us. [We learned] that we should never fear injustice because You are a perfectly holy and just God. You will bring justice at the Second Coming and it will come swiftly. We need to live a life of faith and demonstrate that life by praying at all times and not losing heart. May we all do that for Your glory, honor, and praise, Amen.

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