

The Need For Prayer

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[0 : 00] It's a great privilege for me to have been invited to be sharing with you in the ministry of the words of God tonight.

I've very much enjoyed being back in Vancouver for the past two and a half weeks and spending time with many of you over meals. I remember one occasion sitting outside on the grass at the BBC Peepcare Hospital and just meeting many of my friends and sharing with you what the Lord has been doing in our lives.

I'd like to share a text with you tonight that the Lord has played on my heart. And one of the major privileges of being here the past three and a half weeks has been to share with you in prayer and praise.

So I thought it might be appropriate to speak a little bit about what Jesus has to teach us about prayer. My text is Luke chapter 18 verses 1 to 8.

You will find that in the New Testament section of your Bibles on page 77. Luke 18 chapters 1 verses 1 to 8.

[1 : 29] And Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart.

He said, In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, Vindicate me against my adversary.

For a while he refused. But afterward he said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor regard man. Yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, For she will wear me out by her continual coming.

And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate the elect and cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, Will he find faith on the earth? When I started looking at this passage, And considered whether it might be appropriate to speak on it tonight, I found it to be a very strange passage.

[2 : 50] I had a great deal of trouble getting a hold of what the actual point might be. At first it seems in verse 1, But before Luke reports what Jesus actually said, He seems to be dropping both cues right at the beginning.

He says, And he told them a parable, To the effect that they ought always to pray, And not to lose heart. Well, not many parables are told in this way. First, He gives away the point of seeing, Then he tells the parable, And then he gives the application.

The approach that Luke takes, It almost reminds me of the advice that I read, In my first year at UBC, I think, In a few Luke papers, Which sort of gave away the secret of getting A's on your firm papers.

He said, First, You tell them what you're about to say, Then you say it. Then you say that you said it. And this almost seemed to be the approach, At first. And I was wondering, Well, That's all the point.

That's all that the point is. It seems a bit blasé, And a bit superficial. Let's get on with life. It just didn't seem to be where I am at, Or presumably where you're at, To get this simple encouragement to pray.

[4 : 02] Well, We all know that it's good to pray. Another observation that really bothered me at first, Is that, The point of the parable seems to change as we go along. About three or four turns or twists in the appearance.

First of all, In verse 1, We ought at all times to pray, And not to lose heart. Then, In the actual parable, Which comes in verses 2 through 5, The point seems to be that by continually nagging this judge, The widow eventually, Finally gets her way.

Then, Jesus' explanation in verses 6 to 8a, The first part of verse 8, Seems quite different. It says that, God will vindicate the believers suddenly, And speedily.

It seems to not quite match up with what the widow is actually doing. And finally, Verse 8b, The last part of verse 8, When the Son of Man comes, Will he find faith on the earth?

That question doesn't seem to fit in at all. What does that have to do with? You start looking at a few commentaries, You find that the professional theologians, And the professional Bible study leaders, Have some of the same problems.

[5 : 11] So, They decide, For instance, That verse 1 really has nothing to do with what Jesus said, And this is just a comment that Luke makes, To try and fit it into his mold. Or, That verse 6 to 8a, Only give Luke's own commentary on the parable, That that's not really what Jesus meant.

Or that verse 8b, Is just a way of putting it all into context, Or something like that. Well, I didn't, Quite frankly, Find that particularly helpful either, Because, You sort of think, Well, How do you apply that?

What is the meaning of the parable? Are there three or four points? Or, What do we do with it? It sort of reminded me a little bit of, You know, That passage in Alice in Wonderland, Where she received some advice, About the nature of higher learning.

And, The mock turtle tells her, Well, Higher learning is sort of, Reeling and writhing. And then of course, The different branches of arithmetic. Ambition, Distraction, Agrification, And derision.

Anyway, I just felt that, Breaking the passage into these three or four, Segments, Which seem to have different points, Wasn't going to be particularly helpful. It doesn't, It can help with an application for our lives.

[6 : 20] So I'd like us to start over again, From verse one. And in fact, If we want to understand, What verses one to eight are all about, We need to, Go back just a few verses earlier, To chapter 17, And verse 20.

Which sort of introduces that, That new section. Being asked by the Pharisees, When the kingdom of God was coming, The answer to them, The kingdom of God is not coming, It's signs to be observed.

The question that Jesus is responding to, In the, The speech that follows, Is the question of the Pharisees, When is the kingdom of God coming? And it seems that everything, That follows on this, Is still related to the question, When is the kingdom of God coming?

Because verse 8b, In our parable, Says, When the son of man comes, Will he find faith on the earth? It seems, That is still the same thing. And, And in that sense, Verse 8b does seem to relate everything, To the general context, When is the kingdom coming?

When is Jesus going to return? So with this in mind, I'd like to spend, In the next few minutes, To try and unravel, Some of the things, That the Lord might have to say, Through our parable, In the great verses, I think there's basically, A threefold structure, In what we're dealing with, And that, We could perhaps, Best just follow along, In this outline, It may be a bit of an unusual outline, In that the three points, Are really just two, Point one, We came to point three, I titled them, The need for prayer, The assurance of God's salvation, God's answer, And the need for prayer, And I think that that's how, Jesus goes through, And how the parable is given to us, Our first point then, Is the need for prayer, Because one says, They ought always to pray, And not to lose heart, This doesn't express so much, A duty, Or an encouragement, As a necessity, The actual word,

[8 : 24] That's used in the Greek, Seems to say, It's necessary, That they should pray, And that they should not lose heart, And it's necessary, That they ought always to pray, That does not mean, Perpetual prayer, The Jews didn't particularly think, That that was a good idea, I don't think that, That's what Jesus is after either, We're not to pray all the time, But what it does say, Is we're to pray at all times, Which means, It's not, Continual prayer, Not prayer, 24 hours a day, But continuous prayer, Prayer that continues, Day after day, And hour after hour, Prayer where we keep, Coming back to God, And prayer, And the illustration, I think of this, Is given right in our parable, When the widow, Keeps coming to them, Verse 3, There was a widow, In that city, Who kept coming, To the evil judge, Kept bothering them, Kept coming, That I think, Is what it meant, We keep, We return, To God in prayer, All the time, That is what it meant, By praying at all times, It is not necessary,

For all of us, To be praying, To be on our knees, 24 hours a day, Some of us may, Be asked to do that, Especially people, Who have given, Their entire lives to God, In a monastic, Way of life, But, For all Christians, Prayer ought to be, A way of life, Prayer ought to be, A lifestyle, There is one other thing, That verse 1 says, About why, We are not to pray, What is the one thing, I haven't mentioned yet, This is, We are not to lose heart, I think that, There is an intention, Expressing, In the encouragement, To pray, Which is explained, By they are not to lose heart, We are to pray, In order that, We do not lose heart, The word could be, Translated also, In order that, We do not grow weary, In order that, We do not grow tired, In order that, We don't get fed up, That's why, We need to pray, What, What is it, That we might get fed up with, If we don't pray,

Well, I think that, One correct answer, Certainly is, That we don't get fed up, With the Christian life, So we don't get up, With faith itself, Many who have dropped, Their faith, I think have done so, Because of a lack, Of persistent prayer, A lack of prayer, At all times, And many, Give up praying, Before their answer, But maybe, Another indication, Of what might be meant, Is to be found, In chapter 17, Verse 22, In the passage, Just from these, Our passage, The days are coming, It says, When you will long, To see one of the days, The son of man, And you will not see it, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus here, Seems to imply, That after his death, And resurrection, When he has ascended, To be with the father, Christians will long, Believers will long, For the coming, Of God's kingdom, And for his return, And he also, Seems to be implying, That the normal, Situation, The normal experience,

Of our lives, Is that we long, For him, But we experience, Tension, Because he hasn't come yet, And, A normal experience, Is that we are longing, To see the return, Of the son of man, But we do not see, Very much of the glory, That that will mean, Around us, And here's where, Verse 1 again, Chapter 18, Makes sense, We need always, Pray inside of that, So that we do not, Lose heart, We need to keep praying, Like the book of revelation, They say, Come Lord, Maranatha, We need to be longing, For him to come, I think, That what happens, With many of our, Compatriots who have, Given up going to church, And I believe that, Particularly too, In this city, One of the problems, Is that, The promise of our, Of our salvation, If we don't, Keep holding on to it, In prayer, If we don't, Keep longing for the, Coming of God, This promise of our salvation, Will first become, Blurred and superficial, Then unreal, And finally unnecessary, And then we don't come back,

I don't think, That this, Um, Parable applies, Only to, Prayer for the coming, Of the kingdom, Only for prayer, Of the coming, Of Christ, Final coming of Christ, But, That it also, Even though that is, Certainly our, Genic desire, That it's supposed to be, At the top of our agenda, But that also, It means, We would pray, That Jesus and his kingdom, Will come, And bring healing, And deliverance, In our lives, Here and now, That there are, Situations of suffering, Of spiritual need, Of physical need, And a broken relationship, Where, We are also meant to pray, We are also meant to pray, And not be part of it, I guess the point, Ultimately, Is we are to pray, Not to pray when, We feel up, Or down, Or in the mood, But to pray until we come, And that includes, The situations, We are facing in the present, As well as, The final coming, Of the present, So, We have included,

[13 : 38] In this passage, Both, What Jesus talks about, In verses 22, The longing, For the actual coming, His actual return, As well as, The longing, For deliverance, The longing, For salvation, In our everyday, Mundane situation, I guess, The next question, That he will answer, As well, That's fine, But will he answer, Will he, Will he come, Will he actually return, Is this prayer, Going to be answered, I think to look at that, And to answer this question, We need to actually, Take a quick peek, At this parable, And that is my second point, The assurance, Of God's answer, The verse, Let's see, What Jesus has to say, About this, Verse 30, The judge, Verse 2, In a certain city, There was a judge, In fact, You can translate, In a certain city, There was a certain judge, In other words, The details aren't important, But what is more important,

Is that, It says, He neither feared God, Nor regarded man, That's sort of, A universally, Inclusive description, Of what you might call, The average bad guy, This guy was really a crook, He couldn't care less, About God, The bible says, God is the supreme judge, Well this guy, Had no use for that, But he also, Was the president, By human beings, In particular, Maybe, Maybe this was because, He was open to take pride, Maybe this was because, He was simply established, In a position, And it's just an armchair bureaucrat, He couldn't care less, But here's somebody, Who's really, Just a nasty character, This is the judge, And a widow, Comes to this judge, Now, A widow in our, In our society, Isn't quite the same, As a widow, Back in bible days, Because, There was no social security, And no welfare checks, Every month, And widows, Where you're typically, Defenseless, Typically helpless, Person in society, There was,

They were socially handicapped, They were usually, Poverty and crooked, And, They had no influence, And no power, And certainly, No way of driving, The judge, This woman, Kept coming, Says, Verse 3, Kept coming to him, And, To try and get him, To secure her rights, To help her out, Against her opponent, Says, Vindicate me, Against my adversary, We don't know, What this was, Or who this was, Or what he was trying to do, Maybe, He was giving her a bad time, Because she couldn't pay back, Her husband's debt, Or, He was trying to evict her, From an apartment, That he couldn't pay for anymore, But, Whatever it was, He was, This man was putting pressure on her, And she felt, That she needed legal protection, And she had a right to expect that, Because judges were supposed, To give preference, To people like themselves, Who were socially inferior, And socially underprivile, And then, Verse 4, The judge refuses, It actually says,

He refused, Refused for some time, Some time, The widow kept coming, The judge kept refusing, We don't know how long, It went on, But he was, He was, He was giving her a hard time, He's sort of the, The typical bureaucrat, Who thinks, The world is a choice, And, And, You know that kind of thing, Please fill out this for me, The typical bureaucrat, The top 17 passport photos, To come back, In two to three weeks, And then in two to three weeks, They tell you, You don't qualify, Because of rule 27, As the leading claim, In some brackets, But you're welcome, To reapply under, Except you're violating, Once you come back, In another three weeks, That sort of thing, At least you can imagine, The situation, But anyhow, Finally, The judge gives in, Now why does he give in, Because he's particularly, Impressed by, By this woman, That just, It seems, Because he's concerned, About his public interest, This bothersome woman, Keeps coming, He wants to be rid of her, Because the legal firm, Is getting an attorney's reputation, He's not doing, What he's supposed to be doing,

For this woman, And evidently, She's not letting him go, The widow's going, To make him look bad, And he doesn't, He says, By her, Her continually coming to me, She will wear me out, In fact, That could be translated, She will, She will give me a black eye, And he will, She will make me, Publicly disgraceful, So he grudgingly, Turns out, And he's trying to, Change us around, So he turns around, And he can't find, And give her what he wants, So this much for the story, Now if you're, At all like me, You may think, What a terrible situation, How would you want to explain, Something about care, With this nasty character, Who is the helper, With her, Keep bothering for a long time, And finally gets, Gets away, Why would, Why would you use this, To speak something, About the character of God, Well, I don't think, You can find out anything, From the story itself, It does seem to be,

[18 : 40] Rather a part of a care, But let's look at, What Jesus does with it, Verses six, To the first part of verse eight, The Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge says, And will not God, Vindicate the elect, To cry to him day and night, Will he delay long over them, I tell you, He will vindicate, The speed of the people, So it turns out, That the point of the parable, Is not anything, In the story itself, But precisely the contrast, Between this judge, Is totally useless, To the nasty judge, And the character of God, Even, What he's saying, What Jesus is saying, If even a positively, Evil, And unbelieving man, Can turn around, And help what to him, Is just a bothersome, And significant old woman, How much more certain, Is the deliverance, Of those who are God's elect, The deliverance of those, Who are chosen, And beloved by God, The contrast, Between God and the judge,

Is brought out very, Very forcefully, Here you have the judge, Who is an immoral, Atheist, A careless person, Somebody who is, Who is, Evil to his roots, And who really is, Just looking out for number one, In the name of himself, He's hard hearted, To the end, And doesn't really give in, Because he's swayed, By moral standards, Or anything like that, But he gives in, Out of self-esteem, Because he wants to save, Because he doesn't want, To be bothered, By himself, And then you have God, On the other side, Who knows the plight, Of his people, And who grieves, For their suffering, And his heart is burdened, For them, Then the point, Of the questions, In verse seven, Is once it establishes, This contrast, Will not God, Vindicate the elect, To cry to him, Day and night, Will he delay, Long over them, The point of those questions, Is would God, Who is so different, From his judge, Would he, To step in, Would he, Would he delay, Would he say, Come back in three weeks, Would he say,

You have to fill out, These forms, That we don't qualify, The answer in verse 8a, Is of course not, God will rescue, And vindicate them quickly, And that too, Of course, Is a contrast, With God, The promise we're given, Is that God, Will deliver us, Speedily, In verse 8, Which could often, Be translated, Suddenly, Now, I think probably, Both is intended, This has to do, With the application, Of this help, That God is going to give, In chapter 17, Verses 24, And I guess, And the following verses, To the end of the chapter, We're told, How surprising, The return of Christ, Will be, How surprising, The coming, Will be, To save, And save his people, The images that are used, The comparisons, That are made, Are, It would be like, A flash of lightning, Or, It would be like, The coming of the flood, In Noah's day, When people were marrying, And getting married, And having a good time,

And all of a sudden, The flood comes, Or, It is also compared, To the sudden destruction, Of Sodom and Gomorrah, So, Christ's coming, Will be so sudden, That it will take many people, By surprise, And it will probably, Take us by surprise, But, I think, It also means, That this coming, Will be soon, Because verses 7, And 8 of our passage, Tell us, That God will not delay, But act as quickly, So, The assurances of God, Will answer soon, And he will answer suddenly, Verse 7, Certainly recognizes, These questions, Or certainly recognize, That it may seem, As though God is taking, A long time, And it may seem, As though the answer is delayed, But nonetheless, It promises, He will answer soon, Now, How do we apply that, How do we understand, That this answer was assumed, What, What does that mean, In a situation, When it actually does seem, That God is taking, A long time,

God is delayed, But I think, Once again, The application could be, In two ways, First, First, To the actual, Coming of Christ, There is, There is, A way in which, It may seem, That Christ's coming, Is delayed, Because, Jesus said, That he would return soon, But plus, It may seem, Sometimes, Like it's taking forever, And, At that point, The promise, That we're given, Is that God is Lord, And he will certainly, Do as he has said, It may seem afterwards, Or it may seem, While we're going through, The experience, That it was a long time, That it was, It was very hard, To swallow, Why, Why has it taken, Two thousand years, For him to fill this conference, We may find afterwards, That, It was actually, A short time, We realize, That it was only, A short period of waiting, Compared to the glory, That lies ahead, But in the meantime, We're to pray, Always,

[23 : 44] And not to lose, In the heart, As verse one says, I think secondly, We also stay comfort, From this promise, For our daily life, While we're going, Through this experience, Of waiting for the return, The reason I think, That is that, We are finite human beings, And God is demonstrating, In Christ, The coming of Christ, In the resurrection, That he's interested, In saving us, As finite human beings, And applying, The salvation that we're given, To our finite human lives, And, With the coming of the resurrection, With the coming of Christ, And his death and resurrection, The kingdom, Has already begun, To come into our lives, And all around us, We are to see, Little signs, And anticipations, That the final coming of Jesus, Is about to break in, I wonder if you've ever watched, Little children, Wait for Christmas, This may not be inappropriate, In illustration, For this final year, But, I think it, It gives us, A slight indication, Of how, How God sees,

Our waiting, Every, Every few hours, Little children will ask, How much longer, When, Is it next Thursday, Is it tomorrow, Anything that they need, To wait for, It seems to have been, An awfully long time, Even if, In actual fact, It may be, Another week away, Or another few days ago, But the one thing, That we give them, An indication, A little signs, A little indication, That the long, That the waiting for a day, Is actually coming, Christmas is actually, Just around the corner, Is, Just the little things, That they can see going on, There are lights in the streets, The house is being decorated, The trees being decorated, And there are all kinds, Of festive smells, Pervading the house, Those are little signs, And indications, Of the Christmas, And the Christmas, Of the day, And I think that, We as believers, Know from experience, Also, From past experiences, Of God, Honoring, And answering prayer, He's demonstrated, That many times, I believe there's a wealth,

Of experiences, To which many of us, Do like to testify, And that, The Lord really does, Act that he will not, Debate, There's a beautiful passage, I'd like to refer to, In Psalm 91, Which, Just at the end of the psalm, Which, Speaks, Very movingly, About the way, In which Christ, God will intercede, For us, As we pray, Even now, Not just in the final, Coming of Christ, But even now, That's on page 527, Of your, Of this, In the Bible, Psalm 91, Verse 14, 16, Because he pleads, To me in love, I will deliver him, This is the Lord's promise, I will protect him, Because he knows my name, When he calls to me, I will answer him, I will be with him, In trouble, I will rescue him, And honor him, With long life, I will satisfy him, And show him my salvation, This is, This is the nature,

Of God's promise to us, Again, It applies both to, The final coming of Christ, When all of history, Will be consummated, Into the kingdom of God, And, To our own, Existence here and now, Which is, After all, The existence, Once the kingdom, Has already begun, To come, Then, The death and resurrection, In Christ, But it is, As we await him, That God, Is already making, This promise of God, Because he pleads, To me in love, I will deliver him, Finally, We come again, To the second part, Of verse 8, Which is, Basically a return, To our first point, Number three, In our outline, The need for prayer, After everything, Is said and done, Jesus takes us back, To the beginning, And our passage, Takes us back, To verse 1, And it's, It's sort of as though, There's a sting, In the tail of his parable, It kind of turns around, And hits us again, Nevertheless,

When the son of man comes, Will he find faith, From the earth? This word, Nevertheless, Almost does, Both and three again, In the image, Does the job, Of a big butt, Once we've heard, With the assurance, Of our salvation, Again, That passage, It turns around, It's a butt, And has a sting, In the tail, And he's, And he's, This powerful symbolism, To describe, The character of God, And his men, Applies, This radical contrast, Between the wicked character, And the goodness of God, Who will surely, Come to the river, And then his big button, Is, Are we prepared, For that big of God?

[28 : 30] I think the question, Implies, Will he find faith, On the earth? It implies, That many, Will become weary, Many will lose heart, And turn away, From the faith, God has given, His unconditional assurance, That he will certainly, And speedily, Come to our salvation, But, When the son of man comes, Will he find faith, On the earth?

We can see, That the final, Final question, Of this passage, Is not whether, God will act, But he's, Insisting, God will certainly, And surely, Because of who he is, Because he is so different, From the judge, Because he is the entire, Opportunity of God, That's what he will surely act, The final question, Is not whether, God will act, The final question is, Whether we are prepared, For God's own man, Are we ready, For that?

So as we, In a sense, Really return to, Verse one, And are told, That we ought to pray, At all times, And not leave heart, We, As Christians, I believe, We can covenant together, To join together, In prayer, Prayer that is persistent, Like the prayer, Of that widow, Like the coming, Of that widow, Like the, The, The day after day, Commitment, To, To ask, For, The things, That we long for, Which are, Which are, In our case, As Christians, The coming of Christ, The coming of the kingdom, To see God's glory, Made manifest, Here in our lives, So the things, That we need, To covenant together, To pay for, And are certainly, The coming of the Lord, Then, I think, For one another, As we, In our different stations, In life, Wait for the coming, To try to, Prepare ourselves, For his coming, And certainly, For those, Around us, There's many people,

Around us, Who don't know him yet, Who also, We can prepare, For his coming, I would think, That in, In our church, We need to, Covenant together, Pray persistently, For instance, For, What God may do, In the mission, In November, That, That he will, So his power, That he will, Do mighty, And glorious things, For his honor, And his church, That many, Many people's hearts, Can be touched, That is, To be brought about, To persistent prayers, Through our covenant together, So I think, The argument of the passage, Has then brought us, Full circle, From, The need for prayer, To the assurance, Of our salvation, And in the end, The need for prayer, The Lord said, Here, What the unrighteous judge says, And will not God, Vindicate his elect, And cry to him, Day and night, Will he delay long, Over them, I tell you, He will vindicate, And speak to him,

Nevertheless, When the son of man comes, Will he find faith, In the earth, Let's just bow in his prayer, Our God and father, We open our hearts, To you in worship, We confess, That we don't, Really know how to pray, That our prayers, When we do pray, Lack faithfulness, And lack persistence, Amen, But Lord, We do long, For your coming, We do deeply desire, That your kingdom, May come to our hearts, Please, Give us that faithfulness, To pray at all times, And not to lose heart, Come Lord Jesus, Amen, Father, Father, Father, Thank you,

[32 : 29] Amen,■■■■ONG fact, Because of that, For your