

Praying About the Future

Luke 18:1-8

We ended our service last week with a song reminding us that soon and very soon we are going to see the King. Our passage prompted us to consider that in the last days prior to the King's return it would be just like it was in the days of Noah and Lot. People were going about their daily routine, unconcerned about their godlessness, unconcerned about impending judgment when God poured out His wrath. They were an unwary people who neither prepared for nor cared about the judgment they were warned would come.

We also considered briefly a passage from Peter's second epistle as he wrote to stimulate us to wholesome or holy thinking. We need to be sober minded in alert to Christ's return. He wrote to warn us that there would be scoffers who would mock us for our faith and for believing that this world would someday end in a series of cataclysmic events, disasters of epic proportion orchestrated by God through natural and man-induced disasters. Their impact would be felt globally.

We can see that events occurring today are setting the stage for Christ's return.

Increasing anti-Semitism and not just among Muslims in the Middle East

A nuclear deal made with Iran

A growing humanistic philosophy that is leading us to a secular, godless state

A threatening note left on the windshield of a military service member spewing Jihadist propaganda

Rising antagonism against Christians around the world, even in the US

The unfortunate thing as I see it, and it's just my opinion, is that things are going to get a whole lot worse. Scripture even talks about unrestrained godlessness in the end days after the Holy Spirit is removed.

II Thessalonians 2:1-12

You may be asking the question: what is the world coming to? The answer is short and simple: It's coming to an end.

What are we called to do then as we wait for the coming of the King? I think the answer is given to us in our text for today.

Luke 18:1-8

As we anticipate the coming of the Lord we are called to "pray and not faint". We find the same principle, the same command given by Paul to the Thessalonians. "Pray without ceasing." (I Thessalonians 5:17)

Paul's admonition is an ongoing general command to always pray, to have an attitude or mindset of being connected with God as you go through the day. From the moment you wake up in the morning until you close your eyes at night, you are consciously aware of God's presence so that you are constantly talking to Him.

As you begin the day praying for His guidance and protection

As you prepare breakfast talking to the Lord about someone or something that comes to mind

As you run errands praying about the person stranded on the highway or who is in front of you at the grocery store

As you pull into work praying about your job or your boss or co-worker

As you sit in class that you might be Christ-like
It's a constant attitude of prayer and praise.

Jesus has in mind something else besides having a general attitude of prayer that is unceasing. The prayer Jesus is commanding is specific to the context. Let's consider these points:

Be courageous in prayer

Be committed in prayer

Be confident in prayer

I. BE COURAGEOUS IN PRAYER – v. 1

In the end of chapter 17, Jesus had just spoken to the disciples about the end times and what it would be like prior to His return. I believe this passage is a continuation of that discussion linked or connected by the adverb “then”. It can also mean at that time. At that time Jesus told them a parable. The word parable is a compound word in the Greek and means to throw beside something else in order to teach a lesson. Jesus used parables to teach divine truth. This one was told to the disciples. He also tells them why He is telling them the parable. “Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

As they wait for the coming kingdom He tells them what they should do – pray.

As they wait for the coming kingdom He tells them what they should not do – don’t give up/faint.

First, notice the duration of prayer.

A. The Duration of Prayer

They were to always pray. The dictionary defines it this way: At all times or all time the time or at any time; on all occasions or continuously or forever; in every instance; with no exception.

It is my belief that the context of what Jesus is speaking about regarding the coming physical kingdom of God, He is telling the disciples that they need to pray for the kingdom of God. In the model prayer He gave them He said to pray this way: “Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come” (Luke 11:2) They were to pray for the kingdom to come because until that time its going to be terrible, prayer is going to be essential to keep going.

As John was closing out the book of Revelation maybe he was thinking back to these very words recorded by Luke. Pondering all the horrific events he witnessed in the vision given him about the end

times, maybe he thought about what the Lord said. His prayer should be our prayer.

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen (writes John). Come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:20)

If you would indulge me with a little poetic license let me interpret with a little “Howieism.” Lord, everything you have revealed that will happen in the last days leading up to Your kingdom on earth is going to be terrible. Come as quick as you can Lord, let those days come quickly and not last long.

We need to pray every day “Even so come Lord Jesus.”

Are we looking and longing for His return? Are we praying that it might be today? Are we ready?

But I have tickets to a concert next month.

But I have a bucket list to complete.

But I’m going on a cruise to the Bahamas.

But I’m...

Folks, if we are more interested in delaying the Lord’s return because of something we think we have to do here on earth than we are in praying that it will come soon, we need to check where our heart is really at. If we would rather be here than there, something is wrong.

We ought to be praying every day that Christ’s return might be soon. That is the duration of our prayer. As I said at the beginning, Paul’s admonition is to pray about everything without ceasing. I believe Jesus is pinpointing specifically what we should be praying about. We ought always to pray. It is to be as natural as breathing. That’s the duration. If you stop breathing you will faint. If you stop praying, you will become disheartened.

B. Becoming Disheartened without Prayer

Why are we to pray?

Jesus gives the answer.

So we don’t faint. So we don’t give up.

When we stop and think about the horrific events going on all around us and the events leading up to the end days; when we consider that things are going to get worse, we can become overwhelmed, we can become disheartened, we can become discouraged. We can even lose hope, joy, trust.

Quite simply when we don't pray it's easy to give up, it's easy to lose heart, it's easy to lose hope. Jesus just informed them that the events of the last days would not be conducive to faith. How important then it is for us to pray and keep praying so we don't faint.

During WWII when London was being bombed the heaviest by Germany a sign appeared outside a church: "If your knees knock together, kneel on them!"

Our very freedoms are under attack. ISIS and other extremists seem to be gaining a foothold of terror making us fear an external attack. The judicial, executive, or legislative branches of government have made decisions that are attacking from within.

We shouldn't be surprised by any of it. Romans 1:18 makes it very clear that godlessness and wickedness will only increase in those who suppress the truth. God has given them over to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life so that the inclinations of their heart is only evil all the time. The end result is that they not only continue to do them, but they also approve of those who practice them.

Isaiah 5:20-21, 23 "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Woe to those ...who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent."

These folks are totally dominated by all that is evil. Isaiah speaks a word of judgment against Judah

because they "parade their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it" (v. 9). The world we live in isn't any different.

Because of the Christian moral influence, this nation has experienced a reprieve from God's wrath, but I believe that reprieve will be over. I'm not saying that there aren't those who are trying to restore a sense of morality or that revival can't break out that will sweep the nation, but the Christian moral influence has waned and godlessness is prevalent. God must bring judgment on this land for its open and blatant immorality. What used to be done in the dark, in secret is not open for all to see. God will not be mocked when man thumbs his nose at Him and flaunts his wickedness as if daring God to do something. He will judge.

John MacArthur tells of a prominent judge who recently wrote him a letter. In it he described that one of his duties as judge is to marry people, even of the same sex. He said that because of his religious convictions he could not do that. He will lose his job.

County clerks who issue marriage licenses are facing the same problem because they are refusing to do so based on their faith. Some have already lost their job or have resigned. Christian colleges will be faced with losing accreditation if they refuse to accommodate homosexual people. Students will lose out on grant money if the college they choose to attend doesn't comply. Churches may lose tax exempt status. More and more Christians will be squeezed until we give in, give up or get out. It can be a time of fearfulness, a time to become disheartened and faint.

If you are prone to fear and anxiety about what the future holds – pray! Pray like you have never prayed before. It must be a deliberate attitude as we wait for Christ's coming. Even when we don't know how to pray or what to pray for – pray for His

coming, pray for His peace to settle our heart prior to His coming. The uncertainties can be unnerving. We can begin to listen to all the nay-sayers mocking our belief in the Lord's return to the point that we begin to question the promise of His return. As events in the world go from bad to worse we can become anxious. Jesus says pray, don't faint.

When I was 11 or 12 I was helping in the Camp kitchen at lunch time. It was one of my favorite meals – grilled cheese and tomato soup. My job was to stir the soup. There I was standing on a milk crate because I was too short to reach over the very large pot of soup. It was a hot day working over a hot stove. I began to get dizzy, turned and called for my Mom. The next thing I know I'm on the bench of the picnic table in the dining hall with a cold, wet rag on my head. I had fainted and fallen. Now you know what's wrong with me.

Proverbs 24:10 "If you falter (faint) in times of trouble, how small is your strength!"

We are living in days when more than ever we need to pray. E.M. Bounds states that "prayer is simply faith...when faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live." As we look around at all that's going wrong in the world, we can become faint hearted, but the Lord tells us to be courageous in prayer. To illustrate He used a parable to demonstrate that we need to be committed in prayer.

II. BE COMMITTED IN PRAYER – v. 2-5

This parable has two characters – a widow and a judge. I'd like to look at the parable from the perspective of the widow.

A. Her Trouble

Some injustice had occurred in the life of this widow. She was receiving unfair treatment and she wanted justice.

According to the Old Testament Law, widows were to be taken care of, but over the course of time, they became more of a burden on society than a blessing. She was obviously having a tough time. We see in the book of Acts that the church took on the role of helping widows and later on Paul gave criteria on who qualified as a widow in need because there was abuse. By and large widows got the short end of the stick. The trouble began first because she was a woman. Women didn't receive equal justice under the civil law. Second she had no husband to defend her in this particular case. Third she was poor and couldn't bribe the officials.

In that era, the judge set the agenda for the day's docket of cases to be heard. The court traveled from town to town. A tent was set up and assistants surrounded the tent. Anyone could stand outside to hear the cases being presented but only those approved to have their case heard were allowed inside the tent. Bribery was accepted as a way of getting your case brought before the judge. Alfred Edersheim called them robber judges because they were corrupt.

Whatever the case was, she was in desperate need. How do we know that? We know that because in verse 3 we read that "she kept coming to him with the plea." She was relentless. Every day she came to the tent to be heard. Every day she got the same answer – no. Understand her commitment, her resolve. She had nothing to lose, so she continually came hoping the judge would hear her case and every day she got the same answer.

Her trouble wasn't merely in the situation that prompted her to seek judicial action. There was also trouble with the judge. In just a few short words our text gives a vivid description of him. In verse 6 Jesus describes him as an unjust judge. He was immoral, corrupt, unscrupulous. In verse 2 we are told that he neither feared God nor cared about men. He only thought of himself.

The Middle Eastern culture was a culture based on shame and honor. They sought to live honorable lives so as not to bring shame to them or their family. Fear of public disapproval shamed people into doing good. When I was much younger, my twin brother had gotten into some serious trouble that resulted in the belt of truth being applied to the seat of knowledge. Every time I heard the crack of the belt and the subsequent expression of pain, I was silently saying to myself “I’ll never be bad again. I’ll never be bad again.” That culture hoped public shame would keep others from doing anything wrong. The Romans did that with crucifixions except that they wanted to instill fear. That occurred in medieval times with public executions as well.

This judge had no shame. He didn’t fear God and didn’t care what anyone else thought about his actions.

Her situation was desperate because of the injustice and because of the callous judge. She was in trouble. But we also see her tenacity.

B. Her Tenacity

Take a moment and think back over your life however many years that may be and consider that one thing you fought the hardest for. Think about the tenacity, the determination, the commitment to see it through to the end.

We have here this widow with all the odds stacked against her. In that culture she didn’t stand a chance. Yet finally, the judge relented, gave in, decided to hear the case and give the woman the justice she sought so earnestly. Now don’t for a moment think that this guy suddenly had a change of heart and felt pity on the woman and offered her some mercy. He was still unjust. He still did not fear God or care what man thought – he said so himself. His motivation was purely selfishness on his part. He only cared about his reputation. She

was a bother. He described her tenacity as something that would eventually wear him out.

There is an interesting word in verse 5. It’s the word “yet”. It’s an intensive particle referring to a deep feeling of continual trouble. She kept at it, pestering. It was beginning to take its toll on the judge. We find another interesting phrase in the Greek in the end of the verse. He says that her constant badgering would wear him out. It literally means to give a black eye, to strike to the face, to beat black and blue. He was figuratively getting beat up. In essence her tenacity about getting justice was going to give him a bad reputation.

Because of her tenacity he relented to hear her case and bring her justice. She was committed to get justice.

As we wait for Christ’s return, we must be courageous in prayer.

As we wait for Christ’s return and experience injustice, we must be committed in prayer.

As we wait for Christ’s return and experience injustice, we must be confident in prayer.

III. BE CONFIDENT IN PRAYER – v. 6-8

Let me remind you of what I said a moment ago. Prayer is trust. When we pray, we must believe that God will keep His promises, especially when they seem far off.

Jesus concludes this parable with an explanation about the parable and why we should courageously be committed to pray, especially in light of end times.

It’s easy to look around and watch the world unravel, watch politicians and law enforcement either turn a blind eye or have their hands tied so that they can do nothing to enforce laws. It makes them look incompetent. We can become outraged at the injustice or the abuse of power. We can

demand justice, demand that laws are followed and yet nothing seems to happen. We have grieved these past couple of weeks with the Steinle family at the death of their daughter Kate at the hands of an illegal immigrant convicted in the past of felonies. Deported on five separate occasions and yet he remained in the US where he is committed murder. Where is the outrage? Where is the justice? We demand it. She deserves it and yet nothing happens.

That's what Jesus is talking about in these closing verses. He contrasts the unjust judge with God who is the Judge of all the earth and our loving Father. He spoke first about perseverance in prayer.

A. Perseverance in Prayer – v. 6-7

This passage is not saying that by our perseverance in prayer God will in some way become weary by our badgering and give in to our prayers. If an unjust judge will respond how much more will a loving God respond to the prayers of His people? One author wrote "If an unworthy judge who feels no constraint of right or wrong is compelled by persistence to deal justly with a helpless individual, how much more will God answer prayer! God will not delay His support of the chosen ones when they are right. He is not like the unjust judge, who had to be badgered until he wearied and gave in."

Persevere in prayer for Christ's coming and persevere in prayer for Christ's judgment.

As the seven seals of judgment are being opened, John writes in Revelation 6:9-10, 11b "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' ...and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed."

Persevere in prayer for God to bring about justice on wickedness and rebelliousness toward Him. But remember that it will be in God's time table. Remember that 100 years passed before God judged the world in the time of Noah. Genesis 15:13-16 "Then the Lord said to him (Abraham), 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.'" During that time he preached repentance, but also judgment if they didn't repent.

With all that is happening in the world we can become impatient waiting on God to bring justice, but persevere in prayer. Why? Perseverance requires patience.

B. Patience in Prayer – v. 8

There has always been persecution for those who have followed the Lord. We need to be patient that when the time is ripe His judgment will fall.

Writing his second letter to the Thessalonians who were going through tremendous persecution for their faith, Paul encouraged them to persevere and remain faithful. (II Thessalonians 1:3-4)
II Thessalonians 1:5-11

I hope you caught that God's judgment is right. People ask how a loving God can condemn someone to hell for eternal judgment. The answer is simple: He is just. Paul also stated in that passage that those who trouble you will be paid back by God who will give you relief. On the one hand there is retribution on those who bring trouble. On the other hand there is relief for those who

suffer. Those who do not know God will be punished, but we must patiently pray.

And did you notice also that in verse 7 when He returns He is not coming alone. With Him will be a multitude of angels and in flaming fire He will mete out judgement on those who don't know God or obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Psalm 50 and 97 speak of it as a fire of judgment.

Jesus ends with another prediction of His return, a promise that He not only will bring judgment on those who persecuted believers but that He will come again.

Why then does it seem like there are delays to justice? Warren Wiersbe provides a thought provoking solution. "God's delays are not inactivity but of preparation. God is always answering prayer, otherwise Romans 8:28 could not be in the Bible. God is working in all things, at all times, causing all things to work together to accomplish His purposes."

And that is the conclusion of II Thessalonians 1. It's for His glory and for our good.

II Peter 3:9 reminds that His patience is the hope that someone else will be saved. But know this judgment is coming just as surely as Christ is. God will take vengeance on behalf of His people. He responds at the proper time for revenge and relief.

Isaiah 3:10-11, 13 "Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done...The Lord takes His place in court; He rises to judge the people."

Revelation 6:12-17 "I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when

shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

Romans 12:19, "'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

We must have confidence in the promises of God.

What is their punishment? What is the judgment they will receive? It is eternal banishment from the presence of God. It is eternal suffering for their rejection of Christ as Savior.

We must be courageous in prayer.

We must be committed in prayer.

We must be confident in prayer.

What should we pray for?

Pray for Christ's return that it might be soon.

Pray for Christ's retribution to be poured out on those who have rejected Him.

But pray for Christ's redemption for those who still are without Christ that they may come to know the peace of God through peace with God because they have experienced salvation through faith in Christ.

When we look around at all that's going on in the world, let's not lose heart or be discouraged, let's pray.