

## Encouragement to Persevere in Prayer

Luke 18:1-8

I'm sure we all wish we could always say with all honesty, "Life is good!" But the reality is, life is just plain tough, a lot of the time. God is good—all the time. But life is hard—a lot of the time. This shouldn't surprise us because we are not in heaven yet. We are living in the last days, the period between Christ's first and second coming. And Jesus never said life would be easy for His followers. To the contrary, He says in Luke 17:26-37 that the days in which His followers live will be just like the days in which Noah and Lot lived. The church of Noah's day consisted of only eight people. Noah and his family was alone and isolated (孤立的), surrounded by unbelievers. You can imagine mockery (嘲讽) endured. "What are you building a boat for? There is no water within a hundred miles!" Or think of the church of Lot's day. Lot was one of three people who escaped the wicked city of Sodom and its evil twin, Gomorrah. And he lived in the heart of an LGBT+ community. Noah and Lot were surrounded by evil. So are we. Life wasn't easy for them. Life isn't easy for us.

To complicate matters, not only do we live in an evil world, we still have evil in our own hearts. Noah and Lot had their besetting sin of drunkenness (醉酒). We have ours. In midst of these struggles we face, the question that confronts us is: How should we live? The answer our passage gives us is: Prayerfully! Pray continually! Persevere (坚持不懈) in prayer!

## 1). Our Problem with Persevering

We all know we should pray for all kinds of things and all kinds of people: ourselves, our children, our parents, the church, those who have left the church, those who have never joined the church, our community, our country. But do we pray persistently (坚持不断地)? Maybe you are in the habit of praying before you eat a meal. But do you persevere in praying for all these other needs?

There are many reasons while we might grow lax (松懈的) in praying. Perhaps it is spiritual laziness, poor time management, lack of concern for others, or love of the world. Maybe something else. But our passage identifies one specific reason that we do not persevere in praying: we “lose heart” (v.1). We might pray for something or someone for a while. But then, when we don't see the kind of change we are looking for, we soon get discouraged, and we stop praying for that person or about that problem. We might not say it out loud, but we think to ourselves, “What's the point in praying anymore? It's getting me nowhere.” We might wonder, “Does God even hear this prayer? Does God care?”

A psalm-writer named Asaph struggled in this way (Psalm 73). He had faith in the one true God. He prayed, went to church, and tried to live a life of obedience to God. But life was hard for him. Each day was a struggle. And when he compared his life to the lives of the unbelieving people all around him who didn't pray or go to church, he saw that they had it all. “They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens that are common to man. They are always carefree. They increase in wealth.” Then he thought to himself, “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. In vain I have washed my hands in innocence (无辜) . All day long I have been plagued (受困扰) . I have been punished every morning” (v.13-14). The ongoing difficulties of life caused him to lose heart. He gave up on prayer, and almost gave up his faith (v.2).

Jesus knows we struggle to pray. He knows that the difficulties of life and the discouraging things we experience can cause us to lose heart, throw up our hands, and say, “It's no use praying anymore!” And so He tells this parable (比喻, 寓言) to encourage us to persevere in prayer.

## 2). One Parable about Persevering

In a certain city there was a judge. He was a terrible man. He did not fear God, nor did he care what anyone else thought of him. He was a godless, dishonest scoundrel (恶棍) who had no sense of shame nor any sense of honor. And he was utterly selfish. The only way he would do something for someone is if there was something in it for himself.

There was also, in this city, a widow. She was a victim of some kind of injustice (不公义). Perhaps religious leaders had stolen money or material possessions from her after her husband died (Luke 20:47). We don't know for sure. But being a genuine victim, she approached the judge to seek justice. However, she had no social status (社会地位). She was a woman, and women had no access to the court system. She had no male family members to help her out. She was among most vulnerable and helpless in society. She was not seeking revenge (报复); simply restorative justice (修复式的公义). But she has no one to go to bat for her. So she does the only thing she can do: she goes to this uncaring, self-serving judge alone.

Jesus listeners would know that she had no chance of getting anywhere. The only way to get somewhere with a judge like this is to bribe (行贿) him, threaten him, or plead (祈求) with him. But she cannot bribe him because she has not money or material possessions. She cannot threaten him because she has no social status, no power or authority. And as for pleading with him, he doesn't care about anyone else. If there's nothing in it for him, forget it. He won't give you the time of day.

And yet, what does this woman do? She pleads with him. Though he ignores her (v.4), she doesn't give up. She is persistent with her plea (v.5). She keeps coming to him, so much so that the judge feels like she is just a troublesome bother who wearies him out. The word 'weary' (使疲倦) literally means 'to beat black-and-blue' or 'to give a black eye.' Think of a boxing match where a boxer badgers (纠缠) his opponent with one blow after another until he is battered (猛击), beaten and bruised. The picture Jesus paints is that this widow persistently pleads with this judge. Day in, day out she begs for justice. She meets him in the courtroom in front of his colleagues. She pursues him on street and in the market. At the end of the day, she follows him home, pleading at the door of his house.

Her chances of getting justice may be slim (微小的), but she knew the power of persistent pleading. And it worked! Finally, the judge got so sick of (厌烦) her that he gave her the justice she deserved.

### 3). Two Points about Persevering

In telling this parable, Jesus makes two main points about persevering in prayer. The two points are derived from the two people in the parable: the judge and the widow.

It might seem somewhat surprising, but Jesus draws comparison between the judge and God; however, it is a comparison of complete contrast (vss.6-7). God and the judge are as different as black is from white; as different as day is from night. Let's look at the contrast.

The judge couldn't care less about doing what is right and just. But God loves justice (Psa.99:4). Psalm 103:6 says He works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed (被欺压的人). Psalm 111:7 says, "All the works of His hands are faithful and just." And Deuteronomy 10:18 says that God defends cause of fatherless and widow.

The judge is not good in any way. He is corrupt, uncaring, self-serving. But God is good. His Name is good (Psa.52:9). King David says in Psalm 119:68, "You are good and what You do is good." And Psalm 145:9 says, "The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made."

There are still more contrasts. The judge would not listen unless someone pestered (烦扰) him to the point of driving him mad. But God hears our quiet cry. Psalm 34:15 says, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, His ears are attentive to their cry" (cf. Exodus 2:23-25). In Psalm 56:8 the psalmist (诗人) says God collected his tears and put them into His bottle and recorded them in His book.

A final contrast is the judge's selfishness and God's selflessness. The judge is not interested in helping someone out unless there is something in it for him; if it is going to cost him time or energy, forget it. In contrast, God is a giving God. God the Father gave His only and dearly loved Son (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). The Son gave His own life (John 10:11,15b,17-18; 1 John 3:16). And if God did not spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also graciously give us everything we need? (Romans 8:32).

Such is character of our God. What a complete contrast to the judge. And if the persistent pleading of a needy, nameless widow can have kind of effect on crusty (脾气坏的) old judge, moving him to bring about justice for widow, then how much more will good, gracious, caring God respond to persistent prayers of 'His own elect'? (v.7).

The word 'elect' (选民) is packed with meaning. It tells us that God chose us. He knew us by name before we were created. Before the world was even created. To the judge, the widow was a nameless nag (唠叨的人). To God, we are dear children, known by name! If the judge

finally listened to and answered a nameless nobody, then how much more will our heavenly Father hear and answer the prayers of His sons and daughters?

But perhaps you're thinking, "Yes, but I've been praying for so long for so-and-so, and God still has not answered me. I'm not so sure God is hearing and answering my prayer." What does the Bible teach about God hearing and answering prayer? There is only one reason God will not hear or answer your prayer: if you are willing living in sin without repenting (Isaiah 59:1-2; Jeremiah 15:1; Proverbs 28:9). But if you are praying to God as a repentant (悔改的) sinner, He always hears and answers your prayers. The problem is, sometimes God says, 'No' or 'Not yet.' And because that wasn't the answer we were looking for, we act as if God did not answer at all.

God's answer of 'not yet' is address in the last phrase of verse 7: "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, *though He bears long with them?*" He Jesus teaches that at times, God might take a long time in answering our prayer (2 Peter 3:8-9). But God will not ignore us, nor will He push us off like the unjust judge. Any delay will have good reason because we have a good God.

Perhaps you look at verse 8 and say, "But this verse says God will avenge them *speedily*." We must note that *speedily* does not mean *immediately*. And we must remember that the broader context is Jesus' second coming (v.8b; 17:30). Jesus doesn't say He will return soon. He says that when He returns, He will punish all His enemies speedily. Just as the flood waters speedily wiped the wicked out in Noah's day, just as fire speedily fell and fed on the wicked in Lot's day, so Jesus will speedily destroy the wicked in the day He returns.

Another reason we might think God does not answer our prayers is because He gives us a 'No', and we act as if He didn't answer. But God often responds with a 'No,' and this is an answer! The Apostle Paul persistently asked God to remove the thorn (刺) in his flesh. God's response was, "No. I won't remove it. But I will give you sufficient grace and strength to endure" (2Cor.12:7-10). Or think of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He pleaded, "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me. Yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). God's answer to Jesus was, "No." But the Father strengthened His son for the trial ahead by sending an angel from heaven to strengthen Him. And thank God that He gave Jesus a 'No.' Thank Jesus for accepting the 'No.' On the cross Jesus removed the filth of the sin of all who believe on Him. And this had to happen, because we cannot come into God's presence if we are stained with sin. It is only because God gave Jesus a 'No' that He can give us a 'Yes.' Because Jesus' blood on the cross cleanses us from

sin, God says to us, each time we call out to Him, “Yes, I will hear you! Yes, I will answer you.”

This brings us to the second point the parable teaches about persevering. Just as the widow never gave up pleading with the begrudging (不情愿的) judge, so we should never give up on praying to our gracious God. Remember, you can pray anywhere, any time. And you don't even have to speak out loud. An old hymn says, “Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, un-uttered or expressed; the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast. Prayer is the burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear, the upward glancing of the eye, when none but God is near. Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air.” Never stop praying! If we stop praying, we stop believing. If we stop believing, we stop praying. The two are totally intertwined (相互交织的) .

Whatever it is that you need, whatever is on your heart, pray! And if God gives you a 'No', remember He always gives you the 'Yes' of His presence and His strength. Instead of asking God to ease a burden, maybe you need to ask Him for strength to endure the burden. That prayer will always be answered with a 'Yes!', for His strength is made perfect in our weakness. If God gives you a 'Not yet', ask for patience and perseverance. Keep on praying! Never give up! Never lose heart! Your Father is always listening and will answer in His time and in His way.

## **Conclusion**

There is no question about what Jesus will do: He will hear and answer prayer; He will come again; He will preserve His church until He comes again (Matt.16:18); and when He comes, He will judge the wicked and saved the righteous. But there is a question at the end of the parable: “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” Jesus is asking, “When I return, will I find you persevering in prayer like the widow persevered in pleading? Will I find that kind of faith on the earth? Will I find that kind of faith in you?” Continual prayer is not only the evidence of faith, but the means of maintaining and building faith until He returns. So pray! Persevere in prayer! God will hear you. And He will answer you!