

“Prevailing Prayer - Luke 18:1-14”

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“Then He spoke a parable to them, that **men always ought to pray and not lose heart**, saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, “Get justice for me from my adversary. ’And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, “Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. *Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*” Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “**God, be merciful to me a [the] sinner!**’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:1–14).

It is highly probable that a majority of those who read this simple parable fail to learn the lesson from it that they should. They look at it as though it designed to teach that the unjust judge is a type of God, which cannot by any possibility be the case. If it were, then it would poorly serve the object of encouraging men always to pray, and not to grow weary. Few persons would have the heart to hold out against oft-repeated rebuffs.

THE parable was spoken in order that men might, according to the Syriac, pray at every opportunity, and not grow weary. Surely this parable would not help men to that end, if it taught that God is like the unjust judge—hard to move. There would be no encouragement in that. Such an idea does violence to the whole tenor of Scripture.

Hear what the character of God is:—

- “As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him” (Ps. 103:13).
- “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

- "And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6, 7).
- "Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18).
- "I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by My name. I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts; a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face" (Isa. 65:1-3).
- "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Add to all these the following: "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matt. 7:9-11). **Here Christ is both compared and contrasted with earthly parents.** He has the same kind of love for His children who are in need that an earthly parent has for his children, but He is infinitely greater and better, and His love for His children is as much greater than that of an earthly parent for his children, as God is greater than man. If a person, then, wishes to know how willing God is to answer prayer, let him think of His own willingness, yes, eagerness, to give his children needed things, and then multiply that degree of willingness by infinity.

Besides this, we read: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). **He does not upbraid us because we have not asked before, nor because we have squandered that which He has previously given us; when we ask in faith, He gives freely, without taunting us with our short-comings.**

*Now we can readily understand the parable of the unjust judge. He was utterly hardened. He "feared not God neither regarded man." It made no difference to him what people said about him. He was sure of his position for this life, and he had no thought of God and the future life. All he lived for was his own selfish pleasure. This poor widow had a just cause; but he knew nothing of justice, and paid no attention to her. But she persisted; she could not rest without having her cause decided. **Her life depended on it.** So she kept coming again and again, until finally the judge's comfort was interfered*

with. So, at last, in order to get rid of her, so that he might enjoy his own pleasures undisturbed, he granted the widow's request.

"And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." He who concludes from this that in order to get judgment from God it is necessary to plead and urge as long as the widow did the judge, in order to overcome his indifference, or to gain his attention, maligns the character of God. **The parable contrasts God with the unjust judge, instead of comparing them.** If the unjust judge, with his callous heart, could be moved to do justice by the importunity of the poor widow, shall not God, who delights in mercy, avenge his own loved ones? Who can doubt it.

"Though he bear long with them." The Revised Version renders this passage literally: "And He is long-suffering over them." That deepens the contrast. The unjust judge was cruel, and had no care for man; God loves his people, and is tender and compassionate with them. ***What a world of encouragement there is in this, to pray at every opportunity, at every time of need, and not to grow weary, thinking that God is weary of granting our request.***

"But," says one, "I thought that we had to strive, to agonize, to enter in; that the kingdom of heaven must be taken by force." Very true; we must "pray without ceasing;" but that does not necessarily mean that we must importune forever in order to get one thing. We are not heard for our much speaking; **God does not wish us to be like the heathen, who imagine that the more frantic they become in their appeals, the more likely they are to be heard.** Note the difference between the prayers of the prophets of Baal, and that of Elijah. (1 Kings 18:26-29, 36, 37). Consider the reverent calmness of the prayer of Christ at the tomb of Lazarus. (John 11:41, 42). When we pray, we are to believe that our request is granted, and it is granted. (Mark 11:24). The instant Daniel began to pray to God, an angel was dispatched to give him the knowledge he desired. (Dan. 9:23; 10:12). Circumstances, and the interests of others, of whom we may know nothing, may delay the messenger, and our faith may thus be tested; but God is not unfaithful. ***By the cases and the assurances put on record, we may know of a surety that if the answer is delayed, it is coming.***

But having received one petition, we are just as needy. And so we must continue "instant in prayer." We must not lose heart and become weary. Men ought to pray at every opportunity, at every time of need. This is what the Scriptures mean.

The parable of the Pharisees and the publican, which follows, emphasizes this, and shows how readily God answers prayer. It also shows what really constitutes prayer. Since the parable was spoken to those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others, it is evident that such ones do not offer prayer acceptable to God. The one who would receive anything from God must pray "in faith,

with no doubting" (James 1:6). But ***faith does not and cannot exist in that soul that is "lifted up."*** ***Faith is dependence on another. Faith comes to a man when self goes out. The man who trusts in himself that he is righteous cannot expect to receive anything from the Lord, because he doesn't ask for anything. Why should he? If he has righteousness by his own works, why should he ask the Lord for it?***

This was the case with the Pharisee. He "stood"—struck an attitude—"and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." He prayed "with himself," and not to God. **Apparently he began by thanking God, but actually he was congratulating himself.**

"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." ***He had no confidence in himself.*** He did not, like the Pharisee, compare himself with others, to their disadvantage; he had no thought of others, but only of himself as the chief sinner. ***He used the definite article: "God be merciful to me, the sinner." He acknowledged his own sin, but didn't confess for anybody else. Thus he put himself directly in the class of those upon whom God delights to have mercy.***

The prayer was short, but it was long enough to get all that he wanted. "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than [instead of] the other." What had he done to secure this? He had simply trusted in the Lord. ***He went up to the temple a sinner; he went down to his house a righteous man; not having his own righteousness, but "that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."***

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