Persistent Prayer: Don’t Quit!!

 Luke 18:1-8

Intro.

Pray

 As we start out a new year in FSM one of the emphasis that we want to have is prayer.

It’s been said that nothing of eternal significance happens apart from prayer.

 With that being said, lets start with prayer.

Read Luke 18:1-8

 “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. **2**He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. **3**And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

**4**“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, **5**yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

**6**And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. **7**And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? **8**I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

 I. Who Jesus was addressing with this parable: His disciples 18:1

 A. The first thing that we notice is that Jesus is talking to His disciples as He tells this parable.

 B. He is talking to those who want to grow in their relationship with God.

 C. He is talking to those who want desire to follow Christ with their lives.

 D. Jesus is talking to you and to me.

 II. Jesus stated purpose for this parable.

 A. Notice Jesus tells us upfront why he is telling his disciples this parable: **That we should** **always pray and not give up**. 18:1

 (Have the students repeat this with me: We should always pray and not give up.)

 B. What would be some reasons that we don’t pray as we ought?

 1. We often don’t pray because we don’t **really believe that God is going to respond to our prayers.** We don’t trust God.

 Sometimes we begin to practice the saying, “Why pray when you can worry.” Worry is really the sin of unbelief. Worry causes us to take our eyes off of God and focus on the problem.

 2. **Pride.**

We demonstrate by our lack of praying that we don’t really think we need God’s help. We would probably never verbalize it but none the less, our lives may demonstrate it.

 3. We may have prayed and prayed and **feel like God is not answering our prayers** and so we quit.

 a. Often when we pray and it seems that God is not responding. Could it be that God is at work behind the scenes and we just are unaware?

 b. Take Joseph for example, when he is thrown in the pit of Dothan by his brothers. Undoubtedly he prayed for God’s deliverance and yet he ended up being sold into slavery, then prison, seemingly forgotten. (Gen. 37:17-28)

 c. Later in life, Joseph with hindsight is able to see that God was at work all along. God wasn’t ignoring Joseph’s prayers, He was preparing him through these difficult circumstances.

That is why Joseph is able to say in Gen. 50:20, speaking to his brothers who sold him into slavery, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it (speaking of all his difficult trials) for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

 d. One thing that we need to understand about God is that often God’s timing and our timing are not the same. Often times it seems that God answers our prayers but it is not until the final hour.

 Eccl. 3:11 says, “God has made everything beautiful in its time.” God is faithful. God does answer prayer. He does care about us and doesn’t blow us off.

However, because we often are unaware of what God is doing and because we tend to be impatient, sometimes it may feel like that.

 C. I want to assure you that Jesus wants us to see that we need to pray and that God desires for us to come to Him and spend time with Him.

(So let’s take a look at the parable)

 III. The characters that are in the parable.

 A. The judge

 How is the judge described? “He neither feared God nor cared about men.” 18:2

 1. He doesn’t fear God.

 a. He doesn’t care about God.

 b. He is not motivated to be a good judge to please God. He is motivated with his own personal agenda. We know this because in verse 5 when he does act, he does it so the widow will stop bothering him not because it is the right thing to do.

 2. He doesn’t care about people.

 What is supposed to be the job of a judge?

 a. A Judge is to care about the welfare of people and provide justice when they have been wronged.

 b. He didn’t care about the 2nd Commandment, “To love your neighbor as yourself.”

 c. The culture of Jesus day was a shame and honor culture. People sought to do right in public because they wanted honor and didn’t want to be shamed by people. That is where we get the expression, “shame on you.”

 d. This judge had no shame. He didn’t care about righteousness or justice. He didn’t care what people thought of him. He only cared about himself.

 B. The widow

 1. How is she described? 18:3

 a. She wanted justice against her adversary. Apparently she was ripped off by someone and because of it was in a desperate situation.

 Unfortunately, that is not uncommon even in our day, where people try to scam you.

 b. She is constantly coming before the judge to plead her case.

 2. What do you know about widows in Jesus day?

 a. A woman on her own was in trouble if she did not have a man to protect her.

 b. The fact that there was not a man who came to the judge to plead for her suggests to us that she was probably on her own.

 c. In Jesus’ day single women lived at home and were under their father’s care and authority. Single woman did not work outside of the home. It lets us know this woman is in a desperate way.

 d. This widow represents those who are alone, destitute, powerless, helpless, unloved, and uncared for.

 IV. The Action of the Widow and the Judge

 A. The widow is persistent and was not willing to quit coming before the judge with her request. Why is that?

 1. She is desperate.

 She has nowhere else to turn.

 2. This is urgent

 a. She needs to have the judge act and she believes that if he does it will make a difference for her situation.

 b. We have people in our lives in which time is running out. Without Christ their future is eternity in hell.

 c. Are you urgently making your requests to God on their behalf? Are you urgently looking for ways to share the gospel with them?

 (IV. The action of the judge.)

 B. The judge initially refuses her (v 4)

 C. But because he is so bothered by this woman he finally makes sure that she gets justice.

What is the motive of the judge? It is all about him and not really because he cares about the widow.

 D. Even though he doesn’t care, the widow finally gets her request.

 V. What is the point of Jesus’ parable?
 A. Unfortunately, often when people read this parable instead of being encouraged to pray, they are discouraged because they read this story as one of **comparison.** They wrongly interpret this parable thinking that God is like this unjust judge and so we need to be persistent in making our requests if we want to be heard.

 B. However at the end of the parable Jesus gives us a hint as to what the story is really about. In verses 7-8a Jesus says, “Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.”

 C. Jesus wants us to see this parable, not as a story of comparison, but as one of **contrast**. God is being contrasted with this unjust judge as the one who executes perfect righteousness.

God is not stoic, uncaring, seated behind some intimidating bench. He is not heartless and disconnected. He is not moved to act because He is sick and tired of our nagging. He wants to answer our prayers. Unlike the unjust judge God is “compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love toward his people.” (Psm 103:8)

 D**. The point is**: if an unjust judge will grant the request of a widow that he does not care about, how much more will God, who loves us perfectly, do what is right and best for us.

 E. When we are tempted to stop trusting and begin to think God doesn’t care we need to be reminded of the heart of God. That is why Jesus began by saying that we should always pray and never give up. (18:1)

 (**Say that again with me**, “We should always pray and never give up.)

 F. What is God’s heart toward us?

 There was a song that was written a number of years ago that expressed the heart of God toward us.

 “God loves people more than anything,

 God loves people more than anything.

 More than anything He wants us to know He’d rather die than let us go

 ‘cause God loves people more than anything.”

 G. The only way that we are able to have a relationship with God is because God acted first and that action cost Him His Son. Why did God allow Jesus to come to this earth, live among men, and die for your sins and mine?

 It was because God is a God of love and of justice. Our sin and rebellion, our wrong doing, earned us a death sentence. Because God is a just judge our death sentence could not be overlooked, the payment for our guilt had to be made.

This is where the love of God and His justice collided. Because of God’s love there was a **great exchange** that took place. Jesus was willing to take **our death sentence** and in exchange give us **His righteousness** in its place.

As a result, for all who accept Christ’s death as payment, we are able to enter into a relationship with God and become His children.

 H. When you begin to understand who God is, you begin to realize that He is nothing like the judge in this parable.

 I. I would suggest to you that prayer is profoundly impacted by the amount and accuracy of knowledge that you have of God. When you understand how great, loving, powerful, knowledgeable God is you become motivated to want to spend time with Him.

**Tim Keller defines prayer** this way:

“it is a personal communicative response to the knowledge of God.”

 In other words, your understanding of who God is will greatly influence your prayer life.

 J. What does the persistence of the widow teach us?

She was forgotten, abandoned, disconnected, and had no access to the judge. And Jesus is trying to help us to see that we are really nothing like her.

We on the other hand, are in the family of God if we are in relationship with Christ. We are sons and daughters of God. We have been adopted into His family through Christ. We have a favored position before God. We have access to God.

There is the story that is told of a very successful businessman who traveled all around the world. Many people wanted his time, which he guarded very closely. If you wanted to speak to this man you had to go through his secretary who screened his calls.

 However, this man put in a private line into his office and he gave that number only to his family. He told his wife and children that if they ever wanted to talk to him to call him directly. He always had time for them. And so the children would call and whenever they asked if he was busy, he would reply, “No, I’m not busy, what’s on your mind?”

 What did direct access communicate to his wife and children? It communicated that they were important to him. It communicated that he valued them. And that is true of us in our relationship with God. Through prayer we have 24/7 access to God and He is never too busy to spend time with us because He loves us.

 K. This leads me to ask the question why pray?

 Do you realize that all the religions of the world hold some practice of prayer in common? All religions of the world would say that **you need to pray** so that you will be **accepted by your God.**

But Christianity teaches the exact opposite. We are **accepted by God** through Christ and **therefore we pray**. Prayer is not a way for you to make God love you. As we have already seen, God loved you before you had a relationship with Him. Prayer is a personal communicative response for who God is and what He has done.

My goal in this message is not to give you guilt so that you will feel bad about your prayerlessness and as a result commit to praying more. My goal is help you realize that in Christ your condemnation has already been removed and as a result you can boldly come to the One who loves you more than anyone else in the world.

 Heb. 4:14-16

“Therefore, since we have a high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who have been tempted in every way, just as we are- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

 My goal is that you would not only come to realize the **privilege** that it is to spend time with God but that you would be **motivated** to want to spend time with God because you realize how amazing He is and you would pray persistently with urgency for God’s glory to come down and that the church would be revived and that a great awakening would erupt in TC and beyond.

 L. After the parable Jesus asks the question in verse 8 “When Jesus returns, will he find faith on the earth?”

The question isn’t, “Is God faithful?

The question isn’t, “Does God answer prayer?”

The question is, “Will we remain faithful and be persistent in praying and spending time with God?

 M. As followers of Jesus Christ, quitting is not an option, therefore we need to be persistent in prayer and by faith trust that God will answer and build His kingdom. And remember just because it seems to us that God is not answering our prayers does not mean that He is not at work.

 N. Story of Pastor Chen’s persecution for smuggling Bibles into China

 In 1981 Pastor Chen was arrested for his part in delivering more than one million Bibles into southern China. He refused to release the names of those he was working with or answer any of their questions. The investigators could tell that Chen had already made up his mind to not answer them and they could not but help notice his serenity even as they questioned him and threatened him. Chen had gone through this before so he just shut his eyes and prayed.

Exasperated, the investigators took Chen into a courtyard in the prison and made him stand on a tall wooden box. They knew beatings wouldn’t help. Chen was frail, but was unafraid of dying. A rope was put around his neck and tightened. The rope was fixed on a wooden beam above him. The box he was standing on was about 4 feet high and very narrow.

The investigators said they were done with Chen and that when his legs gave way he would hang himself. That was the penalty for his stubbornness.

The two investigators were assigned to watch Chen’s last moments. As he looked down on them, he felt like Christ must have on the cross as he looked down on those who were putting him to death. At that moment, Chen felt a surge of power in his body.

Knowing his end was not far away, Chen prayed and began to witness to the two policemen. They told him to shut up. They didn’t want to hear about Jesus. But he shared with them anyway.

The long hours soon became days, Chen had to remain still. His body cried for sleep, but he could not give in to his feelings. His legs developed terrible cramps, and in shaking them, he nearly hanged himself. Soon he felt nothing in his legs, even though they had swollen to twice their normal size. His only relief was the rain. He continued to pray and trust God.

Five day passed. Six. Seven. Still Chen had not toppled over and died. Eight. Nine days. The word was going around the prison. Surely no man could survive that long. He had been standing all that time. No food. No water. No rest. It was impossible for him to still be alive. Ten days. Eleven days. On the thirteenth day, a huge thunderstorm rolled in. The sky went black and the rain poured down. His resistance was over. Through his delirium he heard the crash of thunder, saw a flash of lightning, and he fell forward. The rope tightened. Oblivion.

Was that water Chen felt someone splashing over his cracked and puffy lips? Someone else seemed to rubbing his wrists. His legs had been propped up on a chair and he felt the blood pumping back into his body and arms. He soon realized it was the two investigators working on him. Why were they suddenly so interested in reviving the old man they had mocked? Why had he not been strangled by the rope?

The investigators were shaking and urgently saying, “Quick, don’t died, Please! You’ve got to wake up. Please!” Chen asked weakly, “Why? What’s happening? Where am I?”

The investigators responded, “Please, we want to know about your savior, Jesus.” Chen could feel him trembling. “I don’t understand,” Chen said, “Why?”

“Because He save you,” the second investigator explained. “A flash of lightning cut the rope above your head just as you fell. Don’t try to tell us it was coincidence!”

Both of the investigators came to faith in Christ that day. The tears of all three men mingled with the pouring rain as the investigators repented of their sins. Pastor Chen was later released, more out of indecision than anything else. The story had spread around the prison and none of the other investigators had the courage to interrogate him again… so they let him go.

 Do you think Chen was praying during those thirteen days? Why didn’t God answer His prayers sooner? It only seemed like a delay so God would receive all the glory and He would be revealed. Say it together again with me: **We should pray and not give up.** Even if the answer seems to take awhile.

Application

 Do you want to see God work and do what only God can do?

We need to become persistent in prayer and not quit. It may feel like God is not hearing your prayers or answering them. That is where faith comes in. His timing may not be your timing but His timing is always perfect.

If you aren’t praying, I want encourage you to think in terms of “next steps”. Don’t set a goal of praying an hour a day. Maybe set a goal to pray 10 minutes daily. If you do pray now, then what would be a good “next step” for you?

Close in prayer

Small group questions

1. Do you believe that praying regularly is important? Why/why not?

2. What does prayerlessness communicate about how important we believe prayer really is?

3. Do you presently pray consistently? Why/why not?

4. Why do you think it is so hard to pray consistently?

5. What did you learn from Jesus’ parable that can help you pray as you ought?

6. What do you need to do in application to this lesson?