

Why Pray

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[0 : 01] Let's pray while you remain standing. Father God, thank you for your word and we pray today that you would help us as we seek to understand it. Please be at work in us by your spirit and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Oh, please sit down. Amen. He sat among the ashes and the sores that riddled his body plagued him grievously.

He scratched at them. They gnawed back at him. And the only successful strategy that he found was to take a broken piece of pottery and to scrape away at them.

His wife nagged away at him. She thought his maintenance of integrity was greatly misplaced. Surely he should see through it. Surely he should stop trusting God.

Surely he must curse God and die. But Job would have none of it. However, he could not accept his fate blindly. No, he'd take his cause to God.

[1 : 09] And so he cried out, how long would it be? How long before God would leave him alone long enough, says Job, till he could swallow his spit? How long would his friends berate him and falsely accuse him of sin?

How long before God would vindicate him finally? In another place and another time, King David wearily strums away at a stringed instrument.

And he too takes his complaint to God. Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.

Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint. Heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony and my soul is in deep anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?

Turn, Lord, and deliver me. Save me because of your unfailing love. In still another place and another time, one of God's saints sits in a dark cell where he can barely even stretch out.

[2 : 15] He waits for his tormentors to come again to cart him off to a place of cruelty where he will be urged again to give up his faith in Jesus.

In the darkness, he whispers silently and says, how long, Lord Jesus? How long before this ends one way or another?

In yet another place and another time, another saint weakly smiles at the illness that eats away at her body and asks, why?

Why is this taking so long? How long before he takes me to be with him? And elsewhere, a young man walks beside his new wife and wonders about the day ahead.

He knows it will be filled with searching the internet again, looking for a job that might use his qualifications, filling in job applications, and he silently mutters to himself, how long, O Lord?

[3 : 22] How long before you sort this out? How long before I find a job to support us both? Friends, the world that we live in is a world created and ruled by a God who is good and who is powerful.

And yet, it is a world filled with apparent inconsistencies and anomalies. So how do we respond in a world that is like that? Your situation will be very different from the ones that I painted earlier on.

But nevertheless, you will find world much the same as that. How should we respond to our God in a world like that? And that's the burden of the passage we are going to look at today.

So I'd like you to pick up your Bibles and look at Luke chapter 18 with me, verses 1 to 8. Not a long passage. Now, the first thing we need to do about this parable is work out who to whom it is addressed.

And we're told in verse 1 that it is addressed to them. And if you look back a few verses, you can see who the them is. The them is the disciples who've been listening in back in chapter 17.

[4:30] A parable is addressed to disciples in chapter 17 who have been listening to Jesus teach about the day when the Son of Man will be revealed. They will be days of terrible persecution.

There will be days when people wonder when the injustice of persecution will end. And then people will wonder when one of the days of the Son of Man will come.

You see, Jesus is speaking this parable to those people who wonder such things. And that's confirmed by the mention of the Son of Man in verse 8. Jesus is therefore directing this parable to disciples who see, know and experience the difficulty of being Christian while they wait for God's purposes to be revealed and fulfilled.

They will see, know and experience the apparent randomness of things in this world. And as chapter 17 makes clear, this will be a time when one of them will be taken and another one will be left.

Can you see what I'm saying? This is a parable about prayer. And while it can tell us lots about prayer, it is not just a general parable about prayer.

[5:51] This is a parable about praying to God when things are not right. It's about crying out to God for him to set things right. It is a prayer about waiting for God to set things right.

Now, as I say this, we've already begun to think about its purpose, haven't we? Verse 1 makes clear this purpose even more. If you have a look at it there, look at what Luke tells us in verse number 1.

He tells us that Jesus told them this parable about the need to pray and not lose heart. It has a dual purpose. It is designed to urge the godly to pray and it's designed to urge the godly not to lose heart in their prayer.

Now, why would you want to urge Christians to do these things with these particular ideas? Well, again, I think the context of chapter 17 helps. You see, in the world of chapter 17, God does not appear to be achieving his purposes in Jesus.

The world of chapter 17 is a world that looks out of control. And when the world is like this, then there's a danger that you think that God is not in control at all.

[7:06] Or there's a danger of thinking he doesn't know about the sorts of things that are happening in his world. Or there's a danger of thinking that he can't, even if he did know, he can't actually do anything about it.

But that's not all. The world of chapter 17 is a world where there's the likelihood that you will pray about the injustices of the world and not see any answer. And so you pray again.

And again, there's no answer. And so you pray again and again, there's no answer. And eventually, after praying and praying and praying and seeing no answer, you give up praying.

So that's the people to whom the parable is directed. Christian disciples like us. Christian disciples who perhaps have stopped praying or are in danger of stopping praying.

And that's its purpose. It is to encourage us to pray and not give up. Okay, with that in mind, let's see what this parable has to say.

[8 : 05] And the story is straightforward enough. You heard it read. There's this unnamed city somewhere. And in that city, there's an unnamed judge who's not a God-fearer and he's not a people-lover.

And in the same city, there's a widow who keeps coming to see this judge to seek justice over some issue or the other. Initially, this judge refuses.

In the end, her persistence just wears him down. And even though he admits that he's not a God-fearer or a people-lover, he will give her justice. Now, let's take a closer look at this parable because there's lots in it and there's much to say.

First thing I want you to notice is the issue at stake. The issue is one of justice. Verse 3 makes that clear. This widow is seeking justice and against an adversary or an opponent.

Second thing I want you to notice is the judge. Verse 2 tells us he's a judge who, as I've said, neither fears God nor respects people. And in case you didn't hear it, verse 4 tells us the same thing.

[9 : 14] This is an ungodly, unrighteous, uncaring man. He neither fears God nor respects people. The third thing I want you to notice is the response of the judge.

The judge tells us himself why he responds. He doesn't respond because he's kind. He's not that. He has no respect of people.

He's not a kind man. He doesn't respond because he's kind. He doesn't respond because he fears God. He's an ungodly, non-fearing, non-God-fearing man.

No. He gives justice because the widow persists and he simply wants a bit of peace in his life. He wants to get rid of her and rid of her nagging.

His motivations are entirely, entirely self-centered. He doesn't want justice at all. He simply wants some peace. Friends, can you see what's going on here?

[10 : 13] In telling this parable, Jesus is going out of the way to make sure that we don't get it wrong. Do not identify this judge with God.

He is not a God-fearer, this judge. He is not a respecter of people, a lover of people. He is a totally self-centered, unrighteous judge.

And in case we miss the point, Jesus makes that clear in verse 6. He is unrighteous. Very important because people misread this.

And then Jesus goes on to make the point. And in doing so, he contrasts this unrighteous judge with God. In Luke chapter 11, verse 13, Jesus had already told us that God is a loving father who loves giving good gifts to his children.

And so he will reply to our requests because he loves us and loves giving good things to us.

[11 : 15] He will give justice to his elect who cry out to him night and day. God is not an unrighteous judge. He doesn't care. He is our loving father who loves justice.

But that's not all Jesus says. Look at the end of verse 7. Jesus has already implied why God replies. And now he tells us how God replies.

And he indicates by rhetorical question that God will not delay. Saying that God will not delay. And then in verse 8, he pushes it home. Can you see it there? Look at what he says. It's categorical. He says, I tell you, he, that is God, will give justice to them speedily.

God will not tarry. God will not be slow. God will give justice. And he will give it speedily and without delay. There's this wonderful story in the book of Daniel.

Where Daniel prays. And we're told that even while the words are on his lips. God sends his angel.

[12:23] To answer Daniel's request. There's one more thing, though, that Jesus has to say in this parable. We see Jesus puts a sting in the tail of it. Look at verse 8. Look, Jesus looks his disciples in the eyes.

And he says, he asks, he says to them very, very significantly. These words, have a look at it. He says, and yet.

In other words, even though God loves his people. Even though God promises speedy justice to his people. Even though God promises the revealing of the son of man.

When the son of man finally comes. Will he find faith in the earth? In other words. Will he find people that actually believe this?

Will he find people who believe that God really does love his people? Will he find people who believe that God loves to bring speedy justice to his people?

[13:25] Friends, I want to ask you. Why Jesus needed to tell this parable? For you are disciples. Disciples like the disciples in these days.

Why was this parable needed? I suspect it is because so many of us view God as either unjust or uninterested. He sits there in his throne in heaven.

He doesn't really care about the earth. He doesn't really care about us. And we need to get his attention somehow. And so we knock and we ask and we yell and we shout.

And we moan and we groan. And somehow we think that we will get through to him and get. Somehow if we do all of these things we'll get his attention. And get some action.

And we don't. At least we perceive we don't. And so we give up. And deep inside of us. We think that God is no longer interested.

[14:28] He's not there. Or he's uninterested. And he's indifferent to injustice in his world. And he's indifferent to the injustices we find in our own world.

In our own lives. And we think oh he doesn't really care anymore. But worse than that. We even begin to think he's indifferent to the injustice that his people suffer.

And so we think somehow deep inside. That there's no reasonable hope that things will ever be set right.

And we give up. And I bet there are people here who have done exactly that. Who have given up. And have stopped praying.

And can you see what this parable is saying friends. Very important. Can you see the challenges that Jesus is putting to us. The whole of the Bible is clear.

[15:23] God has a purpose for his world. And that purpose is justice and good and peace. God has a purpose for his people.

And that purpose is also justice and good and peace. And God is determined in pushing toward that purpose in his world. And nothing will stop him.

God is pushing on toward that purpose. Nothing will stop him. Despite all the contraindications. One day God will intervene in this world.

He will end all injustice and all evil. And Christ will come. And the days of the Son of Man will be revealed. And justice will be done. But when that day comes.

Will there be anyone left on earth who still believes it? Will there be anyone who still really believes that God is good. And has the good of his people in mind.

[16:23] Will there be anyone. Who trusts that there is a good and righteous judge. Who loves to deliver justice. Friends. Friends when he comes.

Will you still believe it? Do you believe it now? You see if we Christians have stopped praying. Then I think it is because we've stopped believing these things.

We've stopped believing in a God who's sovereign. We've stopped believing in a God who loves justice. And setting things right. How do you stand friends?

Do you still have faith in this God? Or have you lost heart? If so. I want to urge you today to remember who your God is.

He's the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is not some unrighteous judge. He doesn't have your best interests in mind.

[17:22] He's a judge who loves you. He's a God who loves you. He's a God who sent his son into the world to die for you. He longs to give good gifts to his children.

And you if you are believers in Jesus are his children. He will be swift to bring justice. Friends this Bible talk today is the first in a long series that is coming on prayer.

Our focus this year at Holy Trinity is going to be on prayer. So in the next few weeks I'm going to preach about things such as why should we pray? Why don't we pray?

How should we pray in public? How should we pray in private? Ten top tips for improving your prayer life. And then we're going to have a series of sermons on great prayers of the Bible.

My hope is that in these sermons, these Bible talks and through them we'll be fuelled as God's people to be people of prayer. And my prayer is that our prayer life will deepen and be enriched.

[18:28] However, I want to start with asking ourselves why do we pray? And even though our parable doesn't directly answer this question, it shows us the heart of the matter.

You see, our parable shows us God's people at their lowest. And as it shows us God's people at their lowest, it urges us how to respond.

It urges us to be like the widow. You see, this widow in this parable is impoverished. She is in a desperate situation. She is in a helpless situation.

She has an unrighteous judge. She has an unrighteous judge who doesn't answer her prayer. Friends, this unrighteous judge is not God. No.

Our God is a good God. He's a God who knows our every need. He's a God who knows our greatest need and has met it in his son. He is a God who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

[19:35] He is a God who is good to all. He is a God who, the psalmist says, opens his hand and satisfies the desires of his people.

He is a God who is near to all who call upon him. Friends, our God has related himself to us in Jesus, his son. He is our father.

We are his children. He loves giving good things to his children. But I think we have imbibed the spirit of our age.

It is a spirit of self-sufficiency where we or our money or our own ability to fill our own hands with good things dominates.

Friends, this is a lie. It's an idolatry. God alone is God. We are not. And we pray to God because we know that he alone is God.

[20:38] He wants us to express our dependence upon him, our knowledge that he is the source of all good things. He wants us to come before him in good times and in bad times.

And when we do, we can come filled with faith and confidence. That is why we pray. We pray because in the end we know that God is the supplier of all good things.

In him is found every good thing. And when we come to him, we seek good things from his hands. He will not always give them to us at the right time.

But friends, when Jesus comes again, will he find people who have faith in his world?

Were he to come tomorrow? Would he find us? Believers in him and in his goodness.

[21 : 40] Would he find people who really do believe these things about God? Will he find people who believe that God loves his people?

Will he find people who believe that God loves to bring speedy justice to his people? Will he find people who go to God incessantly and urgently? Will he find us on our knees?

Will he find us in prayer? Because friends, there is no other place to go in this world. than to a good God. We know him to be good through his son.

Who loves to give good gifts to his children. So let us turn to him now and ask him to do so. Our Father, we come to you knowing that you have an open hand and desire to fill our lives with good things.

Father, we don't always know what is good for us but we know your desire is good for us. And friends, as we pray now, I'm just going to stop and I know many people here have great things they need to bring before God and so I'm just going to give you a moment to do that in the quietness of your own hearts.

[23 : 16] Let us bring those things before God which we long will be set right. Father, we come to you knowing that as the widow had many burdens we too, Father, have many things that we need to bring before you.

And Father, we don't know the answer to them. Many of the things we bring are deep and grievous to us. We know you may not answer our prayers in the way we want them answered but this day we come to you knowing that you will give justice speedily to your people that you love giving good gifts to your children and these things that we have brought before you in the silence of our own hearts we entrust to you and to the things that you've taught us in your Son in this passage.

We come to you knowing you are a good God who loves giving good things to his children and we commit these things to you this day in Jesus' name.

Amen.