

Luke 18:1-8

"Placing A Premium Upon Prayer"

It seems to me that many believers perceive prayer as an option, not an essential. As something they could almost take or leave rather than understanding it as the lifeblood through which we cleave to our Creator, through which we commune w/our Creator; the scriptures place a premium upon prayer. *Apathetic prayer lives are of epidemic proportions in the church today & it ought not be. Jesus made prayer a priority & in today's text He exhorts you & me to do the same.*

I've pointed it out before but it's interesting to me that for all the miracles Jesus did His disciples never asked Him to teach them to do miracles. He was the most powerful preacher & teacher of the word of God to ever walk the planet yet they never asked Him to teach them to teach or to preach. But what we do discover is this, *"Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray,"* Luke 11:1

They never asked for a lesson on *preaching*, never asked about utilizing the *power* of the Holy Spirit but they asked that He would teach them to *pray*. *I suggest to you that the reason behind that is that there was just something so intimate, something so pure, so powerful about the prayer life of our Lord that they realized that all of those other things (His preaching, His teaching, the power of God upon Him, flowing through Him) were birthed out of flowed forth from His time spent w/His Father in prayer.* So it wasn't, "teach us to preach" it was, "teach us to pray".

In the passage that's before us today our Lord underscores once again the importance of prayer; notice.

Vs 1

I wanna stop right here & take some time to develop a few key points or primary principles that Luke highlights for us to focus upon right off the bat.

#1 We love the fact that the Holy Spirit has chosen to take all of the "guess work" or any uncertainty out of this parable. There are times that we're left to discern and detect on our own some of the particulars of the point our Lord was seeking to stress. Which of course can lead to a difference of opinion (what's the purpose behind the leaven here 13:18-21 is He talking about the kingdom expanding on the earth or sin permeating the church). However here we're just told very plainly.

There's no mystery we're just told the purpose of this parable & it's to teach us, to train us, to exhort, encourage & instruct us that we ought always to pray & not lose heart.

Jesus was aware of the fact that there are times that obstacles will enter the equation of our lives that will get in the way of effective & ongoing prayer. So He's teaching us here that obstacles shouldn't keep us from praying but rather they ought to motivate us to pray all the more.

Now when we read that we're to "always pray" what does that mean? Which from a scriptural perspective that's sort of a funny question because that's like asking, "What do you mean 'always breathe'?" As if you need to be reminded or else you might stop. The fact is that breathing is something we take for granted (until it becomes a struggle then we realize how vital it is, life/death). **But it just is something that happens naturally, it's ingrained in us. Even so prayer should just be an ingrained attribute in the life of the believer. It's not saying that our knees should always be on the floor, our eyes closed & our mouths making utterance to God. He's speaking of the "atmosphere" of our lives, the natural disposition of our hearts, that prayer should just be apart of who we are.** The position of our heart turned *toward* God, living our lives in submission & subjection *to* God. Prayer should be an ongoing, persistent, consistent part of the man/woman of God's life. **It's like when we realize that worship isn't something that we do for 20-30 minutes on a Sunday morning before the message but in reality we worship God w/the totality of our lives. Even so prayer is an everyday, all the time kind of attitude of our heart.**

It's what Paul was speaking of when he said, **"...pray without ceasing," 1 Thess 5:17** Over & over again the bible repeats the need for the prayer posture of the heart. **Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;" Colossians 4:2, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;" Romans 12:12, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;" Ephesians 6:18, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints-"** On and on we could go.

If you were w/us Wednesday evening we were learning about the priority of prayer as Paul wrote to Timothy as it pertains to our responsibility in ministry, toward our family, our church body, those in authority, for men specifically that they would rise up & be the leaders that God has called them to be. We're to be praying for our spouses, our children, children for your parents, for the lost.

You may not be a missionary in the sense that you can hop on a jet & travel to various & sundry parts of the earth but you can touch the world through the power of prayer. The bible is clear that God opens doors no one can shut & shuts doors no one can open & so often the way He chooses to do that is through communing w/us & partnering w/us in prayer.

It would be impossible for me to over emphasize the importance of prayer in the life of the believer. There's a reason that we give the 1st Wednesday evening service of the month over to prayer; it's because it's a critical aspect of body life. Praying together collectively, praying for one another, for this community, that God would use us to make an impact on this city, that He would add to this body numerically that even more might be disciplined & equipped for ministry creating more salt, more light, building upon the work. **What a tremendous victory Satan has won over the church in minimizing in people's hearts the critical need for prayer. It's the lifeline, the life support of the body. It should be the single most crowded service we offer, yet it's generally the least attended; think about that...what does that testify of? It's not just in this church; it's an epidemic in the church in general.**

Jesus stressed prayers importance, He modeled prayers importance, Paul stressed it, he practiced it. Think about the men in the bible whom God used in radical ways. One of the common threads that you'll discover woven throughout their lives is that they were men of prayer. **Abe, Moses, David, Daniel (really all of the prophets) Samuel; Samuel actually made us aware of the fact that it's sin *not* to pray.** In speaking to the nation of Israel he said, ***"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way."*** 1 Samuel 12:23 As we mentioned Jesus was a Man of prayer, all of the apostles... these guys sought the heart of God through the word of God & prayer.

Read Acts Ch 6 sometime. There were some problems in their distribution center. So the people thought it would be best if the apostles got out there & served the people in that way. They were pressuring them to leave what God had called them to in order to do what they thought they should do. If you start pressuring your Pastor to leave the word of God & prayer to do other things you think he should do trust me when I tell you it's a recipe for disaster. They said, "We're not going to leave what we know God has called us to in order to do what you *think* we should do."

They said, *"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*¹ Translation, we can't be man pleasers, we've got to be God pleasers & place our priority upon consistent, persistent prayer & the ministry of the word.

Men *always* ought to pray; it's been said that faith is the furnace in your life, grace is the fuel & prayer is the shovel. You set down the shovel & the burner goes out, you gotta keep shoveling, keep praying. Think about the sin that could be averted. Next time you feel like sinning pray and seek God as to whether or not He's good w/that, ask Him to remind you of the blood of His Son J.C. that was spilled for that & see whether or not that desire is quenched.

"Men always out to pray, & not lose heart." To the positive, pray always, to the negative, don't lose heart. Now I've read this many times but for whatever reason as the Lord would have it when I read it this time the phrase, "not lose heart" stood out in a new light. Because much like the exhortation to always pray the bible also places tremendous emphasis on the resolve in the heart of the man/woman of God that we not lose heart. Regardless of the area of life, whatever the ministry we're to be careful that we not lose heart. *The enemy wants you to lose heart, that is, to become discouraged & just give up. Jesus wants you to "take heart" knowing that He's overcome the world & carry on, bear up under & endure.*

But this principle of not losing heart; we find it applied to a # of areas in the Christian life. Paul tells us that we shouldn't lost heart when it comes to teaching the word, seeing people saved, transformed & sanctified. He says in 2nd Cor, *"Therefore, since we have this ministry, (evangelism/discipleship) as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart."*²

A little later on he encourages us not to lose heart in the temporary afflictions of this life knowing that God uses such things for our eternal good & His eternal glory. That an eternal reward awaits us in heaven that far outweighs any temporary affliction upon this earth. He says, *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,"*³

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ac 6:2-4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. 1982 (2 Co 4:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (2 Co 4:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We're exhorted in Gal not to lose heart or to grow weary while doing good.

Galatians 6:9, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." Good works are like seeds that ripen when we see Jesus face to face, the harvest of which we'll enjoy for eternity.

Here Jesus tells us not to lose heart concerning the priority, the consistency & the persistency of prayer. We're to endure in preaching the word, in good works, in tribulations, afflictions, persecutions & in prayer.

As we focus in on aspect of perseverance in prayer Jesus is saying, "No matter how hard it may be, how hopeless you may feel, whether it seems as though the tables are turning for you or against you don't *quit* praying, *keep* praying." (I might add that we would do well to make prayer our 1st resource rather than our last resort, as is often the case). Look at Vs 2.

Vs 2-5

So check it out, she was appealing to one who had the power to help her. But for awhile he refused, why? In that day judges went around in a circuit, were only in town for a few days & their docket filled up fast. As a woman she was culturally 2nd class, as a widow no one was providing for her so she was poor & if you were going to get your case heard in a corrupt court in that day after the docket was full it was going to be through the means of a bribe of which she had none.

So this guy didn't want anything to do w/her, he was busy & she had no way to buy her day in court. All she could do was hang around day & night & make a nuisance of herself shouting at the judge from outside the tent until he heard her case & that's exactly what she did until she got some results.

The judge says, "#1 This woman is getting on my nerves & #2 she's making me look bad." Where it mentions her "wearying" him it literal speaks of giving him a black eye. She's making him look bad, like he doesn't care (which he doesn't but maybe election time is around the corner & he's hoping to secure some votes so he want's to appear to be for the people, ya see...)

Vs 6-8

Now if you see this as a parable of comparison you've erred greatly. Jesus is not saying that God is generally reluctant to hear you, but if you'll just bug Him long enough, if you'll do what it takes to get on His nerves He'll eventually respond to you. This is a parable of *contrast*, Jesus (as was common for Him) was arguing from the lesser to the greater.

He's saying that the unjust judge wanting nothing to do w/this woman, God *longs* to hear *from* you & *wants* to minister *to* you. This woman was a stranger to an unjust judge. You are the child of your loving/righteous & gracious Heavenly Father. The judge *didn't* want to hear from her, God *does* want to hear from you. *She had no access to the judge but you can come into the presence of God anytime you want. She had no one to help her plead her case, you have an advocate w/the Father even J.C. the Righteous. She had to come before a court of law, you approach the throne of grace.*

So Jesus isn't telling us to always pray because God *is* reluctant, but because He *isn't* reluctant & He's eager to answer our prayers.

Now that doesn't mean that they're always answered the way we want them to be. But when you pray God goes to work immediately; however that doesn't mean that there won't be seeming delays or time that transpires. Often times a persistence in prayer is needed *not* to change God's heart, but to change ours. It's not about getting God in line w/our heart, our perspective, but about getting us inline w/God's heart, God's perspective.

Also at the expense of overstating the obvious there's a very definite spiritual dynamic to prayer. Delays can be caused through spiritual warfare. It's Daniel Ch 10 whereby we read of an angel who appears to Daniel to give him understanding a future events. Daniel sees him, falls down as though dead (understandably so), he raises him up & says, *"Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia."*⁴

So Daniel prayed & when did God hear it? Instantly, when did God respond & dispatch the answer? Immediately (from the 1st day), but Daniel didn't see the results for 3 weeks. Why? Spiritual warfare.

Plus we're just one piece in a big puzzle, our prayers are piecing together the puzzle but often times we're just focusing on our piece. The truth is (Eph 1:11) He's working *all things according to the counsel of His will.* *So sometimes we'll see results in what we'd consider to be a quick response, other times the answer may be "no", other times it may be "wait" but He's working, He's moving & He wants to partner w/us in prayer.*

⁴ The New King James Version. 1982 (Da 10:12-13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Don't lose heart, place a premium on prayer, & don't stop. I prayed for some members of my family to come to Christ for 15 yrs, others 16 yrs, some 17 yrs. You can't quit, don't lose heart, keep praying.

Jesus says, "When the Son of Man comes will He really find faith on the earth?" That is, a faith that perseveres in prayer, that doesn't lose heart. The way the question is phrased it's looking for a negative response. "Odds are not likely," when He returns the world will be filled mainly w/indifferent disciples who easily lose heart & aren't willing to persevere in prayer.

Listen, God loves you. He wants to hear *from* you, if prayer were powerless it would be easy. Satan doesn't want you praying, he wants to place reasons in your mind, in your heart to just give up, throw in the towel and quit seeking the Lord. **Don't you do it, fight the good fight of faith. Seek after His heart, His will, His ways, that He'd accomplish His work in your life; prioritize prayer & God will do great things in your life; you wait, you watch & you'll see.**

Prayer Points:

God help us to have Your heart on this matter of prayer. How we should prioritize it, not lose heart or grow weary in it. We thank You that You're a loving Father, eager to hear from us, You want to move on behalf *of* us. Help us that we not try to get You to see things our way, but that we would seek to see things Your way & at the end of it all be resolved w/nevertheless not my will but Your will be done.

One thing that we know is God's will is that none should perish but that all should come to repentance. God wants you to know Him, to commune w/Him, to have fellowship w/Him. W/all this talk about prayer you should know that salvation is but a prayer away. Seeing Jesus for who He is & you for who you are; you are a sinner & He is your Savior who shed His blood, died upon the cross & laid down His life so that by faith in Him you could receive the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life in Him. It's a free gift to all who will but turn from their sin & trust in Him.