

Perseverance, Humility and Childlike Dependence

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[0 : 0 0] and rather than focusing on any one particular text I just want us to think of this section in general and one of the things that it highlights to us very clearly is that we see three different instances about the Lord is highlighting these instances about coming before God and we find in the first there's this parable about this woman who kept coming and coming and Jesus is highlighting there the importance of persevering in prayer and in the second one we find the Pharisee and the tax collector and Jesus is highlighting there the importance of humility in prayer and of just coming with a genuine broken heart before the Lord and again just in the third one we find that Jesus is again highlighting that he highlights a few things one that he will turn away another never turn away anybody and also that despite all oppositions we're still to come to him but also he shows us again that the way of entry into the kingdom is like a little child it is through just coming in utter dependence in humility before him so that all these things are tied in you often find that in the scripture that there's a great link between one thing and another and we do live in this day of the instant and it's very different to how our parents or even grandparents lived because travel was slow communication was slow we live in a world where there's just so many different forms of communication to what even our grandparents had so we live in this different world where everything's happening so quickly everything's moving so quickly and people's expectations have changed people's demands have changed and that thinking has come into the church as well where the church is often expecting things to happen instantly and the Lord the Lord doesn't change he says I'm the Lord I change not and one of the things that we always have to remember is that part of the Christian life involves delays

God isn't going to work everything the moment we want God isn't going to change our world or the world around us for us just when we ask or when we expect and the Lord always has a purpose always his purpose has involved two things one his own glory first and foremost but also the good of all his people and we must never ever lose sight of that so when we live in this day of the instant it's very important for us to remember that so much of the Christian life involves perseverance of keeping going in fact the very nature of being a Christian Christian life involves perseverance it involves perseverance it involves keeping going the reason if you're following the Lord here today and you may have followed for many many years and you might be the first to say the following has not been the way I thought it would be and maybe you look back and you say so much of what has happened

I wish it hadn't happened and yet it has happened and but the amazing thing is this that God has remained faithful to me but more than that I'm still following maybe at times like Peter following far off but still following why because of this grace that is given which enables God's people to persevere and Jesus says that those who persevere to the end the same shall be saved which is an indicator which points to the fact that perseverance the keeping going is evidence of the work of grace within the heart within the life how do I know well there are that I am a believer well there are loads of things within the scripture we aren't left to work it out just according to how we feel if we went according to how we felt one day we'd think we're Christians the next day we would be convinced we weren't and if we went down that route we'd be all over the place but the Lord makes it clear from the word and one of the things he shows us is that by keeping going despite all the knocks all the failures all the things that went wrong all this the battles you endured all the temptations you endured all the afflictions you endured all the sorrows the crosses all these things that have come into your life you're still following him and that is evidence that is evidence of that grace which is given that perseverance and so we find here that Jesus is highlighting this perseverance particularly with regard to prayer at this time this is where the main focus is at this particular time and of course perseverance is an essential part of prayer and the reason I said that

about the the age that we live in the age of the instant is that we are used to getting something almost the moment we ask and the Lord is saying that is not sometimes it is I was going to say that's not the way that's not the rule of the kingdom sometimes it is there's a version scripture that says that the

Lord will answer before you even ask that he will give before he knows what you want he he responds before you've actually asked that is sometimes the way he works but he works he's never tied down as it was always consistent with himself but we are never going to know when we go to him in what way he will answer so one of the things as we say that Jesus is highlighting is the importance of perseverance and the Lord Jesus himself was somebody who persevered in prayer we find the prayer life would be a very interesting study to go through the prayer life of Jesus but we find that for instance there were times like when he was going to choose the disciples he spent the whole night in prayer and Jesus in our nature was was living in dependence upon the fullness of the spirit and in fellowship with the father while he was here as mediator here as our representative and he knew the absolute importance of being in constant communication with his father in heaven and of course it was his great great joy his great delight that's what made the cross intolerable is where he had to cry out my God my God why has thou forsaken me where there was this constant communication and love and bond and fellowship so Jesus himself knows the importance of prayer and he also knows how persevering in prayer is so essential and because we are we are so frail in many different ways this is why Jesus highlights this story to encourage us and it's very simple it's a very simple story and as we've often said before we mustn't try and spiritualize all of Jesus's parables because you get into all kinds of difficulties the main theme that

Jesus is teaching here very simply is don't give up and he highlights it by this widow woman who kept going to this unjust judge this judge who had no respect for God or for other people he was somebody who was an independent spirit and did exactly what he wanted didn't matter what anybody else said or thought and he might have been a Roman judge because very often there were three judges amongst the Jews at that time but that doesn't matter but the point that Jesus is making is here is this man who didn't have any respect or care in any way for anybody here's this widow woman and because she kept coming to him and coming to him and refusing to listen to us sort of just how he didn't seem to bother about it or whatever in the end because of her absolute persistence because she wouldn't give up he just said right i'm gonna get i want to deal with this woman i want to give her what she wants because she's going to weary me out and the lord makes a point of if an unjust an unrighteous judge will respond like that how much more how much more will god give justice to his people who cry to him day and night and we find that this word what we have here that where it says the lord will give justice to his people speaks really of of vindicating his people of coming speedily to vindicate his people and the lord will this is one of the things he loves to do and sometimes it takes time and sometimes people who have been under oppression and have been dealt with unjustly and they think am i ever going to get justice is this ever going to sort it will god will see to it it's part of what he does and sometimes when you're in the dark and going through these times it's very hard to see how you're going to get your feet back on solid ground and the light once again to shine within you but it will and god will deliver you and vindicate you that's what's been highlighted here and so this as we said this story is encouraging us to to keep on praying but it's also tied into what Jesus is talking about in the previous chapter in chapter 17 and that's why Jesus he says at the end of verse 8 i tell you he will give justice to them speedily nevertheless when the son of man comes will he find faith on earth now when Jesus asks this question he's not asking out of ignorance because what Jesus is doing here this is a spur as it were to his people to keep on praying and we've always got to irrespective of how the climate is or how we are ourselves this is something that we have to keep on doing to keep on praying um jc ryle has written that lovely little little book tiny little book on prayer he was saying that our christianity begins with prayer it is the very breath of christianity and it it's our christianity flourishes with prayer and our christianity will decay by lack of prayer and i think there's an awful lot of truth in what he's saying here but the question we'd have to ask ourselves is why are we liable to lose heart in prayer because remember prayer is this tremendous privilege that we have where we go directly into the presence of the lord just you and me there we go we go into his presence because this is what Jesus Christ has won for us this direct access to himself

[11 : 51] and we are able we don't need to be orators we don't need to have great language we'll see that in a moment from the pharisee he spoke he had wonderful language the tax collector didn't but it's nothing to do with language or ability to speak it's all got to do with heart but we can come

anytime day or night into the presence of the king let us never forget it is the presence of the king of glory the creator of this whole world the god who has this world in his hand who has measured the length of days all of us will have who knows he spans the whole of time from eternity he knows the beginning he knows the end he knows exactly when this world will melt with fervent heat as is described to us in second peter he knows all these things he is in control of all these things and here you and i we can go to him anytime anywhere and say lord please help and he has promised in his word over and over and over again that he will not turn away from those who come to him in sincerity and in truth those who really really come meaning what they're saying who come with this dependence upon him with this awareness that there is nobody else who can help me here but the lord alone lord is never going to turn away from someone like that so we've got to ask the question why is it then that we're liable to lose heart well i think one of the things that has been already highlighted here is a delay in the answer to prayer can cause us to lose heart and maybe you understand that you know that that you have prayed and you've prayed and you've prayed about something or prayed for someone or prayed about some issues within your own life and nothing has changed and that can become very difficult because sometimes we begin to question our faith and sometimes we think well maybe maybe i don't have enough faith maybe i don't have faith at all we can begin to have all kinds of questions going on when we're not being answered and then there's always the danger of trying to do things ourselves that we'll we'll sort it out like abraham did abraham remember had been praying for a descendant and the lord in fact had promised him but because the delay went on years and years and there was nothing happening abraham said i'm going to have to sort this out well it was himself and sarah we'll have to sort this out we know what he did and we know the result which is still the result that we're seeing throughout this world today where uh remember how he how he took hager his servant girl and he thought he would get the child a promise with her and ishmael the son is the father of the the whole arabic race today and we see then the the conflict that existed then way back then between between ishmael and isaac and the conflict that continues to this very day by the what remember this was abraham the father of the faithful but because he didn't have patience and he tried to help god and we see what actually happened and sometimes also one of the things that can cause us to i suppose to almost to give up in prayer is that sometimes things can get worse rather than better when you pray have you ever experienced that where things become so bad that satan will come and whisper in your ear do you know something you

better stop praying see since you've started praying about this it's just got worse and sometimes our own heart and satan will have us have a stop we'll listen to that well we shouldn't classic examples of that would be the likes of joseph joseph joseph's life just got worse and worse and worse david's life got worse and worse and worse you see how you go to the psalms and see often david is praying for deliverance and for god to fulfill his promise and rather than get better it just goes god steadily year by year just got worse and worse and worse and that's hard and that's that is a real test of faith but again this is the way that the lord works because see at the end the lord brought joseph out and vindicated joseph and fulfilled for joseph far and beyond anything that joseph ever imagined or dreamed and he did exactly the same for david again sometimes we struggle in prayer because of our own sense of an indwelling sin that we're we're praying and then we say to ourselves how can the lord listen to someone like me and particularly if we're conscious of our sin or aware of our sin and we feel that this sin is such that we cannot really pray about anything but that all we are that our lives are a mess and we're just sinners and we don't know what to do and again sometimes it's difficult in prayer because of the spirit of the age because when there's a if we're living at a time when the when the the world is very very if we're living at a time where the world is strangling the church and i mean that the whole spirit of the age is one that seems to be influencing the church not for good but and the world is never going to influence the church for good where the the spirit of the age there's a deadness that seems to be choking the very spiritual life out and that there's an atmosphere in as it were in the in the world that we live in and prayer is difficult it's more difficult than at other times no question whatever that if we were in revival situation if we were in a period where the lord had opened the windows of heaven and poured down great blessing then prayer would be so so natural it would flow but when when when you might be going through bleaker times or harder times then prayer sometimes it's not an it's not an excuse it's not a reason for just for us to stop praying but it's another indicator sometimes why prayer can become difficult and where we might be tempted to give up and stop persevering in prayer and the lord says

no never never stop and just i think we've always got to be be aware too that uh got to remember that the the evil one is behind it as well that there are often forces we we forget this you know it talks about prayer we talk about a prayer warrior that's exactly what it is it's battling in prayer prayer is warfare spiritual warfare and we've got to we've got to remember that the evil one will be doing all in his power to prevent us praying or even prevent the answer of prayer and i think one of the great examples of that is given in the book of daniel where daniel had been praying and fasting for weeks and there was no answer coming until eventually a heavenly messenger came back and explained to daniel of the intense spiritual battle that was taking place within the spiritual realm that the answers to his prayer were being hindered now that's quite an amazing thing and that's why we're told that we wrestle not against flesh and blood prayer is not about just flesh and blood we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and against spiritual rulership in places so this is it's serious business it's it's it's real warfare and so the lord is encouraging us he says look despite everything you have to keep going but it is so important when we come to the lord in prayer that we bring god's word to him in prayer and say lord do as you have said the promises of god are never separated from from of prayer life and so we have to we have to go to the lord and bring his promises before him and we've always got to remember also the efficacy of the intercession of christ in heaven because this comes back to our sense of our sin because so often as we pray we think oh a holy just god will never ever ever listen to my prayer but the wonderful thing is christ liveth to make continual intercession for us and he takes our poor prayers and he brings them cleansed before the father because everything that we are everything is tied into his mediatorial work the fact that he has risen into glory today is there that he is there for us he continues to make continual intercession for us and god is looking at us through christ god is listening to us through christ everything is through christ through the blood of jesus christ and that's our great encouragement because if it weren't for that then our prayers would be of no avail we wouldn't we wouldn't be heard for us even for our much asking but we are heard on account of what jesus christ has done and so then the lord moves on and he tells them another story because there were those the people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and they treated others with contempt you know these two things go together self-righteousness and contempt for others go hand in hand if a person is full of self-righteousness inevitably they look down on others they condemn others that's what we find exactly with the pharisee this pharisee was so full of his own importance of his own righteousness before god he was so convinced of his own being just that he looked down upon the the sinner in the corner who actually was being listened to by the lord while he himself was not and that's how he got it so incredibly wrong but that is part of the danger of self-righteousness it's part of why it is such a sin remember what we're told in scripture judge not that ye be not judged well a self-righteous person tends to be a very judgmental person where they're where they're looking down upon others so here's the story as well it could be called the parable of two prayers or whatever and they're two incredibly different people different attitudes different approaches but the sad thing about this pharisee is he was completely deluded he was deluded he was deluded in different ways

there's three things we'll see about his delusion he was deluded about his prayer and you see as he approaches god he does so very boldly now we're told in the bible to approach the throne of grace boldly but it is a humble boldness this man came with a almost an aggressive boldness he comes just so full of his own importance this full of confidence and see how he begins a prayer and you know when he begins a prayer you think everything is good and he says to the lord he said god he said i thank you now to begin with we say well all is well but that soon changes i thank you that i am not like other men and then he goes on and he gives us tells everything and do you notice what he's doing he's not really praying to the lord at all i thank god he is really giving a speech about himself to anybody who's around who's prepared to listen that's what he's doing it's a congratulatory speech speech it's not a prayer it's not asking the lord for anything he's not praising the lord for anything although he begins by saying god i thank you and from there on it goes straight downhill and we see there really the the seriousness of the of this and you know one of the great dangers i think any person who's involved in public prayer must guard against is playing to a gallery because that's exactly what this man was doing he was playing to a gallery whatever gallery might have been present in the temple whoever was there to hear him he wanted to come out of it looking good and jesus constantly warns us against that very thing and he says don't be standing on the street he said back in in matthew chapter 5 he gives warnings against those who like to make great flowery prayers that they will be well thought of people by people well thought of by people because of how

well they've spoken or their oration or whatever no he said he said when you're doing business with God it's just you and the Lord now I know there's an awesome responsibility when you're called on in public prayer it's different to private prayer in the sense that you are leading people in prayer that's what when at a prayer meeting that's what we say would so and so lead us in prayer and the whole purpose of leading in prayer is that that it should be aspired to everybody else to be praying as well it's not the patient praying giving a performance and those who are listening to the prayer as it were marking it out of ten that is good that is abhorrent before the Lord when we are called on to lead in prayer that's exactly what we should be doing is leading the other people present whether it's one two ten or a hundred people present so that they are praying as well and that is why we must be seeking that it's that we're led by the Spirit in prayer that we're like the disciples saying Lord teach us to pray it's a huge responsibility so there's always a danger and we need to ask the grace to be kept from that of wanting to play to a gallery well that's exactly what this man was doing you see our prayers have to be sincere they have to be from the heart so this man you can see that his prayer was it was just so so completely wrong and the

you notice then that the subject of his prayer as we said there is there is there is no subject really to it at all all he's doing he's telling God what he does in the course of the week and thanks the Lord that he's not like the tax collector in the corner you know that's why probably it says in Acts of the Apostle when Ananias was so concerned when the Lord told Ananias to go and see Paul or Saul of Tarsus Ananias said Saul I can't go and see Saul he is a persecutor of the church and all the Lord said to Ananias was behold he prays that would almost indicate that Saul prior to that moment who had been a Pharisee of the Pharisee who had his credentials were absolutely perfect had never really prayed before if we are finding the prayer life of the Pharisee what we're seeing here that's probably what the apostle

[29 : 05] Paul was like as well before he was converted and that's why the Lord then says ah but behold he prays he hasn't been a praying man before but he is now so this this man this Pharisee he's also deluded about himself because he thought that God was going to accept him because of who he is or who he was that's really what it's about that's why Jesus told the parable he said those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and here's what this man does he tells the Lord exactly what I do Lord he says I'm not like other men I'm not an extortioner I'm not unjust I'm not an adulterer well that's fair enough or even like this tax collector but then he goes on and he says I fast twice a week I give tithes of all I have in other words he's saying I go beyond what's called of me see all the things that are bad

I do none of them see the things that are good I go way beyond what's required I am so good I am so just I am so right and this self righteousness which is an extreme here is such a danger in our own hearts because you know the way self righteousness works is that if we do something good we think that God owes us something if we do something that's bad we say well I'll maybe wait a wee while till that goes past and then I'll get back on to an even keel it doesn't work like that and God doesn't operate like that and that's one of the things that we've got to understand that we have nothing our best efforts all do you know what we're told all our righteousnesses all of them are us filthy rags wow but you know thankfully the blood of

Jesus Christ also cleanses all our sin and that's the only place we can come to to be made right with God doesn't mean our sin is eradicated but it means our sin is dealt with one day it'll be completely eradicated but not as long as we live in this world but it means that it is forgiven our sins are pardoned our sins are cleansed as God looks on us he looks at us through the righteousness of Jesus Christ and to the unclean sinner who was bathed in the blood of Jesus the Lord says over him are her clean to the sinner who was bathed in the blood of Jesus Christ who was so conscious of their own unrighteousness God looks on them and says righteous because of what my son has done for you and that's why it's so essential so important that we're covered by the blood of Jesus Christ so this man was deluded about his approach to God he was deluded about himself but he was also deluded about the tax collector the one man he highlighted in the temple and he says Lord I thank you I'm not like him I would hate to be like him I'm a good Pharisee he he is just such a sinner that's really what he is saying but you know he got it completely wrong because that tax collector went home justified righteous in the sight of God the Pharisee went home self-satisfied but he had nothing from the Lord absolutely nothing and the tax collector was the very very opposite he couldn't even stand up all he could do was beat upon his chest and he was saying God be merciful to me a sinner and this word here this idea of the mercy here has the idea of to cover

Lord cover me cover me how does God cover you he covers you with his own robe of righteousness the righteousness of Jesus Christ cover me and that way our sins are dealt with our sins are forgiven our sins are pardoned and this is the kind of prayer that the Lord will always answer we might be in a bad place we might be in a sore place we might feel broken we might feel so hurt within ourselves but you know as we sang in Psalm 34 this poor man cried God heard and saved isn't that wonderful so simple so small but so powerful with eternal consequences and that's what it is we come to the Lord in whatever poverty we are in and we cry to him and when we do he hears and he saves wonderful and so this man he went down he went down to his house justified in fact almost you have here a duplicate of the the prodigal son and the elder brother and the

[34 : 41] Pharisees of course they prided themselves in themselves but before we close just one word and we see these people bringing little ones to Jesus they're just little infants and the disciples are of course rebuking them and trying to stop them which is quite an extraordinary thing and there's a whole sermon in itself in all that but the important thing is that coming to Jesus will always get a response from Jesus I think that's important because you'll notice Jesus responds that's what Jesus does he doesn't stand idly by and say oh disciples have got it wrong again no he intervenes Jesus called to them saying let the children come to me in Mark's account in fact he really rebukes the disciples very sternly do not hinder them so you see always the approach to Jesus if it is a genuine reproach will have him respond always remember that and that's what we have here also we find that again we find there's hindrances but that again is so often the case with prayer but Jesus then highlights and I think with this we finish truly I say to you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter that's the way we have to come little children little infants they've got no egos they've got no agendas they've got no they don't come with any great pride all they have is a great sense of need little infants they can't do anything for themselves they're dependent dependent to be fed dependent to be cleansed to be dependent for everything that's the way we have to come to the

Lord Lord I have nothing all I have is who I am and all I need is your salvation please forgive me receive me you know if we come us in like that the Lord will not turn away you will go to your home justified let us pray ■ tell you