

“Cry Out! God Hears!”

Luke 18:1-8 Then Jesus¹ told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³ In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' ⁴ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸ I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

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Being a widow in Jesus' day was no cake walk. Because they were women, widows had no inheritance rights. If they had sons, the man's estate was passed onto them. This was the widow's best bet. If they had no son's the man's estate including his wife was passed onto the closest male kin. Usually, the estate was taken and the wife rejected. This left the widow suddenly without resources. Moreover, there was a stigma against widows in which many peoples believed that if a woman's husband died before he was old then he was being punished by God for some unknown sin and thus the punishment should be passed on to his widowed wife as well. This often led to the ill-treatment and exploitation of widows. For many widows, begging was their only recourse.

Regardless of what God's people did to widows, God himself had great concern for their plight. The prophet Jeremiah quotes the LORD saying, "Leave your orphans; I will protect their lives. Your widows, too, can trust in me" (49:11). Isaiah even quotes the Lord saying that he will bring vengeance on those who abuse the orphan and widowed, "See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her-- but now murderers! Your silver has become dross; your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them. Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities" (1:21-25).

That sets the stage for Jesus parable here in which he uses a widow's persistent pleading with a wicked judge to grant her justice against her enemy as an analogy for his disciples to pray continually and not to give up. This parable immediately follows Jesus giving a rather cryptic description of his death and then his second coming to his disciples in which he paints a picture of the time between the two being a difficult time which will try their faith. The parable seeks to say that the disciples' prayers and their relationship to God are not like an exploited widow having to continually pester an unrighteous, uncaring judge as the only means for her to receive justice against her enemy. Instead Jesus

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makes the point that God does indeed care for his chosen ones and he will speedily work justice for them against their enemies.

God hears us when we cry out and indeed does work in our lives to put things to right for us, but...it may take some time. The image that the New Testament Greek implies is that God has to work it out, to make the justice come about in our real lives. It is not just a simple decree. Therefore we are to pray continually and not give up on God.

As I worked on this sermon this week, I took a tour of the word prayer through Luke's Gospel to see what sort of thing the people in Luke's world prayed for and how they prayed. Since Jesus tells us to pray continually I think it would help to know what sorts of things we can occupy our prayers with and how and why. Luke's first mention of prayer is when Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, went into the Holy of Holies in the temple on the Day of Atonement while people stood outside praying. While in there, an angel appeared and told him that his barren wife, Elizabeth, would bare a child (1:10). This shows a correlation between the people of God praying before and during worship so that those who lead worship will hear a message about what God is really doing in the life of his people. Next, after Jesus was baptized by John he stood there in the water praying and Luke says heaven was opened so that we catch a glimpse of God, the Trinity – Jesus the Son in the water, the Spirit descending as a dove, and the Father saying this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased (3:21-22). Here we see a correlation between prayer and knowing God in Christ as the reception of the Holy Spirit and the Father claiming us as his beloved children.

Next we discover that Jesus often slipped away to wilderness places (5:16) and up onto mountains to pray. One night Jesus spent a whole night on a mountain praying and when he came down he chose the twelve disciples (6:12). Another time Jesus was praying alone with his disciples nearby and he asked them who the crowds said he was. In the conversation Peter makes the confession of faith that Jesus was the Messiah from God (9:18). Thus, we see here that there is a correlation between prayer and knowing one's calling and who it is who calls us. Another mountaintop experience was when Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a mountain with him and while he was praying they saw him transfigured in shining white standing with Moses and Elijah. Immediately following that experience we have another Trinitarian revelation. A cloud (the Holy Spirit) enveloped them and God the Father spoke to them saying that Jesus was his Son whom he had chosen and they should listen to him (9:28). Thus there is a huge correlation between prayer and knowing who Jesus is and what he has come to do for all humanity and even you and me as individuals and once again we see that prayer is a Trinitarian experience with Christ in the Holy Spirit before the Father.

What does Jesus say we should pray for? In the first instance he says “Pray for your enemies” (6:28). Once while Jesus was praying his disciples having seen him praying came to him and asked him to teach them how to pray and he taught them the Lord's prayer. “Father, in heaven hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves

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forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but deliver us from the evil one." This is a good prayer to try to discipline yourself to pray continually. Another thing to notice here is that when people see us praying it just might happen that they become inspired to pray and want to learn how to pray. In our passage today Jesus tells us to pray always crying out for God to work justice for us against our enemies (18:10).

Next Jesus talks of attitude in prayer. In passage following this morning's passage, Jesus condemns the prayer of the self-righteous where we thank God for how great we are and how good we have it and reminding God of all the good we do and so forth. Have you ever prayed saying "God I've done this and that and this for you and I try to be the best that I can be. Could you please do this for me?" That's praying on our merits of which we really have none. Rather, Jesus tells us to pray the tax collector's prayer of humble desperation, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Actually in the Greek it says, "God, be for me, a sinner, a sacrifice that removes my sin." If we get used to praying like that continually we find that the rest of our lives truly do begin to fall into place. In the Eastern Orthodox traditions that have what they call the "Jesus Prayer" that they continually recite. It goes, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner,"

Finally, when Jesus entered into the Garden of Gethsemane with Peter, James, and John he instructs them to pray so that they do not fall into temptation and they joined with Jesus in his prayers. Did you know your prayers are never separate from the prayers of Jesus who stands continually before the Father praying for us. His prayers become our prayers and our prayers become his.

To wrap all this up, and emphasize a main point for you, Jesus tells us to pray continually and not give up because it is in primarily in prayer that we meet Jesus in the Holy Spirit and in him we share his prayer life before God. People who pray a lot have a deeper sense of who God is as Trinity, who Jesus is and what he's done for us. It takes prayer to know God. Without it we simply won't come to know the living God whom we claim to serve. So, pray continually and don't give up. Cry out for God hears. Amen.