

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 03 April 2022
Services: *Across the diocese*
Series: Parables of grace
Passage: Luke 18:1-8
Title: Always pray – never give up

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ²He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

⁴“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

⁶And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

***** A minister had just preached a sermon on prayer and he then invited people to come forward if they wanted someone to pray for them. A man came forward and said, “Reverend, I need you to pray for my hearing.” The minister placed his hands over the man’s ears and prayed fervently for the man’s hearing. When he finished praying, he asked the man, “How’s your hearing now?” The man replied, “I don’t know yet, Reverend. My hearing’s not till next Wednesday at the courthouse.”**



Well, this very well-known parable in Luke 18 brings us to the topic of prayer, and in particular, our need to pray with persistence: to always pray and not give up. And the very first verse of this passage is key to our understanding of the whole parable. In verse 1 we read,



“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” (Luke 18:1)

So, the stated intention of the parable is to exhort us to be like this persistent widow in our prayer life – to bring our requests to God, to keep asking and, in the words of this passage, ‘not give up’. We are to persist in our prayers, we are to keep asking, we are to keep bringing our petitions before God, again and again, until they are answered. That’s what Jesus is encouraging us to do here.

And just to be crystal clear at this point, Jesus is not just encouraging us to have a regular prayer time – to pray every day about whatever needs arise on that day. No it’s much more specific than that. Jesus is encouraging us to pray about the same thing over and over again, day after day, year after year if necessary, until our prayer is answered, because that is what the woman in the parable does. She has this one, serious, unmet need, and she continues to beseech the judge about that one need until her request is finally granted. She doesn’t give up.

And we are being exhorted to emulate that same dogged persistence in our own prayer lives.



“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” (Luke 18:1)

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Having said that, it's important that we realise that there are some elements in the parable that are contrastive with our relationship with God – elements that we are not to draw a direct parallel with. The main one being the character of the judge.

THE JUDGE

In verse 2 we are told that the judge doesn't fear God and doesn't care about people and in verse 6 we are told that he is unjust. Furthermore, in verse 3 we find out that his judicial decision in this woman's case, up to this point, has been unfair and unjust. So this man is godless, uncaring and unjust. He's not a very nice person. He is nothing like God at all!

But this is what makes the parable so powerful. Jesus is saying, if a godless, uncaring, unjust judge can be worn down through dogged persistence to eventually do the right thing, to do the just and compassionate thing, how much more will God, who is just, who is loving, who is compassionate, honour and answer the persistent prayers of the people he loves.

So Jesus says,



“Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?” (verses 6-7).

Jesus is encouraging us to approach God in prayer with confidence, knowing that he already loves us, that his heart is already turned towards us in compassion. Our persistence in prayer is not driven by a desperate need to turn the heart of a callous uncaring God toward us, but is embedded in the confidence that when we approach God through Christ our Saviour, he already loves us and wants to help us.

Hebrews 4:16 says,



“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we might receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

THE WOMAN

The second contrastive element is the woman herself. While we are clearly to emulate her persistence (because that is the whole point of the parable according to verse 1) we are not necessarily to emulate the apparently belligerent nature of her persistence. While not overtly stated, the woman's belligerence and aggressiveness is certainly inferred by the judge's comment in verses 4 and 5,



“Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!”

The Greek word translated in the NIV here as “attack” is *‘hypopiazō’*, which means to beat up, treat roughly, and forcibly grind something down.

Folks, this is a woman you definitely don't want to mess with! She's feisty and aggressive and she's not gonna take no for an answer! She'll never back down. She is going to doggedly fight, tooth and nail, until she gets what she wants.

I don't know about you, but she certainly scares me! She's not someone I want to have an argument with!

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Now, we need to be careful that we don't draw parallels here where none are intended. We are not encouraged to be like this woman in the **nature** or **character** of her persistence (which seems to have been quite belligerent and motivated by her lack of trust in the unjust judge) but simply in the **fact** of her persistence. She is held up to us by Jesus not as an exact **model** of persistence but as an **example** of persistence – and there's an important difference.

We aren't to approach God forcefully, demanding our rights, demanding that he grant our requests. We are to approach him humbly, reverently, penitently, trusting in the grace of Jesus and resting in the love and goodness of God. But we **are** still to come to him in persistence – humbly bringing our needs before him again and again – until the answer is given. We are to be like this woman in one sense and in one sense only – we are to keep asking, we are to pray faithfully and “not give up” as we were told in verse 1.

Now, of course, there is a whole set of biblical conditions for answered prayer that come into play at this point, and that is another whole sermon in itself, but suffice to say that if our prayers are to be answered they need to be requests that are in accordance with the will of God, for the glory of God and the extension of his kingdom, and prayed by someone who is a penitent follower of Christ.

But notice that Jesus, in this parable, doesn't touch on any of those condition. He is hitting one point and one point only – our need to persist in our prayer requests and **not give up!**



***** George Mueller**, was a wonderful man of God who founded a number of orphanages in England, in the 1800s, and he was an incredibly persistent pray-er. He illustrated the importance of persistence in prayer in his own life. **In November 1844, George Mueller began praying for the conversion of 2 young men in his community, and he prayed every single day for those 2 men, for decades.**



Towards the end of his life, Mueller wrote, “When I am persuaded that a thing is right I go on praying until the answer comes. I never give up! I have been praying every day for 52 years for two young men, sons of a friend of mine. They are not yet converted, but they will be. How can it be otherwise when we have the unchanging promises of God!”

Wow! What great faith! What incredible persistence! You see, that is the kind of prayer that Jesus is promising to answer. And answer it he did!

One of those men was converted a couple of years before Mueller's death. The second was converted 2 months after his death. George Mueller never lived to see the final answer to his prayers, but he went to his grave absolutely convinced that the answer would come.

He prayed and he did not give up.

***** I am very aware that many of us have been praying for friends and family, for our churches and communities, for years - decades. Don't give up!**

I wonder how many times we give up praying about something, just before God grants the answer. What would have happened if George Muller had stopped praying for those two young men after 10 years? After 20 years or 30 years? What if he had thought, **“Oh well, clearly God isn't going to answer this prayer. It mustn't be his will. I'll stop bothering him.”**

To be honest with you, I don't know why God answers some prayers very quickly, while others he takes decades to answer. We mere humans are not given full insight into the mind of God and his reasons for delaying the answers to some prayers. We are not given a full explanation; we are simply exhorted to keep praying **and not give up!**

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*** A visiting missionary influenced my own attitude to prayer greatly when he visited my youth group (when I was a young person way back in 1627).



Michael Babbage was an Anglican Missionary, working in Yemen, near Saudi Arabia. He told us that he was originally working among three tribes in the Yemen, and before he went there he got three churches to pledge to pray for one tribe each. During his first 3 years he had a wonderful response to the gospel from two of the tribes ... but the 3rd tribe remained hostile and unresponsive to the gospel. On his first furlough he revisited the three churches who had pledged to pray for the 3 tribes, and discovered, as you can guess, that two of the churches had prayed faithfully and persistently – every single week, for their tribes. But the third church had had a couple of prayer meetings in the first month or two and had then stopped praying.

Michael Babbage sent prayer requests out to a number of churches to pray fervently and persistently for the third tribe, and only a couple of months after his return to the mission field, revival broke out in that tribe and a thriving church was established.

That story impacted me deeply as a young man. Because it taught me that prayer actually works! And furthermore, that persistence in prayer is ESSENTIAL.

For some reason, that I will never fully understand, God has entrusted the work of the kingdom to us, and he has endowed our prayers with great authority – our prayers play a hugely important role in the outworking of God's Kingdom.



John Wesley once said, "God does nothing except in response to prayer."

I don't quite agree with that – I think it's a little extreme. Thankfully God sometimes works *despite* our prayerlessness. But certainly, our prayers are hugely important.

I encourage you to be a persistent pray-er. To pray and NOT give up. To pray faith-filled, persistent prayers for your church, your town, your community, your friends and family. To pray faithfully and persistently, until the answer comes, so that God might be glorified and his Kingdom extended on Earth.

Luke 18:1 "Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."

So, don't give up!

AMEN