

Luke 18:1-18

“Faithful Praying”

Imago Dei Church (Raleigh, NC) – 1/1/2017

- Over the last several weeks and the coming ones, we’ve been preaching from various passages on “what we’re most passionate about”—what we obsess over
- So we’ve talked about the gospel, the great commission, the pursuit of justice.
- This morning we’re going to talk about prayer.

Big Idea: Prayer is an invitation to commune with God based on HIS promises, HIS character, and HIS mercy.

- Not a definition, per se, but at least a partial explanation of what is happening when we pray. I want to unpack a little bit about what I mean by that before we jump into our passage.
- “an invitation” = God invites us to prayer; a privilege!
- “commune with God” = know God intimately; fellowship with him
- “based on His...His...His”
- 2 Encouragements based on these 2 stories

#1: PRAY CONSISTENTLY AND CONFIDENTLY—BECAUSE OF GOD'S CHARACTER (18:1-8)

- Luke begins this first parable by giving us the interpretation.
 - I like parables like this...
- Two Direct Applications:
 - **(1) Pray Always** — live your life in the posture of prayer before God; bringing everything to him
 - This is a wonderful invitation...
 - **(2) Do Not Lose Heart** — 2 senses:
 - 1. Don't lose stamina (don't give up)
 - the story indicates this is part of what Jesus means for us to learn – keep coming!
 - 2. Don't lose hope
 - The context suggest this is also part of what Jesus is teaching
 - In Luke 17, Jesus is asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God will be coming.

- After giving them a wise but somewhat veiled answer, Jesus then instructs his disciples:

²² And he said to the disciples, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³ And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them. (Luke 17:22–23)

- His main point: the disciples will be able to tell when Jesus is returning
Also: there will be a delay
- Follows up with a story to encourage them to pray...pray for the return of Christ, when he will right every wrong, when he will defeat all our enemies, and when he will bring justice and righteousness on the earth.

- The Story: fairly straightforward—

- 2 Characters: a judge and a widow
- The Judge (vv. 2)—Jesus gives us his two characteristics that are relevant for the parable:
 - [1] **he does not fear God** — he does not esteem him, nor live his life ‘*coram deo*’

Sproul: “Living *coram deo* is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.

To live in the presence of God is to understand that whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God. God is omnipresent. There is no place so remote that we can escape His penetrating gaze.

To be aware of the presence of God is also to be acutely aware of His sovereignty. The uniform experience of the saints is to recognize that if God is God, then He is indeed sovereign. . . .

Living under divine sovereignty involves more than a reluctant submission to sheer sovereignty that is motivated out of a fear of punishment. It involves recognizing that there is no higher goal than offering honor to God. Our lives are to be living sacrifices, oblations offered in a spirit of adoration and gratitude.

To live all of life *coram Deo* is to live a life of integrity. It is a life of wholeness that finds its unity and coherency in the majesty of God.

- [2] **he does not respect man** — he has no concern for the plight of the poor; judges were supposed to defend the cause of the poor and the widows, but this judge is only concerned about himself
- In contrast (v. 3), we know little about this woman, except:
 - She is a widow (the very class the judge should have cared about)

- She is in need of justice regarding some dispute with an adversary
- She is persistent
- Judge (vv. 4-5)—no intention to give her justice (v. 4). That's why there is a delay. It wasn't that he was playing a cruel joke on her, but that he never intended to do anything about it!
 - But this is a very self-aware judge—he engages in some self-reflection for us!
 - What ultimately moves him to act is not compassion, but annoyance!
 - he is NOT acting out of love or fear of God,
 - NOR out of concern for the woman
 - (we might add, he is not acting out of a sense of duty to the office either)
 - Instead, it's her persistence—he gives her justice
- Jesus (vv. 6-8)—moves from lesser to greater (2 ways):
- The point is clear—If THIS widow is getting justice from THIS judge, then God's chosen people can certainly expect a response from the Lord

- Esp. when they ask for him to vindicate their expectation of him bringing justice and righteousness to the earth
- Jesus adds “speedily” or “soon”—must be read in context
 - Jesus is not saying that all of our prayers get answered quickly
 - He IS reminding his disciples that, though they may experience persecution and suffering at the hands of the world, God hears them and promises deliverance
 - (his “soon” may be different from our “soon”)
 - (may be partial fulfillment, like at Pentecost)
 - There is an intentional end-times focus on this promise—**but he keeps it imminent (close by)**
- That’s why Jesus asks the rhetorical question at the end of v. 8.
 - He wonders aloud: when Christ returns, will there be people who are eagerly expecting their coming vindication—will their people those who are so confident with in the character and promises of God that they are willing to cry out

“night and day” to God to do what he has promised to do?

- This is why I say we must pray “confidently and consistently”
- We are CONFIDENT in the love and care of our heavenly Father—he knows—he cares—he promises
- So we CONSISTENTLY ask him to act to bring in his kingdom and establish justice and righteousness
 - Not a license to pray and expect to get whatever new gadget you want
 - Not a license to pray for riches and glory in this life
 - Instead, it’s an invitation to know God, rest in his character, bring your cares and kingdom-shaped desires to Him, and EXPECT that he will answer these desires in the proper time.
- Which brings us to the second story...

#2: PRAY HUMBLY AND DESPERATELY—BECAUSE OF GOD'S MERCY (18:9-14)

- This time, Luke tells us not exactly the interpretation, but at least who and what Jesus is speaking against:
 - Those who are self-righteous, and therefore they treat others poorly
- This story also has two characters: a Pharisee and a tax collector— These two represent opposite ends of the 1st-Century Jewish hierarchy: the Pharisees at the top, and the tax-collector at the bottom
 - Both are going to pray at the Temple
- The Pharisee (vv. 11-12)
 - He thanks God, but only to talk about how great he is—FIVE TIMES he mentions “I” in these two verses
 - (ILL)—“Me Monster”
 - Focus on his own moral superiority (in relation to the other men) & his over-the-top religiosity (fasting, tithing)
 - He even points specifically to the tax collector!
- The Tax Collector (v. 13)

- from start to finish, the tax collector displays an awareness of his own unworthiness and contrition
 - he stands far off, not worthy to approach God
 - he won't lift his eyes
 - he beats his breast
 - he calls himself a sinner
- His only prayer is for mercy
- While the Pharisee talks to God about his own righteousness, the tax collector brings only his own neediness
- While in the first story, Jesus invites us to approach God expectantly and confidently, he here reminds us that we always approach God as beggars, unworthy of the audience he gives us.
- Jesus comments (v. 14)—
 - Only one of these men will be justified.
 - A clear statement from Jesus that the path of self-justification and the path to acceptance by God are NOT the same; they are in fact polar opposites.
 - Self-righteousness & truly knowing God are **mutually exclusive**

- Andrew Fuller said this about how the self-righteous CANNOT understand a gospel for sinners:

Thinking highly of himself, and of his doings, he will resent every thing said to him which calls in question the goodness of his state. He flatters himself that he is at peace with God, and does not choose to be disturbed in his repose. Talk to him of Christ Jesus having come into the world to save *sinners*, even the chief of sinners, and it will either appear to him a strange doctrine, or, if he comprehend your design, it is likely he will feel himself insulted. He says, in his heart, Am I, after all the pains that I have taken, to be placed on a footing with the worst of characters? If so, where is the justice of God?— Thus the gospel seems a hard saying, and he cannot hear it. A sinner, in such a state of mind, is farther from God, and more hopeless, than the profligate whom he despises. (“The Believer’s Review of His State”)

- Cf. Phil. 3:7-11:

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

- What does any of this have to do with prayer?

- If prayer is fundamentally about getting what I want, or having my desires met, then not much
 - (don't want to deny that we should ask God to meet our needs in prayer—we should)
- But if prayer is fundamentally an exercise of knowing, communing with, being known by, and having fellowship with the God who created us, then we have to access him somehow. We have to gain a hearing with him.
- HOW?!
- Jesus gives us two options—(1) our righteousness, or (2) his mercy—and only one of them works
- It's here that we see that prayer is fundamentally a gospel issue.
- In prayer, we are invited to know God, to experience his presence and to talk with him, to listen to him, to be shaped and conformed into his image, and to have our desires and wills conformed to his perfect will. But NONE of that can happen for a person who isn't aware that they can only access God based on his mercy—as displayed through the person of Jesus Christ.

4 QUESTIONS FOR THE IDC COMMUNITY

- [1] Will we be a people who not only talk about God's justice, but ask him to manifest it in, around, and through us?
- [2] Will we persevere in prayer, knowing that God is for us and not against us?
- [3] Will we pray expectantly, knowing that God has promised to carry out his purposes on the earth?
- [4] Will we be a people marked by humble communion rather than self-righteous performance?