

Pray—Do Not Lose Heart

Luke Series #44

Luke 18:1-8

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Let's pray before we read God's Word.

God, we are praying that You would show us Christ and reveal Your glory through the preaching of Your Word. Take these truths and plant them deep into our hearts and build us up. Give us hope and confidence that we would always pray and not lose heart. Help us now as we respond to Your Word. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Let's read Luke 18:1-8:

18 And he [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The beginning of this section tells us that Jesus told this parable for a specific effect—a specific purpose. Jesus is giving us this parable so that *we* would always pray and not lose heart. We need this reminder and hope from Jesus because there are many times we are tempted to give up praying and just lose heart.

I'm sure that in God's providence He wanted me to preach this sermon because this is a temptation I have faced over the last few months. I think this message is what God wants us to hear because many of us have faced difficulties and trials over the past year and we will face trials this coming year. God is having us read, study and hear this from Jesus so that we would be a people who always pray and do not lose heart, not give up.

Three and a half months ago my dad died and one and half years before that he was diagnosed with cancer. For that year and a half—probably on average of five or six nights a week—I would sit down with my boys before bed and we would pray for my dad to be healed.

They call him Papa and they would pray over and over again for God to heal Papa. There were times when I was driving or I would go sit in a forest preserve and just beg and plead with God, “Please don’t take my dad. I don’t know what I will do without him. God, please heal him.”

Three and a half months ago we were sitting with my dad in the hospital and he died later that night. Before he died I had sent a message to the elders, knowing they were at their monthly meeting that night. This is part of the e-mail I sent them:

My dad is still alive but hasn’t been awake since yesterday. It’s very difficult to watch him. Our prayers have shifted from begging God to heal to begging God to take him home quickly. And so far neither prayer is being answered the way we would desire.

In that moment—and many times since then—devilish lies pop into my head. “Does God care? Does God hear? Does God answer? Is He so cruel that no matter what I am asking for He does the opposite?” We are tempted to give up and lose heart.

In some ways those 36 hours leading up to his death felt longer than the previous year and half as I was crying out to God to take him away from his sufferings. That was a unique situation for me but the feelings are not unique. All of us—if you are someone who has prayed much—have been faced with this temptation to give up:

- praying for healing that hasn’t happened
- praying to have a child
- praying for a family member to be saved
- praying for restored relationships
- praying for a job

We pray for things and at times the circumstances don’t change. It feels discouraging and hopeless. We are tempted to stop praying and trusting. We are tempted to just lose heart. Jesus anticipated this. He knew His disciples would face this. He knew that *we* would face this. Therefore Jesus gives us this parable so that we would always pray and not lose heart. Let’s look at the story again.

The parable begins by describing a judge, “*In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.*” Right away we are told this is a bad judge—not the kind of judge you would want. He does not fear God, does not worship God, is in no way like God and he does not even care what God thinks.

This judge also does not respect man. He does not care what you think or about your problems. He does not care about anyone else but himself. This is the judge as he is described for us.

Then Jesus brings another person into the story. *“And there was a certain widow in the city who kept coming to him [the judge]...”* seeking justice. This woman lost her husband and in the context that Jesus was sharing this story, she’s a picture of a person who is desperately needy. She was without resources, without much help. This was before government help and insurance policies. Jesus is picturing someone who is in need and she has an adversary—someone who is against her and not treating her fairly.

The widow goes before this judge and asks for justice. She’s not asking for a favor or special treatment; she’s simply asking for justice. The judge refuses. He’s bothered by this woman who keeps coming to him, bothering and annoying him.

Finally after the widow bothers him enough the judge gives in. The judge says, *“Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.”* She does not necessarily make a case for herself. He is just not convinced by her arguments. He is not moved with sympathy, compassion or a desire to help her. He’s only motivated by selfishness. He’s like a dad—like me—when a son comes and asks over and over again, “I need something to eat. I need something to eat. I need something to eat. I need a brownie. I want some candy. I want a cookie.”

“Fine, just take some candy and go away.”

That is what this judge is doing. He’s not moved by wanting to help this woman; he’s bothered by her and therefore gives her what she wants so she will go away.

There’s our hope-inspiring story. Somehow this story is supposed to give us encouragement to pray and not lose heart. How? How is this story supposed to give us that kind of encouragement today? Is it because our God is like this judge so Jesus is telling us when we pray to keep going? If you ask God enough times He’ll get sick of you and give you what you want?

This is not what Jesus is saying. He is saying the exact opposite. It’s a contrast. He is saying because your relationship with the Father is nothing like this widow’s relationship with the judge you can always pray and not lose heart and not give up.

As I was studying this I listened to a sermon by J. Ligon Duncan, CEO of the Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. He drew up three main lessons that I am going to use as a structure through this passage. I want us to receive this as Jesus intended so that we would be built up into a people whose faith would be increased, established and strengthened. That we would be a people who always pray and do not lose heart.

God is not like this judge.

The reason we can pray and not lose heart is because God is not like this judge. God is just and eager to hear and answer our prayers. We are tempted to lose hope and to lose heart. We are tempted to think that maybe God is like this judge; maybe He's not hearing me or answering me. Maybe if He is hearing me He is just annoyed by me and doesn't care about me or my problems. Jesus is saying that God is not like that!

God is eager to answer. Luke 44:7 says, "*And will not God give justice to His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long over them? I tell you, He will give justice to them speedily...*" God wants us to pray to Him day and night. God wants us to come to Him with our requests. He is eager to hear and to answer.

We are tempted to think that He does not hear. Remember Who your God is. He is all-knowing, all-sovereign and all-powerful. He is righteous, merciful, gracious and good. Remind yourself how your God is very unlike the judge in this story which should encourage you to pray and not lose heart.

We are not like this woman.

Our relationship with God—our position with God—is very different from this widow's relationship to the judge. She is probably unknown by him. He doesn't know her except for the fact that this woman continues to bother him. He certainly doesn't care for her. He feels no sympathy towards the widow. She is just an annoyance.

This is not who we are before God. We are not a bother. We are not uncared for and unloved.

Look at the word Jesus uses to describe us in verse seven. If you are following Jesus and have trusted in Him for salvation, then God is going to use a word here to describe you. "*And will not God give justice to His elect...?*" His elect. Jesus could have used many different words to describe us. He could have said,

- "Will not God give justice to believers, those who believe in Me?"
- "Will not God give justice to His disciples, those who are following Him?"
- "Will not God give justice to the redeemed?" Or "His children?"

All of those would have been good and encouraging things. However He goes to a doctrine—a truth—here about us that gives us more confidence and assurance than any of those other descriptions. He says, "*...to His elect...*"

There are many people who haven't thought about what the Bible teaches about election. Others may have thought a lot about election. Sometimes within Christian circles there can be

differences and discussions about the doctrine of predestination. I know this teaching in the Bible comes with tension about human responsibilities and divine will. I want us to set any of those views aside for the moment and receive this the way Jesus intended.

Jesus is giving us this parable so that we would always pray and not lose heart. He is using this word to describe us for that same reason. You are not someone who is a bother to God. You are someone as Ephesians 1:4 says, “*Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...*” He chose to pour out His mercy and grace on you. He chose to love you, not because of who you are or what you can do for Him but because of His Son, He chose to show you grace mercy and love.

Paul goes to this truth to give us confidence in Romans 8:28-30—a verse that a lot of us use when people are struggling, discouraged and suffering:

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good [that is a glorious truth], for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

That’s why He goes on and can say who can bring any charge against God’s elect? What can separate you from the love of God? Nothing! Nothing can separate you from God’s love because before the foundation of the world He knew you. He loved you.

When you are tempted to wonder if He has forgotten you, abandoned you, stopped listening to you, remember that He has chosen to love you and give you grace and mercy. He has not forgotten you. You do not have a Father Who is bothered or annoyed by you. He cares for you and will bring justice.

God is not like this judge. He is just, righteous and good. We are not like this widow in relationship to this judge. We are not a bother or an annoyance to God. We have been chosen by God for His grace and mercy.

Jesus is coming again to make everything right.

Jesus is coming and bringing final justice. Jesus will set everything right. The end of Luke 17 is about the coming of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ—the second coming. We just celebrated Advent—the first coming of Jesus—yet we are looking forward to and longing for the day when Jesus will return again, restoring everything and making all things new.

I think this applies to all areas of our lives but especially in this context of thinking about the second coming of Jesus, He is giving hope to His disciples as they wait for His return. He gives them a parable so they won't lose hope but will always pray and not lose heart.

He comes back to that at the end of the passage, “...*when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?*” This parable is given in the context of looking forward to the day when Jesus Christ will come again. That is when God's final justice will happen. “*And will not God give justice to His elect, who cry to him day and night? Will He delay long over them? I tell you, He will give justice to them speedily...*”

He will return and when He returns He will bring justice. That is both good and bad news. If it weren't for the truth of the gospel this would only be bad news because justice—true justice—for what we all deserve is God's wrath. Romans 3:20 and following tells us that God is just—a righteous God. He does not let sin go unpunished. He does not say, “Sin is not that big of a deal so you are fine.” No. God is just. He is a righteous God Who punishes sin. Every sin that has ever been committed will be punished either on the cross for those trusting in Jesus or by experiencing God's wrath forever. God is just.

Yet because of His Son God is also a Justifier. When His justice comes it will be grace for those who are trusting in Christ. It will be God's wrath for those who are not. We often feel like Satan, sin, evil and death are winning right now, but death has been crushed and there is coming a day when that final victory will be evident.

Jesus will come and finally make all things new. Sin will be banished. The curse will be gone and Jesus will create a new heaven and new earth. All things will be set right. It's because of Who our God is, how He loves us and cares for us and who we are in Him that Jesus Christ is coming again to make all things new. Based on this, we can always pray and not lose heart.

He ends this section by saying, “...*Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?*” The call to us is, because of these things, continue in faith. Continue in prayer. Keep going to God in prayer. Do not lose heart. Do not lose hope. Remember that God is not like this judge; He is just and righteous. Remember that if you are in Him He has chosen to show you mercy and grace. He has not forgotten you or abandoned you. He loves you. Continue trusting. Continue praying.

I am going to show a video at the end of this sermon. It's a song by Shane & Shane who partnered with Desiring God and put this video together which includes a sermon clip by John Piper.

This song was a healing restoring truth to me. The song is called “Though You Slay Me” coming from Job 13:15, “*Though He slay me, I will hope in Him...*” The chorus says,

Though You slay me
Yet I will praise You
Though You take from me
I will bless Your name
Though You ruin me
Still I will worship
Sing a song to the One Who's all I need

(Though You Slay Me, by Shane & Shane)

In the sermon clip, John Piper talks about our trials and the temptations to doubt and question God and wonder if He cares. He gives this truth that Jesus is giving in this passage of, “Therefore, do not lose heart.” As we listen to this let’s respond with hearts of worship as we think of these truths.

I come, God, I come
I return to the Lord
The One Who's broken
The One Who's torn me apart
You strike down to bind me up
You say You do it all in love
That I might know You in Your suffering

Though You slay me
Yet I will praise You
Though You take from me
I will bless Your name
Though You ruin me
Still I will worship
Sing a song to the One Who's all I need

My heart and flesh may fail
The earth below give way
But with my eyes, with my eyes I'll see the Lord
Lifted high upon that day
Behold, the Lamb that was slain
And I'll know that every tear was worth it all

Though You slay me
Yet I will praise You
Though You take from me
I will bless Your name
Though You ruin me
Still I will worship
Sing a song to the One Who's all I need

Though tonight I'm crying out
“Let this cup pass from me now”
You're still more than I need
You're enough for me
You're enough for me

John Piper: Not only is all your affliction momentary, not only is all your affliction light in comparison to eternity and the glory there, but all of it is totally meaningful. Every millisecond of your pain from the fallen nature or fallen man, every milli-

second of your misery in the path of obedience is producing a peculiar glory you will get because of that. I don't care if it was cancer or criticism. I don't care if it was slander or sickness. It wasn't meaningless. It's doing something! It's not meaningless. Of course you can't see what it's doing. Don't look to what is seen. When your mom dies, when your kid dies, when you've got cancer at 40, when a car careens into the sidewalk and takes her out, don't say "That's meaningless!" It's not. It's working for you an eternal weight of glory. Therefore...therefore, do not lose heart. But take these truths and day by day focus on them. Preach them to yourself every morning. Get alone with God and preach His Word into your mind until your heart sings with confidence that you are new and cared for.

Though You slay me
Yet I will praise You
Though You take from me
I will bless Your name
Though You ruin me
Still I will worship
Sing a song to the One Who's all I need
I'll sing a song to the One Who's all I need

(Though You Slay Me, by Shane & Shane featuring John Piper)

As we close I want us to think about the connection in this passage between prayer and faith because Jesus tells us He has given this to us so that we will always pray and not lose heart. At the end He's talking about finding faith here on earth as our going to God in prayer is an expression of faith and dependence on Him. As we continue to go to Him with our requests in prayer throughout our lives, we are expressing our confidence and faith in Him.

We are going to close by singing, "Begone unbelief, my Savior is here." This is God's call to us that we should continue praying, believing and trusting—and not losing heart.

Let's pray.

God, I pray that You would fill us with hope when we feel hopeless. Fill us with confidence when we are doubting and fearful. Build up within us a faith that does not waiver, shake or cower. Cause us to continually come to You in prayer. Day and night we would cry out to You, not because we want to bother You enough but because we know that You care and want to hear us. You love us and care for us. We are longing for the day when Jesus will come back and make all things new and bring final justice. Come quickly, Jesus. However while we are here, build us up that we would always pray and not lose heart. I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Begone unbelief, my Savior is near,
And for my relief will surely appear:
By prayer let me wrestle, and He wilt perform,
With Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm.

Though dark be my way, since He is my Guide,
'Tis mine to obey, 'tis His to provide;

Though cisterns be broken, and creatures all fail,
The Word He has spoken shall surely prevail.

His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.

Determined to save, He watched o'er my path,
When Satan's blind slave, I sported with death;
And can He have taught me to trust in His Name,
And thus far have brought me, to put me to shame?

Why should I complain of want or distress,
Temptation or pain? He told me no less:
The heirs of salvation, I know from His Word,
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord.

How bitter that cup, no heart can conceive,
Which He drank quite up, that sinners might live!
His way was much rougher, and darker than mine;
Did Jesus thus suffer, and shall I repine?

Since all that I meet shall work for my good,
The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food;
Though painful at present, wilt cease before long,
And then, O! how pleasant, the conqueror's song!

(Begone Unbelief by John Newton 1779)

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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