

03-31-2019

Message: The Faith for Which Our Returning Lord Will Be Looking

Text: Luke 18:1-17

Introduction

- A. If your house is on fire, first responders, 911 operators will all tell you the same thing, “GET OUT!” Don’t stop or go back in to save your possessions. Get out!
- B. I’m personally very conscious of this, as I’ve shared with some of you previously. Today is Sunday, March 31, 2019. In 2005 March 31 was a Thursday. That evening I was meeting in the conference room with my fellow elders. My father and mother were watching March basketball in their Florida condominium, when the light bulb next to my father exploded, spraying waves of sparks, some of which embedded deeply into the thickly cushioned arms of the couch. When mom and dad realized patting out the sparks with their hands was not working and smoke began filling the home, dad went looking for a fire extinguisher under the hall bathroom sink while mom ran to the kitchen and dialed 911. The operator told mom, “Get out now! Don’t try to battle the fire yourselves.” Mom dropped the phone, went into the hallway and called to my father, “Bob, get out. The operator said get out now.” Thinking dad was behind her, she opened the front door and made it to safety, not realizing black soot surrounded her mouth. When she turned around, dad was not behind her. She thought to go back in for him, but black clouds of smoke were billowing out the front door as a result of the fresh oxygen fueling the fire. Fire fighters were on the scene in 5 minutes, but the blaze was so intense they could not enter through the front door, so they took out a bedroom window to enter. Even then, their heat sensors set at 350 degrees went off immediately. Several days later when I went to the fire station to thank them for their efforts, they told me they found dad, fallen back from his knees into the hallway.
- C. If we are in a house that is on fire, get out. Don’t delay. Don’t stop or go back in to save your possessions. Get out!
- D. Last week in Luke 17 we heard Jesus give a similar message of even greater urgency. Get out of the kingdom of this world which has been our home before it is destroyed by fire at Christ’s return. Do not delay leaving it and do not return to it. Flee to Christ and enter His kingdom now by faith in Him, so we won’t be destroyed with the world when He returns to bring His kingdom to its glorious consummation.

Luke 17:29 but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom **it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.**³⁰ **It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.**³¹ "On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house **must not go down to take them out;** and likewise the one who is in the field **must not turn back.**³² **Remember Lot's wife.**³³ "Whoever seeks to keep his life **will lose it,** and whoever loses *his life* **will preserve it.**

2 Peter 3:10 But **the day of the Lord will come like a thief**, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and **the earth and its works will be burned up**.

- E. In Luke 18:1-30, Jesus calls and challenges us, in light of His return and the destruction of this world, to be found living by that faith through which He saves us from the coming wrath of God, and delivers us safely into his eternal kingdom in the new heavens and earth. His call and challenge come in a question:

Luke 18:8 "... **when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?**"

- F. But what is the nature of this faith for which Christ will be looking at His return? "Not all who call Me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Of the four illustrations of saving faith that Jesus has inspired Luke to record in 18:1-30, we hope to look at the first three this morning.

I. 18:1-8 Jesus is looking for a faith that continually calls and waits upon the Lord without losing heart.

- A. If we ask ourselves why our risen, reigning Lord has appointed us to hear these particular words of His today, we might assume, and not wrongly, that Christ, in His grace and mercy, wants those among us who have yet to have their sins forgiven to hear Him calling them to put their faith in Him for their souls eternal safety and the forgiveness of their sins. Scripture tells us that faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, and now is the day of salvation .

Romans 10:17 **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.**

2 Corinthians 6:2 for He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." **Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION "--**

- B. 18:1 But notice that it is not only unbelievers that Jesus wants to hear His words today. We see in 18:1 that Jesus is addressing these words to His disciples. Why would He do that if they have already believed? He speaks these words to us to preserve our faith in Him, using the same Word of God by which He first created our faith in Him, so that we would not be like Lot's wife and turn back to this world.

Luke 17:22 And **He said to the disciples**, "The days will come when **you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.**

Luke 18:1 Now **He was telling them** a parable to show that at **all times they ought** (GK: dei = necessary, must) **to pray and not to lose heart,**

C. Jesus is teaching His disciples that His promised return and kingdom's fulness will be delayed (17:22), and that as a result they will suffer hardships, disappointments, persecutions. He tells us this so we will not become disillusioned by assuming incorrect expectations for believers in this present age - when we pray to the Lord about an disabled child, an alcoholic father, progressive cancer, a stressful work environment, a corrupt or hostile government, unemployment or faltering business, unsaved children, hostility and discrimination toward Christians, etc., and nothing changes. So He tells us a parable to encourage us to continue to call upon Him in constant faith and hope, for that is the nature of saving faith.

D. 18:2-7 The parable, as we will see, makes a "how much more" (a fortiori) argument (Cf. 11:5-13). If an unrighteous judge who has no love or compassion for a widow seeking justice, how much more will our righteous Lord who loves us bring justice to His faithful people.

Luke 18:2 saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man."³ "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.'⁴ "For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,⁵ yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'⁶ And the Lord said, "**Hear what the unrighteous judge said; ⁷ now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night,** and will He delay long over them?

E. 18:8 But now Christ gives us a challenging call to that enduring faith for which His is looking.

Luke 18:8 "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?**"

1. God will remain faithful to His commitment to His elect. The question is, will we remain faithful to our commitment to Him while we wait for His help and final deliverance at His return?
2. Some have said, "I asked God to help me, but nothing changed, so I gave up on Him." Do we see the arrogance, the lack of humility in such a statement? Who are we to put God on a timer? The faith for which Jesus is looking does not tell God how much time He has to answer us, does not put God on the clock. There is no humility, respect or fear of God in that. Jesus is looking for a faith that continually calls and waits upon the Lord without losing heart.

F. Did you notice in Psalm 77, which we read to each other, how the Lord teaches and leads us in how to pray to Him in difficult circumstances with a faith that shows no disrespect toward Him nor loses heart?

1. 77:1-2 God leads us during times of trouble to make relentless cries to Him for help, day and Night, as Jesus describes in Luke 18:7.

Psalm 77:1 **My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud;** My voice *rises* to God, and He will hear me. ² **In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; In the night my hand was stretched out** without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted.

2. 77:3-6 God guides us to pour out the suffering of our agonizing, sleepless hearts to Him.

Psalm 77:3 **When I remember God, then I am disturbed; when I sigh, then my spirit grows faint.** Selah. ⁴ **You have held my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.** ⁵ I have considered the days of old, the years of long ago. ⁶ I will remember my song in the night; I will meditate with my heart, and my spirit ponders:

3. 77:7-9 God guides our laments and questions to be directed toward Him, versus grumbling to others or To ourselves. Even Christ in His anguish on the cross asked God the question, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1; Mark 15:34)

Psalm 77:7 **Will the Lord reject forever? And will He never be favorable again? ⁸ Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has His promise come to an end forever? ⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious, or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion? Selah.**

4. 77:10-12 Yet God leads us to remember His gracious works and interventions of old, so as to trust in Him while we wait for Him.

Psalm 77:10 Then I said, "This is my weakness: *supposing* that the right hand of the Most High has changed." ¹¹ **I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. ¹² I will meditate on all Your work and muse on Your deeds.**

5. 77:13-15 While God first leads us to cry out to Him and direct our laments toward Him, He then leads us from lamenting, to remembering, then to reaffirming God’s character and faithfulness, and thus to reaffirming our faith in Him.

Psalm 77:13 **Your way, O God, is holy; What god is great like our God?** ¹⁴ You are the God who works wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples. ¹⁵ **You have by Your power redeemed Your people,** the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

- G. This is the faith for which Jesus will be looking, a faith that cries out to the Lord day and night without losing heart.

II. 18:9-14 Jesus is looking for a humble faith that claims no merit or entitlement before the Lord.

- A. 18:9,10 Jesus gives another parable contrasting how faith expresses itself in humble prayer to God, claiming no merit, entitlement, or contempt of others. He contrasts a Pharisee and tax collector.

Luke 18:9 And **He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:** "Two men went up into the temple **to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.**

- B. 18:11,12 The Pharisee, respected by his culture as righteous, assumed himself to be so by comparing himself to others.

Luke 18:11 "**The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself:** 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

1. Notice his prayer expressed contempt for the tax collector, a societal outcast. When we bully, pick on, put down others, we do so to elevate ourselves.
2. Notice also in the Pharisee's prayer that he expresses no need of God for anything. He assumes his behavior merits and entitles him to a right standing before God. We need to be aware how subtly we can embrace an attitude of entitlement before the Lord. "If I've done everything right, then why are things going so wrong?" "I've never hurt anyone. Why am I being hurt?" "I diligently give to the Lord. Why doesn't He bless my business, my finances?"
3. Notice also that his prayer is not actually a prayer to God. He is actually giving himself a eulogy, a good word. This is ironic, since eulogies are typically said at funerals. His eulogy is ironically prophetic of his destiny with eternal death, since he is not justified by faith in the Lord. He is a walking dead man.

- C. 18:13,14 It is the despised tax collector who humbly prays to God for mercy, claiming no merit or entitlement before the Lord. It is he, not the Pharisee, who went home justified before God, for the faith by which God justifies us claims no merit or entitlement before the Lord, but cries to Him for mercy.

Luke 18:13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'¹⁴ "I tell you, **this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.**"

III. 18:15-17 Jesus is looking for a faith that responds to His sovereign lordship with the humility of a young baby.

- A. 18:15 Mothers were bringing their babies to Jesus to be blessed by Him. But the disciples thought babies were too unimportant for Jesus to give His precious ministry time to these mothers' desires.

Luke 18:15 And they were bringing even their babies (Gk: brephos = young baby) to Him so that He would touch them, **but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them.**

- B. 18:16,17 But our humble, gracious Christ is happy to give attention and blessing to those considered the least among people.

Luke 18:16 But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for **the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**¹⁷ "Truly I say to you, **whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.**"

Matthew 18:3 and said, "Truly I say to you, **unless you are converted and become like children,** you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ **Whoever then humbles himself as this child,** he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

1. These children are representative of something basic to all who enter God's kingdom. The point of comparison is a baby's humble, submissive, dependent trust. Newborns go wherever their parents take them, are dressed in whatever their parents dress them, sleep in whatever room their parents place them, live in whatever place their parents live, etc.
 2. Without such humble, dependent, submission to Christ as Lord, no one has a place in Christ's eternal kingdom. For Jesus is looking for a faith that responds to His sovereign lordship with the humility of a young baby.
- C. The absence of this humble, child-like faith is displayed in Jesus's encounter with a rich young ruler looking to inherit eternal life in 18:18-30. In contrast to Peter and the disciples, he was unwilling to give up his riches and follow Jesus. He instead walked away, forfeiting eternal life, for Jesus is looking for a faith that exalts Christ as it's highest object of trust and treasure.

Conclusion

- A. May none of us walk away from Jesus today. May we call upon Him for mercy.
- B. For the kingdom of this world is a house on fire. GET OUT! Do not delay leaving it and do not return to it. Flee to Christ and enter His kingdom now by faith in Him, so that we won't be destroyed with the world when He returns to bring His kingdom to its glorious consummation. When He does return, will He find faith on the earth? A faith ...
1. ... that continually calls and waits on Him without losing heart.
 2. ... that claims no merit or entitlement before Him, but expresses our need for His mercy

3. ... that responds to His sovereignty and lordship with the humble submission of a baby
4. ... and that exalts Him as our highest object of trust and treasure.

- C. Next week, Lord willing, Ryan will unpack this last illustration of the faith for which Christ will be looking upon His return. If you affirm Ryan becoming our church's next senior pastor with your vote as I have with my vote, then he will continue to lead us through Luke, walking with Jesus on His journey to Jerusalem, His journey to the cross.
- C. It has been a privilege and blessing to serve Christ and you, His body, in this ministry over the last two decades. You have been a blessing to me and to my family, for which we owe you the debt of love.
- D. Earlier this month, when Ryan and I talked over this week's and next week's texts, I mentioned that the first message I preached to this church was the text on Jesus's encounter with the rich, young ruler. Ryan responded with an observation that in God's sovereignty, what was my first message to this church in the process of becoming senior pastor will be, God willing, his first message to this church as senior pastor. The messengers change, but the message remains the same. Same God, same Lord, same faith, same gospel, same promise and hope of glory.
- E. God appoints His servants of the Word to serve our respective generations and then be replaced by those who serve their generations. For our mortal bodies, like grass, does not endure, but God be thanked that His word endures. As Christ's apostle Peter writes ...

1 Peter 1:24 For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,"²⁵
BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER. **And this is the word which was preached to you.**

... and I trust by God's grace that this Word will continue to be preached to you. Much love church.