

Bothering God

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Date: 30 May 2004

Preacher: Paul Dudley

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 30th of May 2004. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled, Bothering God, and is based on Luke chapter 18, verses 1 to 8.

What a church! We're friendly. We preach well, supposedly. We look after each other. We are a great church.

We have survived 150 years and look at us. Isn't it great? But what would you say we need, I mean, we seem to have everything, what would you say we need to last another 150 years?

What's our most urgent need? We seem to be doing okay at the moment. But what about another 150 years? What do we need between now and that 150 years? Well, I guess if you looked at the inside look that we've just had come out recently, perhaps it's our finances.

[1 : 09] If we're to survive the next 150 years, we need better finances. Perhaps what we need to do is we need better, generous people. You need to be more generous. That's how we're going to survive the next 150 years.

Now, hang on a moment. Perhaps we need better evangelism. We need to be bringing more people in here. That's how we're going to survive the next 150 years because eventually you're going to die.

We're going to need other people to come in. So we need to get better at perhaps drawing more people in. Well, perhaps if you ask this question to the church in general, what is the most urgent need of the church in general?

Not just here, but perhaps throughout the world. What's the most urgent need if the church is to survive? Well, perhaps it's the issue of sexual purity.

Perhaps we need better teaching on how we are to conduct our marriages, the way that we are to treat one another sexually. Or perhaps we need a very clear doctrine statement throughout the world on the issue of abortion.

[2 : 08] That would make the church survive. Or perhaps what we need is better Bible colleges. Bible colleges that will teach better theological students.

That's the way we'll ensure a better future. What is it that you and me most urgently need? What is it that Holy Trinity most urgently needs?

What is it that the church most urgently needs? The Bible tells us as we look through it, we need to know God better.

We need to know God better. We need to be people who do not fall away. We need to be people who grow in an understanding of our great God.

That we may know His will and purpose for our life. And do you know the small but vital step that that needs to happen?

[3 : 12] The part of the challenge for that? The foundational step for this to happen, for us to grow in a knowledge of God? Prayer. Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

We need to be a people of prayer. We heard of a cracker of a sermon last week for those who were here last week. A cracker. It was fantastic. We were told to persist in prayer.

I've heard quite a few people saying that they were very challenged by the sermon. Stop and think then. How has it challenged you this week? From what you heard last week about persisting in prayer and being people of prayer, how have your habits changed this week?

Have you become like the great preacher Spurgeon who prayed for two hours a day? Have you started praying for two hours a day? Or perhaps you might be more like Luther who commented one day that he had a busy day the next day.

So he decided he would get up an extra hour early because it was busy the next day and pray for an extra hour. Which meant he was up at four o'clock in the morning. Or perhaps you had changed your habits so you're a bit like my last minister who gets up at 5.30 every morning to pray.

[4 : 42] For me and for the church. Perhaps we're just sitting our standards. Perhaps you have changed a little bit. Perhaps you've actually spent an extra 15 minutes a week this week praying.

Perhaps you've set aside a couple extra times to pray. And perhaps you went home last Sunday night and you got on your knees and you prayed. Or perhaps you didn't.

We've got lots of excuses for not praying, haven't we? I'm too busy. I'm just too busy to pray. It's been a really busy week. I've got my exams this week. Can I just say, this is not just an excuse I'm putting out there.

There's excuses that my own heart says. Perhaps we're too spiritually dry to pray. Or we feel no need to pray. Perhaps we feel too bitter to pray.

Perhaps we feel too ashamed to pray. Perhaps we're just content with mediocrity. Jesus told them.

[5 : 44] Jesus told them their need to pray always and not lose heart. Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem.

It'd be good for you to have your Bibles open to page 853 as we work through this. Jesus is on his road on the way to Jerusalem with his disciples. He's told them that he's going there.

We know why he's going there. He's going there to die. He's there with his disciples walking along. The Pharisees are walking around as well.

And the persecution that Jesus is facing and the questions that he's been asked becomes more and more intense as he gets to Jerusalem. In chapter 17, verse 20, one of the Pharisees comes up to Jesus and say, when is the kingdom coming?

They recognise, they've heard Jesus speak about this kingdom coming. And they say to Jesus, when is it going to come? And then we see from chapter 17, verse 20 through to the end, Jesus giving an answer saying, look, when is not the important question, but the fact that it will come.

[6 : 54] And not only will it come, but it will be a terrible and fearful day. Look in verse 24, it will come like a flash of lightning.

In verse 26, it will be like the days of Noah. In verse 27, they'll be eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage until the day Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.

That's what this day is going to be like when Jesus returns. Like Sodom in verse 29. But on that day that Sodom left, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them.

It will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. We see there in verse 34 that people and families will be separated.

We see in verse 37, it will be a day of death. Jesus knows and says very clearly that he will return.

[8 : 02] He makes it known that the kingdom will come. And it will be a terrible and fearful day. I don't know if you actually thought about that much recently.

About the fact that this world will come to an end. I was driving out just recently. Just driving through the beautiful Melbourne suburbs. And then I started driving out towards this beautiful countryside. And there was all these hills. And it was just magnificent. But I had on a tape of a sermon talking about Jesus' return. And I looked around and I thought, this world is going to change.

In the twinkling of an eye. It's going to just be shaken to its very core. I've been through a few tremors.

We lived in a place where there was a few tremors up in Bathurst outside of Sydney. And it's quite sort of, you know, feeling the earth shake. It's sort of, you know, things start shaking on the shelf.

[9 : 07] And you think, oh dear, what's this? There's nothing compared to the cosmic shaking of the earth. Where the earth is shaken to its very core.

That will happen. Jesus makes it clear. But Jesus knows that when this happens, we'll be a while off.

And that his disciples will actually have to go through a very hard time. That they'll be persecuted. That many of them will lose their lives. And so Jesus gives them this teaching about bothering God.

About their need to pray always and not lose heart. Particularly in the midst of great hardship. We see there two characters. It's a parable that Jesus told.

Two characters that we see in this parable. One is the judge and one is the widow. Now we find out in verse 2 that this judge is a guy who does not fear God. And does not respect people. Now those

who knew their Old Testament would know that in 2 Chronicles.

[10:13] Those who are the judges of God's people. Were to be people who considered very carefully what they did. That they were handing out judgments.

Not on their own behalf. But on behalf of God. They were to be people who feared the Lord. They were to be people who were to take care. They were not to take bribes. But Jesus says in this parable.

Imagine a judge. A judge who has no shame whatsoever. A judge who has no sense of the good. No sense of honour. He is a thoroughly difficult man.

Imagine having to face him. If you had a parking ticket. And you wanted to sort of say. Look I need to get out of this. It wasn't me. Imagine coming to this guy. He would just throw it out. And just say go away.

Well the second character that we got there. We see in verse 3 is the widow. The widow has no support.

[11:15] She has no husband. She is there to look after herself. And in this culture. This is no easy feat. She is living in a male dominated world.

She is living in a world with no social security or welfare benefits. She is a powerless person in this society. This is the widow that comes up to the judge.

Of course the judge should know. That the widows in Israel had a special place. Well she comes up to the judge. And she demands justice.

There is an opponent that she has. She wants justice against this guy. We don't know what this person has done to the widow. Perhaps he's cheated her or hurt her. We have no idea.

That doesn't matter. But she wants justice. And the only person that can give her justice is the judge. And so she comes up to the judge and says. I want justice.

[12:18] As we read on in verses 4 and 5. We see that this judge does not give it to her. For a while he refused. He didn't do it.

He shows his shame. No shame whatsoever. He's quite happy just to ignore this widow. Yet because this widow keeps bothering me. I'm sorry.

For a while he refused. But later he said to himself. Though I have no fear of God. And no respect for anyone. Yet because this widow keeps bothering me. I will grant her justice. So that she may not wear me out.

By her continually coming. This widow keeps on coming up. And keeps on wearing him down. Like a war of attrition. There she is. Coming up into his court.

Day after day. And she just keeps on bothering him. I want justice. I want justice. I want justice. Throw that woman out.

[13:16] I want justice. Next day. I want justice. And she just keeps on wearing him down. And in the end. He's just so worn out.

Oh. For crying out loud. Just give her justice. Get her out of my court. I don't want to hear anymore. And he grants her justice. Jesus goes on to explain in verses 6 through to 8.

I guess a bit of less to more. A bit of a part of the parable. If it is like this with the unjust judge.

Jesus says. How much more so with God. A loving father. So if this unjust judge. Who has no shame. Is going to grant justice. What about a loving God.

Who cares for his children. A loving father. How much more will he grant justice. Look what it says there in verse 7. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones.

[14:17] Who cry to him day and night. Will he delay long in helping them. I tell you. He will quickly grant justice. To them. Jesus is saying to his disciples.

Look at the character of God. Look at this character that you've got. In God. He is a God who listens. He is a God who will not delay in helping. He is a God who will bring justice.

Here is a God that is sovereign and just. Here is a God who is worth trusting. Here is a God that is worth persisting in prayer with. So therefore disciples. When you come up against hard times.

Keep praying. Keep praying. And don't lose heart. The disciples did come across hard times.

The final hours of Jesus life. As we flip the pages. Of Luke. Where do we see Jesus? We see him.

[15:17] Bothering God. Praying in the garden. Praying to his father. What about the disciples?

Jesus. Jesus has given them this warning. Keep persisting in prayer. Don't give up. Don't lose heart. What are the disciples doing? They're asleep.

They abandon Jesus. As we read on through the New Testament. We see that Jesus is vindicated.

We see that there is a God who does come quickly. A God who brings justice. And Jesus is raised to life. Three days later.

Here is a God who listens to Jesus' prayers. A God who vindicates his son. I wonder if the disciples in the midst of all that.

[16:18] Had the last part of verse 8 going through their head. And yet when the son of man comes. Will he find faith. On the earth. You can imagine him sort of sitting there.

In the midst of all this turmoil. Running away from Jesus when it counts. Falling asleep. When they should be praying. I wonder if they had in their minds.

As Jesus died. Will he find faith on the earth. What about us?

Are we any different to the disciples? Left our own devices. Would have we done any better than the disciples? Would have we been on our knees praying away?

Or would we be people. Thinking about. Will Jesus find faith. On the earth. I guess the reality is. Left our own devices.

[17:28] If Jesus returned. He would find no one faithful. Left our own devices. No one would persist in prayer. Left our own devices. No one would hold on.

But we have a gracious God. A gracious. And loving God. We have a God. God. Who takes upon himself.

The death that we deserve. The punishment we deserve. For not being people persisting in prayer. A God. Who takes upon himself. The penalty of everything that we've done wrong.

All our failures. What a gracious God. He takes that penalty for us. And not only that. He pours out his spirit upon us. Uniting us.

Uniting us. By faith within Christ. What a gracious thing. Pouring out his spirit. Enabling us now.

[18:27] Just like Christ. Is able to speak directly to the father. We. By faith united in Christ. Can now speak directly to the father. When you pray. You speak to God. The father himself.

Because you are united. By the spirit. Not only that. God in his graciousness. Takes our weak and feeble prayers. And makes them perfect prayers.

Because we are in Christ. Not only that. Our spirit encourages us. To grow in godliness. The spirit pours out. Poured out upon us.

Helps us to. To grow in our godliness. To be people who persist in prayer. Not only that. God in his graciousness. Uses our prayers. To bring about his will. What a gracious God we have.

What an awesome God. What an awesome privilege we have. Of prayer. So therefore. What's my encouragement to you? Because of this graciousness. That God has.

[19:27] Has brought about for us. Bringing us into the family of God. Let us be people. Who reflect that character of God. Let us be people. Who persist in prayer. And do not give up.

Let us reflect that character. Not because we think. That it might earn God's favour. Not because we think. That it might. Give us some brownie points. But let us persist in prayer.

And not give up. Because that reflects the character. Of God. Of Christ. Therefore. Remember that. There is a day that will come. The day of the son of man. When he will be revealed. In all his glory. Where the earth will be shaken to its core. Keep that in your mind.

Know that God will come one day. To vindicate you. Know. Know. Know. Know. That one day. God will set things right. Know that there is a God. Who listens to you.

[20:24] And therefore. In light of that. Keep praying. Keep bothering God. Keep reflecting. The character of God.

Seen most clearly. In his son. Let me give you some practical tips. About doing this. How is it that we can. Practically. Keep on praying.

Be people of prayer. Well. Here's the first one. Plan to pray. Plan. Sometime each day. Get out your diaries. Even if you need to. Plan to pray.

Because if you plan to pray. Then you're more likely to pray. Adopt. Practical ways. To actually stop you from. Drifting away mentally. When you're praying. I've got a couple of examples.

My wife. And I have three kids. It's very difficult. For my wife to pray. Particularly in the morning. When she's got three kids. Running around the house. Well.

[21:22] Two walking. And one crawling. And you've got ABC for kids going on. And she wants to spend some time in prayer. How does she stop her mind from drifting. While praying to God.

Early in the morning. After breakfast. She has a diary. And she writes out her prayers. She loves writing. And so here we have. A book. Of her prayers.

That she writes out in the morning. For that day. It stops her from drifting. Stops her from. From losing concentration. Of her prayer. She writes it out. The kids know that. When she's writing. She's praying. There's one practical tip for you. Perhaps another way. That you might help yourself. In prayer. Is to develop prayer partners. People that you can pray with regularly. And here's another one. Perhaps choose models. That work. Work well. [22 : 16] But choose well. What models you're going to use. Develop systems of prayer lists. I started. Early on in my prayer. In my days. Writing in a diary. And I have a diary here. Of the prayers that I pray.

And in it. I would write. You know. My bible study prayers. The prayers for that week. And I would just. Write them in a book. But now I have a prayer list. I'm not trying to set myself up here. As. This is a model. That you could follow. But this is. Just one way. That helps me. And in this folder. I put here. My prayer list. Things that I pray for each day. Is on the first page here. And then. I have. All the way through here. Different things that I pray for. Praying for Ali Saunders. And their prayer letter. I have the youth work. The youth workers letter here. I have Peter Adams letter. I have our. 150 days worth of prayer. In there. Just a list of prayers. That help me each day. What other practical ways. [23 : 11] Can we persist in prayer. Try. Mingling your praise. Confession intercessions. Try tying them.

To the scripture passage. That you read that day. I guess finally. Some wise advice. Pray. Until you start praying. Just keep praying. Start. Start praying. As you came in tonight. You would have seen. All the fantastic things out there. Reflecting the history. Of Holy Trinity.

150 years are out there. There's some lovely wedding dresses. Photos on the wall. Of great moments. In the 150 years. Of Holy Trinity. On this wall. Going down here. Are some of the memories. Of the people. Of being here. In Holy Trinity. All these great things. Talking about. How we survived. 150 years.

[24 : 09] Even our. Quilt here. Reflecting some of the things. Of our past. Wouldn't it be interesting. That. Out there on the roof.

And on the walls. Was written all the prayers. That people have prayed. Over the last. 150 years. The Holy Trinity. Doncaster. Perhaps. It would be so many. That.

It would start filling. Up this whole area here. So just. Little bits of paper. The prayers. That have been prayed. And they'd be stuck. All over the roof. And all over the walls. Imagine.

If we could see. All the prayers. Of faithful people. Praying. For the church here. Look. There's a prayer there. For you.

I wonder how many. There would be. Praying for you. For myself. For Paul. All the prayers. Scattered all over the church.

[25 : 03] It would be interesting. Wouldn't it. Instead of having. Perhaps some of the memorabilia. Out there. Having these prayers. Of faithful people. Praying. That Holy Trinity. Would keep on going. I wonder what type of prayers.

We'd see in 150 years time. Are your prayers. Going to be. Scattered on the walls. Somewhere. Are you going to be.

People of prayer. Praying for yourself. And for the ministry. Here at Holy Trinity. I wonder where. Your prayers would be. Would they be there.

At all. Would you be a person. Who did not persist. And gave up. How about I. Add a prayer now. For us. A prayer that. The Bible teaches us. Right at the end. Of the Bible. Let me pray. Come.

[26 : 01] Lord Jesus. Come. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.