

## A Key to Effective Prayer

Luke 18:1-8

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*January 1, 2012 – Evening Sermon*

Luke 18:1-8 says

[1] And he (Jesus) told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. [2] He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. [3] And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' [4] For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, [5] yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" [6] And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. [7] And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? [8] I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

If you look at our national situation the any one thing stands out it is the need for prayer. We are in a very serious need for effective prayer. Here in this parable of the unjust judge we have one of the keys of effective prayer. Luke 18:1 says *[1] And he (Jesus) told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.* Charles Spurgeon, the Baptist preacher in England over a hundred years ago, has a sermon on this passage. He says they ought to always be in the spirit of prayer, being always ready to pray.

Spurgeon uses Nehemiah as an illustration of that. Nehemiah was a servant in the Medo-Persian Empire. Nehemiah was Jewish but the Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire and many of the Jews in captivity were still in captivity in the Medo-Persian Empire. It wasn't that they were treated as slaves but they hadn't gone back though they could go back but Nehemiah was a servant to the King there. Here they are some 90 years later and he gets word that the wall is still down in Jerusalem and its given them all kinds of problems from their enemies around them. The wall needs to be rebuilt. When he hears that he is very sad and he is in the presence of the King as the cup bearer and the King says "Why are you sad?" It says that Nehemiah prays to the Lord and then says to the King...Notice how Nehemiah prays silently to the Lord but he is

speaking to the King. It is the combination here of prayer in every situation in life. It is a great example of that.

Spurgeon says "A Christian should carry the weapon of all prayer like a drawn sword in his hand." While Nehemiah is sad for what has happened to his people who had gone back the King says to him, "What do you want?" Nehemiah says "I'd love to have party to go with me to rebuild the wall and have help in doing that, etc." The King gives him that and the wall had been down for 80 plus years and in about 42 days the wall was rebuilt. Here is a man who prays and God enables him to do this.

The passage in Luke says that men ought always to pray and not to lose heart. We are not to fail to persevere. That's the purpose of the parable in general. Now in specific in the context it deals with the second coming of Christ and it teaches when Christ is apparently slow in returning that believers are not to become discouraged at all but to persist in prayer knowing that He will come at the right time.

Let's look back at the parable and look at the judge and what he was like. Luke 18:2 says [2] *He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.* Then there was the widow and what she needed and did in Luke 18:3 which says [3] *And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'* Spurgeon thinks of it like this. He pictures the widow as her husband having died and left her a little property. It was all she had to bring up the children she had and support herself but someone had seized her property unjustly. Therefore she wanted it restored so she goes to the judge about it but he couldn't care less.

The result is in Luke 18:4, 5 which says [4] *For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, [5] yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'* So initially he is not content to help her but after a while he says all right I'll deal with it. The point of the parable of course is the power of persistent, believing prayer, just like that widow where she kept going and going and asking and asking. That's the way we need to be with the Lord for that's a real key. We won't accept refusal in a sense there, a prayer that won't stop. We persevere in prayer.

Notice the parallel in Luke 18:6-8a which says [6] *And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. [7] And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? [8] I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.* The unjust judge stands in sharp contrast to our just heavenly Father. Until you become a Christian is God your Father? No, who is your father? Everybody has a spiritual father. Jesus said to the religious leaders who tried to fool Him in John 8, "You are of your father, the Devil and the lust of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning."

We start off with the wrong king, the wrong spiritual father and we have to be translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. It says in John 1 that as many as received Christ to him He gave the authority to become sons of God, even those who believe in His name. When I realized my sin and my guilt before a holy God and I understand who Jesus is. He is God the Son and He died for my sins so that God could justly forgive me. When I surrendered my will to Him in true repentance where I'm purposing to obey and put my trust in Him alone as my approach to God – upon a life I did not live, upon a life I did not die, another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity – then that's faith in Christ. When I do that then He's my heavenly Father. I'm adopted into His Family. I'm legally cleared and adopted and I'm headed for heaven. I'm a new creation and the Spirit of God has come to live within me and so on.

So this woman prevailed with such a judge, how much more will we prevail with our heavenly Father if we are persistent. Her power wasn't her eloquence but her power was her perseverance. Spurgeon says "The church is seeking the same thing if Christ's church is a widow in the sense." True her husband is alive, meaning our Husband the church is alive because we're the bride of Christ and He's alive but He's in a sense absence. He's present but in another sense He's in heaven and one day He'll come back. Jesus spoke about how the Bridegroom, Himself, would be gone and that we would fast while He was gone but then He would return. The fact that the Bridegroom is not present in a sense, the world takes advantage of that and they seek to rob the church of her legacy. The church is sent into the world as the bride of Christ to take the truth of the Gospel to the world and to call on them to repent, turn and become true children of God.

Prayer is rebellion against the status quo. That is the term that David Wells uses about it. The widow refused to accept her unjust situation and Christians should refuse to resign ourselves to the fallenness of the world and culture around us. Nothing destroys effective prayer as much as acquiescing a wrong situation or losing heart or not persevering.

P.T. Forsyth has a great book out called *The Soul of Prayer* and in it he says "We say too soon 'thy will be done' and too ready of acceptance of a situation as His will often means feebleness or sloth. It may be His will that we surmount His will. It may be His higher will that we resist His lower will. Prayer may really change the will of God or if not His will His intention. It may like other human energies of Godly sort take the form of resisting the will of God. Resisting His will may be doing His will. Prayer is not merely the meeting of two moods or two affections, the laying of the head on a Divine bosom in trust and surrender that may have its place in religion but it's not the nerve and soul of prayer nor is it religious revelry. Prayer is an encounter of wills until one or the other gives way. It's not a spiritual exercise merely but in its maturity it's a cause acting on the course of God's world. Also there is always behind all the readiness to accept God's will without murmur when it's perfectly evident and final." We want to have this perseverance

that Christ is talking about here like the widow had. That is a key to effective prayer.

We can pick up that we can expect delays in Him answering prayer. There may be various reasons for His delay. I want to look at Matthew 15:21-24 says

[21] And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. [22] And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." [23] But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." [24] He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

That always catches us off guard because we think He was sent for the world. It is true that He was sent for the world but notice the condition of His team in a sense. Notice the condition of Israel whom God has chosen and revealed His Word to that they would be a light to the world. The great majority of them at this point are lost sheep. So He was sent first to them and then He'll take them and send them to the world when they are no longer lost sheep. He chooses 12 (disciples) to start with and so on. So He was sent to do that and then He will ascend and pour His Spirit out and they will go into the world.

It goes on to say in Matthew 15:25-26, *[25] But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."* [26] *And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."* Wow, He called her a dog. He is comparing her in a sense to Israel where God had revealed Himself. How would you have responded? Now notice how she responded in Matthew 15:27 which says *[27] She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."* She is basically agreeing with Him saying "You're right I am a dog, I'm just asking for some crumbs. Then it says in Matthew 15:28, *[28] Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire."* And her daughter was healed instantly. Notice her humbleness, perseverance and her hanging in there plus Jesus' response to this perseverance. That's effective prayer. That is the type of thing we need to do.

Here is an interesting case in persevering in prayer. This was in Guide Post Magazine some years back. The article says some years ago I had a friend in the hotel business. Norman Vincent Peale is writing this article. This friend was given the task to try and restore and revitalize a failing hotel in a city in Pennsylvania. Other competent managers had tried to solve the problem through advertising, public relations, expensive renovations and so on but the place went steadily down hill until my friend, whose name was Jim Johnson tried something different. Every night Jim Johnson would drive by a nearby hill alone, find a place to park where he could look down at the hotel and sitting there he would pray for the occupants behind each lighted window. It didn't matter that there were not many

such windows or whether he knew the people behind them or not, but he prayed that the business men would find their stay in the city successful and profitable. He prayed that married couples would know closeness and happiness in being together. He prayed that weary people would find rest and that lonely people would find friends. He prayed that the atmosphere of the hotel would be changed so that uncertainty and anxiety no longer stalked the corridors and that warmth, welcome and peace would unfold to anyone who stayed there.

Night after night he prayed and gradually things began to change. Transients who visited the hotel found themselves coming back. Guests told their friends about it mentioning the tranquility and friendliness. Word spread that there was something different about the place, something reassuring and heartwarming. The hotel began to move back up. The red ink disappeared from the ledgers. I'm quite sure I know the reason why. It was because one man prayed. It is perseverance in prayer. Here is one of the dividing lines between effective prayer and ineffective prayer. It is perseverance. That is hard to do. It's not easy to persevere when God doesn't seem to be answering.

Sidlow Baxter talks about his struggle between will and emotions. He says "When I entered the ministry in 1928 I determined that I would be the most "Methodist" Baptist in the history of the world." He was going to be very methodical when he made plans and all. He had a plan about praying. He said that he would plan to pray everyday and read his Bible everyday and so on. He said "I won't take time to tell you all the subtle subterfuges which Satan used to trick me out of keeping my plans but then it all came to a crisis. At a certain time one morning I looked at my watch, according to my plan I was still persevering and I was to withdraw for an hour of plan. I looked at my watch and it was time for prayer but then I looked at my desk where there was a mountain of correspondence that I needed to answer. My conscience said 'you need to answer those letters.' I vacillated 'shall it be prayer', 'shall it be letters', 'prayer', 'letters' and while I was slithering a velvety little voice began to speak in my inner conscience, "Look here Sid, what's all this bother. You know very well what you should do. The practical thing is to get those letters answered. You can't afford the time for prayer this morning. You're having conversions, isn't God pleased with you? Even if you can't pray, don't worry about it. Look Sid you better face it, you're not one of the spiritual ones."

He said "I don't want to use extravagant phrases but if you had plunged a dagger into my bosom it wouldn't have hurt me more when I heard 'you're not one of the spiritual ones'. I'm not the introspective type but that morning I took a good look inside Sidlow Baxter and I found that there was an area of me that did not want to pray. I had to admit it. I had to look more closely and I found that there was a part of me that did want to pray. The part that didn't was the emotions. The part that did was intellect and will. Suddenly I found myself asking Sidlow Baxter, are you going to let your will be dragged about by your changeful emotions and I said to my will, "Will, are you ready for prayer?" And will said, "Here I am, I'm ready."

So I said, "Come on will, we will go pray." So will and I set off to pray but the minute we turned our footsteps to go and pray, all my emotions began to talk saying 'we're not coming' and I said to will 'can you stick it out?' Will said, 'yes if you can' so will and I dragged off those wretched emotions and went to pray and stayed for an hour."

Baxter goes on to say "If you had asked me afterwards if I had a good time do you think I would have said yes? No! It was a fight all the way. In the middle of the most earnest intercessions I suddenly found one of the principle emotions out on the golf course playing golf. I had to run to the golf course and say 'come back.' A few minutes after that I found another emotion that had traveled one and a half days in advance and was in the pulpit preaching a sermon. I had to tell it to come back. I couldn't say we had a good time but it was exhausting and we did it. The next morning came, I looked at my watch and it was time. I said to will, 'come on will, it's time to pray.' All the emotions began to pull the other way. 'Will can you stick it?' 'Yes, in fact I'm stronger after the struggle yesterday.' So will and I went in again. Did you have a good time? No, I have to tell you with tears the heavens were like brass. It was a job to concentrate. This went on for about two and a half weeks but will and I stuck it out. Then one morning during the third week I looked at my watch and said 'will, it's time for prayer are you ready?' 'Yes I'm ready' and just as we were going I heard one of my chief emotions say to the others 'come on fellas there's no use wearing ourselves out because they're going to do it no matter what we do.' That morning we didn't have any hilarious experience or wonderful visions but will and I were able with less distractions to get on with the plan. Suddenly one day when will and I were pressing our case at the heavenly glory one of the chief emotions shouted 'hallelujah' and all of the other emotions shouted 'Amen!' and for the first time the whole territory of James Sidlow Baxter was happily coordinated in the exercise of prayer and God suddenly became real and heaven was wide open. Christ was there and the Holy Spirit was moving. I knew all the time that God had been listening."

Baxter says "The point is this. The validity and effectuality of prayer are not determined or even affected by the subjective psychological condition of the one who prays. The thing that makes prayer valid, vital, moving and operative is when my faith takes hold of God's truth. Why don't you resolve from this time on to be a praying Christian for you'll never, never, never regret it." That's a pretty good picture of persevering and the battle we have to go through. It's not easy but it's crucial.

In Luke 18 we have the parable and the parallel and the parallel goes on about God avenging His elect and will He delay. In Luke 18:8 He says *[8] I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*" He will answer and it may not be speedily from our standpoint in a sense but it will take place. Notice He is speaking here of Christ's return in this context. Why is Christ delaying in His coming? In II Peter 3 it says in the last days, the days we have been in for 2,000 years there will be those

scoffers who say “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” There was a flood once but it says in II Peter 3:9, *[9] The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* He is delaying His return to give people time to repent but He won’t delay forever. II Peter 3:10 says *[10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.* According to His promise we’ll look for a new heavens and a new earth.

So the context of this also has to do with the second coming so we want to hang in there. He has promised us He’s coming back. We look forward to it. We say even so come, Lord Jesus but in the meanwhile we have a job to do. There are many people who need to hear the Good News. We need to be praying for the Gospel to go out. It is a crucial thing that we’re about here.

Years ago when our church was young we were having an officer’s retreat. One of the men said “We pray about a lot of things, we set goals and we ask God to bring forth people from our congregation to go into full time ministry but we don’t set goals for that so we don’t have to exercise faith for that. Why don’t we set a goal in that area?” They decided to ask God to call forth from our congregation an average of one person a month into full time ministry either at home or overseas that year. That was a big goal, more than all of the previous years combined. So we began to pray for this as well as other prayer groups. Every Sunday morning I would stand in the pulpit and say “God, we as a congregation are asking You to call forth from our congregation an average of one person a month into full time ministry either at home or overseas.” At the end of the year, 13 had gone. The next year we set a goal of 15 and at the end of the year 17 had gone. The next year we had set a goal of 21 and 22 had gone by the end of the year. The next year the goal was 27 and 28 had gone. The next year we set a goal of 36 and at the end of the year 28 had gone. The next year we didn’t set a goal but what a difference it makes when we persevere in prayer.

When we lay hold God says the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few so pray to the Lord of the harvest that we would thrust forth laborers into His harvest. This is a key to effective prayer to pray persevering and believingly. Luke 18:8b says *Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?* Now will that faith be that prominent when He comes back? The church will be in existence when He comes back. He is not teaching the non-existence of the church but He is challenging us to persevere here in prayer.

What will help us pray? One thing that helps us pray is reading Christian biographies like Hudson Taylor’s biography or George Mueller’s biography or Amy Carmichael’s. These are great men and women of prayer. It helps us persevere in prayer. Read Christian books on prayer like P. T. Forsyth’s book

that I quoted earlier or E. M. Bounds' books on prayer. There are excellent books out on prayer and if we read those they will help us in our prayers. Be part of a prayer group. Pray with others either one on one or group settings. Get with others and really get serious about prayer. Pray for our country. Persevere in prayer.

I remember when God was going to wipe Israel out for them to start over because they had rebelled so much in the Exodus. He was going to start over with them as well and Moses pled with Him not to do that and it says in Scripture "Therefore He would destroy them had not Moses, His chosen one, stood in the breach before Him to turn away His wrath from destroying them" and that is found in Psalm 106:23. Here is this sin that has made a breach and here is this awful judgment coming on the people. Moses stood in the breach by praying in persevering prayer.

We want to join in and pray for our country, for the Gospel to go out, for our missionaries and for God to raise up missionaries from our church, people here and there. That is the solution. That is standing in the breach. That is so critical. Let's close in prayer and ask God how you can pray more effectively. Ask for guidance about that and what you can do that would help you with it and others with it. Then I will close. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the incredible privilege of prayer and we want to take prayer very seriously. We want to apply this teaching about the widow to our lives. We want to be as persistent as she was. We pray that You would help us do that, Father, individually and collectively as a church and we pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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