

ALWAYS PRAY AND NOT GIVE UP

Luke 18:1-14

Key Verse 18:1

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show that they should always pray and not give up.

First, “Grant me justice against my adversary” (1-8). Look at verse 1. “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show that they should always pray and not give up.” In chapter 17, Jesus said that the kingdom of God does not come with careful observation, because it is within us. When we have the rule of God in our hearts, the kingdom of God is within us. When Jesus comes again, those who have the kingdom of God within them will be taken up to the sky and meet him in the air, but those whose hearts are occupied with the things of this life will be left. Today’s passage is the continuation of Jesus’ teaching about the coming of the kingdom of God. Now in view of his second coming, what should we, the believers, do? Jesus shows through the parable of a persistent widow that we should always pray and not give up.

In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. He was not godly. Some people are not godly, but at least they are humanistic or sympathetic. But this judge was not sympathetic either. Then, what kind of person was he? He was a cruel man, selfish, self-seeking, willing to pervert justice for his own selfish gain. He was a friend of the rich who could bring him a lot of bribes. Because of him, many poor people did not see justice, and thereby, were sorrowful and oppressed.

There was a widow in that town. In those days, a widow was the symbol of the helpless and powerless. She had no provision or protection from anyone. She was mistreated. Since she could not afford the cost for the trial, her case was ignored, and she was deprived of justice. She was sorrowful, but since she had no money, and since the judge neither feared God nor cared about men, it seemed that there was nothing she could do. It seemed that she had to swallow sorrow and bitterness all by herself. But did she give up? No. One day, early in the morning, she visited the judge’s house and knocked at the door, saying, “Please grant me justice against my adversary.” The judge was mad, and kicked her out, saying, “Bring me money.” The judge was not willing to listen to her case. But she didn’t give up; she kept coming to his house. Sometimes, in the morning, sometimes, in the afternoon, even sometimes, at night, with Halloween costume, with a spooky voice, she cried, “Grant me justice against my adversary.” At first, the judge ignored her; but later, he was so bothered by her; he could not sleep because she screamed, “Grant me justice against my adversary.” Finally, he said to himself, “Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!” So, he took care of her case.

Look at verses 6 through 8a. Let's read these verses together:

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."

Jesus here logically proves and confirms that, if we pray, our prayers will be answered. As our good Father, God surely pays attention to our needs and our cry, and he is more than willing to help us. But there are certain conditions. We must pray for justice, and when we pray, we must pray always, and not give up. We need to check out these two conditions very carefully. The prayer topic we are called to ask is justice. Why do we need to pray for justice? It is because, since the fall of the first man Adam, justice has been removed from the world and from our life. People want happiness; that's what they desire, so they pursue it, but on the contrary to their wish, most people end up unhappy and miserable. The rich people become miserable, and the poor people become miserable too. As a result, all men cry out in unison, saying, "What shall I do?" "Where is the way?" This is injustice. People want life, so they work hard, then, death, not life, comes and takes them away from their family; despite their wish, they have to leave their homes and families, their dreams and hard-earned success, and someone else comes to enjoy the fruit of their hard labor. This is injustice.

Fundamentally, as people live in this world, in this corrupt and fallen world, they live with injustice practiced in their life all the time. The price of sin is very high; people sin, and as a result, their families are broken, and they become failures and losers in the society; they become so lonely and sorrowful in their forties, fifties and sixties with no one around them; no one wants to be with them. People know that if they continue in sin, their life will be ruined and their family broken; so they want to stop sinning, but simply, they cannot; under the power of sin, they are forced to sin continually until they are destroyed completely. This is injustice.

We Christians, disciples of Jesus, are asked to overcome all injustice and get what we truly desire through prayer. But there is one more condition, that is, "always pray and not give up." The expression, "not give up," shows how, in many cases, things go even if we pray for justice. Simply, often, despite our prayers for help, things do not change; or, despite our prayers, often things get worse; or even sometimes, things look impossible or even things seem already over in failure. We feel like giving up. But Jesus encourages us to not give up in our fight for justice; instead, he wants us to fight for it and pray continually, with his promise that God will see that we get justice, even quickly.

Jesus says, "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?" Here, notice the expression, "who cry

out to him day and night.” What kind of expression is “crying out to God day and night?” When do you cry out to God day and night? When you are really desperate! When you have some really important and urgent! What you pray for is something you really desire and pursue; when you pray for it, you mean it. When you pray that way, crying out to God day and night,” God will see that you get justice, and quickly. So, we must pray this way – cry out to God day and night!

As Jesus’ disciples, what we desire is something noble, something righteous and beautiful; but instead, we keep on doing what is ugly, what is shameful. We don’t do what we want to do, but we keep on doing what we don’t want to do; we cry out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” This is injustice. Sin is injustice. So, you fight against your sin. How is it going on? In many cases, you are defeated over and over again; yet, you still don’t give up; instead, you keep fighting; you pray for God’s help; often, this kind of fight goes on for years – so many failures, heart-aching moments, and but despite such defeats, you keep going on in this fight, repenting and making a heart’s decision over and over, and keep on praying for God’s help. Your continuous fight itself despite many defeats is an expression of your faith in God. Then, as your battle against sin becomes really serious, as you become really sincere in this fight, God comes to have a chance to intervene into your situation and helps you, launching his mighty power in your heart and life – sometimes, God does it by giving you his word very personally – with God’s word, your eyes are opened to the spiritual world and you see and understand everything differently; sometimes, God does it by launching his power into your body directly – DNAs change, hormone level changes, and your body functions differently that your desires change completely and diseases are gone. By God’s intervention and help, you finally overcome your sin and get justice in your Christian life; finally, you do what you really want to do and don’t do what you don’t want to do. Then, your Christian life is wonderful – holy and righteous.

What about then, our mission life? We want to save souls and establish disciples, so we work hard pouring out our time and energy, enduring all related difficulties. Yet, year after year, we remain fruitless; it’s like we work hard for a company, but are not paid for years. Indeed, this is injustice, and Jesus wants us to pray for justice in this matter with his confirmation that God will help us get justice. So, we pray for it and pursue it, asking God to send us his sheep, save souls and establish powerful disciples through us. Maybe, we remain fruitless for one year, two years, maybe, 3 years, or even 7 years. Yet, we still don’t give up. We keep on praying for God’s help and blessing in this matter that we may become exceedingly fruitful. As this fight goes on continually, as we get really sincere and serious about it, as we really mean it, as we make all possible efforts for it, crying out to him day and night, saying, “Lord, isn’t it your desire to save souls? How come you don’t’ do anything even if I offer myself as your instrument?” God comes to have a chance to intervene into our situation and help us. Suddenly, one word of God touches your hearts, and with it

you pick up great spirit that your words and attitude change, and your sheep respond very positively; or God himself gives you his words, saying, “Ok, the time has come,” and from that time, you become fruitful.

In this way, through prayer and not giving up despite difficulties, you come to get justice in your life of faith, doing what you really want to do and getting what you have desired; as you come to experience God in such important matters, your understanding of God deepens and you enjoy very powerful and fruitful Christian life. Through prayer and experiencing God, you grow in Jesus Christ. When your Christian life goes this way, you are truly happy and satisfied. That’s why this passage, by saying, “they should always pray and not give up,” shows that prayer is a must for Christian’s life. Without this spiritual growth that comes through prayer and experiencing God, we become religious people just like Buddhists monks or Muslims always doing religious things, giving great meaning to religious activities and ceremonies; if your Christian life goes that way, it is really painful – so boring - doing the same things over and over again; you already know all the messages your pastor serves, and your prayer is habitual. Eventually, such people become Pharisees, always criticizing and demanding. We should always pray and not give up. This is a must. I am very thankful for our 40 days prayer for the conference. Through this, we are learning how to pray and what to pray, and we learn to set aside time for God in prayer.

Look at verse 8b. Jesus says, “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Here, Jesus relates prayer to faith. When people do not have faith in God, faith that God really takes care of them, faith that God is willing to help them, they cannot pray always – they just try one or two times hoping that something good may happen, but when nothing happens, or even when things get worse, they simply say, “As I thought,…” and give up. When you pray and not give up despite challenging circumstances, then, your prayer itself is the expression of your faith in God. Those who have faith in God can pray always and do not give up, even if there is no change or even if things look bad. Because they trust in God, because they expect something great from God, they cannot give up; they keep praying for God’s help, and they are the ones who eventually see God’s answer for their prayers.

Jesus says, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” As the time of his second coming approaches, more people are found losing their faith. Even when people say, “I believe in Jesus,” in many cases, that does not mean anything, but just an expression of what kind of religion they have; or they say so, because, otherwise, they are afraid of not belonging to any group in the world. Modern day, Christians don’t pray. Some people say that they pray, but what they mean is that they offer prayer before eating foods, or they offer 10 seconds prayer before going to bed. To them, prayer is just a form of their routine activity as Christians – a religious thing they have to perform as Christians, not real struggle before God. This is now the trend among many church going people. By saying, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Jesus

expresses his earnest desire to find many people who have faith in God in this last generation. He wants to see his believers having faith in God - not just some religiosity. He wants to see his disciples praying all the time because of their absolute faith in God. He wants to see many great men and women of faith; he wants to see many great warriors of prayer. Pray always and do not give up! Cry out to God for help day and night!

Second, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (9-14). Look at verse 9. As Jesus was delivering this message that was about prayer and faith to his disciples, some people were nodding their heads, and said, “Yes, you are right. They must pray always and not give up.” And some others said, “Amen. They must learn this lesson.” Verse 9 describes them as “those who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else.” This expression shows that they had been praying all the time and were confident of their religious life. So, Jesus gave another parable to show them with what kind of attitude they must pray to God.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. Look at verses 11 and 12. “The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’” About his prayer, two expressions stand out – “stood up” and “prayed about himself.” The expression, “Stood up” shows his confidence. In his prayer, he was bold and confident. Yet, his confidence was not in God’s goodness and love for him, but in his own activities and performance. Then, while he thought that he had performed so many great things excellently, why did he come to God in prayer? What was his prayer topic? Actually, he did not have any prayer topic; in his prayer, he just prayed about himself, bragging about what good things he had done and how good he had been, feeling so proud that he was not like those party animals or tax collectors.

Yet, how did the tax collector pray? Look at verse 13. Let’s read this verse together:

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

This man stood at a distance. There were designated prayer seats in the temple. But this man stood at a distance, instead of occupying one of the prayer seats, because he knew that he did not deserve such privilege. While other people came, worshiped and prayed to God confidently, he was standing there in the corner, because he knew how terrible his sin was, and now his heart was full of remorse and regret. But about his sin that was more clear than crimson tide, there was nothing he could do; just standing at a distance, beating his breast in pain and sorrow, he said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” He also did not mention about his specific prayer topic, but just asked for God’s mercy. What kind of mercy from God? On

what? Any kind! Just a hint of God's mercy on him would be more than enough; he would doggedly accept it and be thankful about it because that would be the sign that God had not rejected him and that he had still a chance in God despite his terrible sins.

In verse 14, Jesus says, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God." The word, "justify" means to make someone or something just. Originally, the tax collector was not just before God due to his wrongdoings; he was a sinner, deserving God's punishment. But now he was made just before God, because God forgave him of his sins; he was now considered innocent in God's eyes. The Pharisee went home, but not justified, showing that he was also a sinner when he came to God in prayer, even if he had done so many good-looking things. Outwardly, due to those activities and performance, due to his Bible knowledge and religious and moralistic life, he looked good, but in God's eyes, he was not good – instead, he was still a sinner, deserving God's punishment. But due to his activities and performance, he did not recognize it; so, he only bragged about himself. As a result, he was not forgiven.

With these two men's example in their attitude to God in prayer, Jesus shows us how we must approach God in prayer – not with a self-righteous attitude, but with a humble and repentant attitude. We are all sinners – some are well performing sinners, and some are just openly terrible sinners. We all need God's forgiveness and justification in Jesus Christ. Jesus, through these two people's examples, shows us that it's all up to how we approach God in prayer that we may or may not be justified. How do you approach God in prayer? How do you approach others in your practical life? Like the Pharisee? Or like the tax collector?

In today's passage, we learned that, as we wait for Jesus' second coming, we must pray always for justice and not give up. Let's pray that justice may prevail in our society and in our lives. In the year 2017 and beyond, let's pray always and never give up in any circumstances. In this way, we may really learn prayer. May God bless our upcoming conference abundantly; let there be great salvation work and 40 new disciples rise through this conference. Also, let's get rid of any hint of pride, arrogance and self-righteousness. Instead, let's come to God in prayer with a broken and contrite heart, earnestly asking for his mercy.

One Word: Always Pray And Not Give Up