

Always Pray And Dont Lose Heart

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 July 2023

Preacher: Robert France

[0 : 0 0] Now we're going to turn back to that chapter. We read a moment ago and we're going to look just briefly at the first 14 verses where we find two parables, two parables of Jesus and the first one being what's entitled in my Bible, the parable of the persistent widow and then the second one that we look at briefly is the parable, the parasy, sorry, and the tax collector. So in verses 128 of our script of reading we were told that Jesus told them a parable in the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. Always pray and not lose heart. That was 2000 years ago that Jesus said that but what is this parable saying to us tonight here in our situation? Well it's saying exactly the same as it said to the people gathered there over 2000 years ago, always pray firstly and second, do not lose heart or give up. Don't lose heart or give up. And yet when we look at the parable we don't actually see a prayer in there, in that parable. It's not an actual prayer, it just appears to be the story of a widow desperately seeking justice from a judge. However it all becomes clear in the latter part of the parable when Jesus begins to offer an explanation.

On verse 2 we read, in a certain city was a judge who feared neither God nor respected man. Now here was a man who was appointed to the position of judge in that community and in that city. Now we all know what a judge does, the judge sits on a bench and he administers justice. That's what that judge was appointed to do. And I would suggest that a judge would be a respectable and educated and an upright man in the community, somebody who you would look up to and you would perhaps honour or you would certainly show him respect. He was a pillar of society and the fact is that regardless whether that man believed and respected God or not he should still have respect for the people who were, as it were, placed under his care. If anyone came to him with a case he should certainly have respected them. He should respect his fellow man. But as we see here in this reading that wasn't the case at all. This man was unrighteous. He was uncaring and as such you think that perhaps he shouldn't even have been in the job. He perhaps shouldn't even have been in the job if he didn't know how to look after and how to respect his people. If he had been diligent in his duties perhaps he would have been respected and people would have looked up to him and they would have shown him respect. And you know what that perhaps carries a warning for each and every one of us even today that we ought to be careful how we look towards others, how we treat others and how we behave towards them. Remember if you are a believer in here tonight you represent our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So watch how we behave towards others and watch how we treat them. You know in Romans 13 we are told now, read from the King James version here as a scholar for our understanding. And we read there it says, Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be ordained of God. This judge, this man was ordained or established by God. He was placed in a position authority for the good of the people and the society that he was living in and yet we read that he neither feared God nor cared about men. He neither feared God nor cared about men. And it's apparent that this man only cared for himself. He had his own self interest first. He only cared for number one. It was him first and foremost.

He didn't care for other people and he didn't care for other people's problems. He wanted his title. He wanted his job. He probably wanted to wage more than anything but he didn't want the responsibility that came with it. He didn't want other people's problems. He couldn't be bothered with anyone. He couldn't care less. But you know that he was about to meet someone who was going to test him. And there in verse three we meet with a second character in this parable. And we read there, and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him saying, Give me justice against my adversary. So here we're introduced to this poor widow. She was having a problem. She was having a conflict or a dispute with someone. We don't know who. It could have been a neighbour. It could have been someone, or else in the community. But this woman is having a

problem with someone over something or other. And it appears that she was at her wit's end. She didn't know what to do or she didn't know who to turn to. And so she came to this judge. She was alone in the world.

She had lost her husband. It's apparent that she had no family to look after her, to care for her, and to help her along the way. She had lost her husband. And that was it. The poor woman was almost as if she were destitute. So her only recourse to her problem was the authorities. And she thought only a judge can help me out in this situation. So there she went. She went down to the judge. Because after all, he was the one who had the authority and he was the one who had the position to help her out and to give her the justice that she sought. So she went to the judge and she made her plea. She said, give me justice against my adversary. But it refused. It refused point blank to help that poor widow. Now perhaps a refusal from someone like a judge or someone in a position of high authority would have made us step back and maybe think, oh, I better try somewhere else or do something else or go somewhere else to look for help, but not this widow. This was her last chance. She knew of no where else to go or what else to do. So she kept coming to him and saying to him, give me justice against my adversary. Now we don't know how often this woman came to the judge. Did you come to him daily? Did you come to him weekly? We don't know. But the fact of the matter is she was persistent. She kept coming to this judge and she kept asking, give me justice against my adversary. And you know that in the end, her persistence began to wear him down. And eventually he gave up. It paid dividends because he read there of him saying, for a while he refused. But afterwards he said to himself, why neither fear God nor respect man yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that you will not beat me down by her continual coming. He gave her justice and at last this poor lady had the legal protection from her adversary that she had sought from the start. And then in verse six we see Jesus begin to expand on the minion of the parable where he says, hear what the unrighteous judge said. You know, we might be a little surprised that Jesus picked the judge to get home the message of his parable.

We might have thought that well maybe he's going to pick this poor persistent widow and he's going to zoom in on her persistence. But no, he chose the judge in order to reinforce the message of the parable. And he said there, hear what the unrighteous judge says. And what did the judge say? Well he said, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that you will not beat me down by her continual coming. He gave her justice, but it wasn't because all of a sudden he had a conscience and he began to care about people and he began to respect people. There wasn't that at all. He gave her justice so that he would have his peace and quiet. So that he wouldn't be continually bothered by this woman coming and knocking on the door and saying, give me justice from my adversity. He did it out of a pure selfish motive, but you know regardless, her persistence paid off. You know persistence in any walk of life helps us achieve objectives, but perseverance in prayer will achieve much more. Even if we have to wait for it, if we have to wait a while for God's answer, and that's often the case, God answers our prayers at the right time. Maybe not exactly when we want it, but when he knows the time is right and when he knows what's best for it. He does things in his own time and in his own way, and it's up to us to be persistent in prayer while we wait for his response or his answer.

[9 : 40] And then moving on, we see in verse 7 and 8, Jesus says, and will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night, will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? You know that if the judge who was so uncaring and so unjust granted the widest request, how much more will a just and holy God, a God who loves us and gave himself for us, respond to our pleas and to our petitions? He will not fail us and he will not let us down. He will give justice to his own special people. And if you're in here tonight and you believe and if you trust and if you live for the Lord Jesus Christ, you are one of His special people. You're one of God's special people. David wrote in Psalm 4, but know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself, the Lord hears when I call on him. The Lord hears his people when they call on him. Now perhaps you're here tonight though and you can't say that you are the Lord's. Maybe you presented here, well tonight if you're not the Lord's, you presented here with another opportunity to change that because the Lord is here tonight with us. He's close. He's here in the presence of a swole spirit. And if you don't know and trust and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, I would urge you to reach out and lay hold on him. To seek him while he's to be found and to call upon him while he is near and be assured as I said he is near to us tonight. He is in this place where his people gather to worship him and to call upon his name and to praise him. So ask God for guidance. Ask God for assurance and don't give up until you get your

answer.

Be persistent. Be persistent. So finally and briefly we're going to close this section and we look at Jesus' question. He asked a question there again. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth? When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth? In his book he spoke in parables, Gordon Jai Kiddie writes and he can explain it much better than I can. So I'll quote him there. When Jesus asks if he will find faith on earth, he is not suggesting that there will be no faith when he comes. He is acknowledging that we do live in a fallen world that affords challenges to our faith.

In a world which sadly the love of many will grow cold. And you know we see that maybe in some areas of the world today the love of many growing cold. And he continues, he's inviting us to examine ourselves in the light of that fact and be realistic as we set ourselves to live for him in a fallen world. Above all he is pointing us to perseverance in our faith.

Yes, he will find faith on earth. He will find a people who are praying without ceasing, who are overcoming the world and who will reign with them in glory. And then he asks this question, would you be part of that? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Persevere to the last and you will receive a crown of life.

He's told them that parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. And the persistent widow sets an example for us in perseverance. Can we follow that example? Can we follow the widow's example? Someone once said, great works are not performed by strength but by perseverance. And Charles Spurgeon no less once said, by perseverance the snail reached the ark. Persevere in the faith, persevere in prayer and God will respond.

[14 : 18] Now maybe times we feel our prayers are just going away and reaching over like the heavens are brass. Don't give up. Persevere like that widow persevered and you will see the result.

So the parable of the persistent widow telling us always pray and don't lose heart or always pray and don't give up. So moving on to the second parable and in this section it's a parable on prayer. Verse 9 reads, he also told his parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. Now we might think that Jesus here was primarily having a dig at the Pharisees but he was in fact addressing everyone who was present there that day. But you know what? And we have to be very careful here. You don't have to be a Pharisee to have the spirit of the Pharisee and that's something that we have to be careful about. As believers this is something that we have to guard against.

We've got to watch ourselves. Now unlike in the first parable we looked at this one actually does contain prayer and as we look at it we're going to look at two men, two prayers and two outcomes very briefly. Now this parable was designed to challenge the audience who would have recognized both types of men that Jesus used as an illustration here. So two men went down to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector, two polar opposites. You couldn't have got anyone more opposite in society that day than a Pharisee and a tax collector. One would have been considered a moral and upright in Jewish society whereas the other would have been despised and even considered as a social outcast. The Pharisee was one of the major religious groups in Israel and one of the strictest. They studied the law, they were always engrossed in the law but the Pharisee's failing was they added to the law and then they added more to the law and even more to the law. They made it in such a way that it was impossible for anyone to adhere to the law. These men were so self-righteous it was unbelievable. It was unbelievable and here Jesus uses the Pharisee here in this parable to bring out a few home truths regarding prayer. Jesus in his day was often adored for the Pharisees. His teachings were in some respect antagonistic towards them and on many occasions denounced them in the strongest language. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says of them, and they loved the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogue and greetings in the marketplace and being called rabbi by others. They were proud, they were vain and they loved to be noticed. That doesn't mean to say that every Pharisee was bad.

There are examples of some in the Bible who were somewhat different. So the Pharisee went down to the temple to pray and it just so happens that he went at the same time as this tax collector. The tax collector in these days as I said they were despised by others not just because of their job but because of the way they carried it out and this was through of all such men. They were by and large and scrupulous. They gathered tax for the Roman authorities and they were gone from village to village and they took more than they were due, far more than they were due and then once they are collected it they paid the Roman government what they were due and they kept the rest for

themselves. These men were rich and they were comfortable but you know what it came at a cost. They were despised in all the communities that they were in. So here were these two in the temple and as we read the Pharisee standing by himself prayed. He separated himself from the others. He moved away from them. He felt that he was better than them so he stood alone and it's very likely that he strolled down to the front of the temple there and he stood up with his flowing robes and then he began to engage in what he calls prayer. He launched off into prayer a prayer of which Charles Spurgeon said his prayer was indeed no prayer but a self glorification. In verse 11 we read the Pharisee stood off standing by himself and he prayed us. Or in the authorized version he stood and prayed thus with himself or to himself. This man although he briefly mentioned God was in no way praising God at all. He was praising himself. He was praising himself. It was all about him. It was all about his works. It was all about his observance. No mention of God's grace. No mention of God's providence. No mention of God's mercy. None of it. It was all I. I. I. I thank you that I'm not like other men. This man felt that he was unique. He was above all other men. He wasn't an extortioner. He wasn't unjust. He wasn't an adulterer. And he certainly wasn't like this tax collector. Perhaps that was all true. But the spirit in which he said it was one of arrogant pride. There was no grace in this man's heart. Whatever. No grace at all. And just to be sure he also mentions his fasting and his tithing. How far beyond the required fasting and tithing he went. He went way beyond what is expected from the law. Just to be sure. Just to be sure. This man made a list of his own supposed virtues.

[20 : 43] And yet at the same time pointed at every other person's failings. And in particular he picked on this tax collector. He derided his fellow man. This poor man who had also gone up to the temple to pray. Because in his eyes the tax collector was unworthy. He probably felt that he shouldn't even have been in the temple because God wasn't going to listen to him anyway. Why did he bother coming down? God is not going to listen to a man like that. This far as he was smug he was self-righteousness and he prayed to the altar of his own pride. William Bartley once wrote, Pride is the ground in which all other sin grows. Pride is the ground in which all other sin grows. May the Lord help us to guard against pride. May he keep us humble and look into him. And as another said, Pride is the only disease known to man that makes everyone sick except the one who's got it. Pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick except the one who has it. And you know what?

I think it's only the great physician who holds the cure for such an ailment. For the ailment of pride. And the sad fact is that most of those who are afflicted with pride are totally unaware of it. So we have to be in our guard against the demon of pride.

Tartus of Pharisee, self-righteous to the core. But then we read, but the tax collector standing far off wouldn't even raise his eyes to heaven. He wouldn't even raise his eyes to heaven.

But he beat his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. He beat his breast in anguish. He beat on his heart, of which it is said in Jeremiah 17 and 9. The heart is deceitful and above all desperately wicked. Who can know it? And he cried to God for mercy. He prayed just seven words. He said, God be merciful to me a sinner. Wow. How can a prayer as that? Wouldn't be much good in our prayer meetings would it? Seven words. Well the fact of the matter is what we need in our prayer meetings are more of that type of prayer.

[23 : 44] Prayer offered in humility and sincerity. Prayer of repentance. A prayer of anguish which moves the heart of God. We ought to be careful how we approach a just and holy God in prayer. What are you doing humility? Who are we? Who are we to stand like a Pharisee before God and praise ourselves? There is nothing in us that is praiseworthy. Nothing at all. This man wouldn't even raise his eyes to heaven. He felt so ashamed and so guilty of his sin. He had realized his position before God. His lostness before God. And on that particular day he determined to do something about it. So he made his way down to the church. And unlike the Pharisee he didn't go to be sinned because he read that he stood afar off. He was probably in an area of the temple where he couldn't be sinned. Such was his feelings of unworthiness. He went so that nobody would see him. He cried to God for mercy and God heard. He cried to him for mercy and God heard. And you know there would have been others in the temple at that time. And they would have witnessed what was unfolding. They would have heard their prayers, both of them, and they most likely would have applauded the Pharisee. They would have looked to him and they would have praised him for his prayers. But they would have looked and contempt upon this snivelling tax collector.

And they would as would the Pharisee have thought, well if one goes home from here to be justified it's going to be the Pharisee. It certainly wouldn't have been this detestable cheat. The tax collector would despise in the eyes of man, but not in the eyes of God.

God desires that all are sinned. It doesn't matter who we are or what we've done. We're all precious in the eyes of God. He wants none to be lost. And that includes the likes of the Pharisee. If people would come to God with repentance in their hearts, confess their sins and ask them into their lives, they would never turn any away. Tax collector, Pharisee, plumber, joiner, builder, housewife, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. He would turn none away. But you know briefly at the end we see there's two outcomes. And the Lord Jesus himself said, I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. But the one who humbles himself will be exalted. And that in itself is easy enough to understand, is it not? If you're proud and vain, you'll be brought down. If you're humble, you'll be raised up before God. You know that would have stunned the listeners in that day. It was the total opposite of what they expected. But the truth of the matter is what was missing from the Pharisee's prayer and what was very much present in the tax collector's was confession and repentance.

That's what the tax collector had in his prayer. Confession and repentance. Something God delights in. And as we read, response to. Now I can imagine that Pharisee would have headed off home feeling very smug and very self satisfied with himself and perhaps even feeling justified. But he wasn't. He was empty. He was empty. But I imagine that the tax collector would have felt very different on his way home from when he came into the temple. He would have felt there was a change to place in his heart. He would have felt a burden would have been lifted off him. All his fears would have been gone. He would have felt exactly as what he was a new creature in Christ. And what a blessing that would have been for that man.

[28 : 11] But what I've got to ask you tonight and here again, do you know that blessing? Do you know that blessing that comes from trusting in and following and living for our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you have that inner peace like the tax collector now possessed? He came before God in humility and he was welcomed by God. Have you done that? Have you bowed humbly before God and asked him into your heart or life? And maybe you're here tonight and there's something holding you back. It could be uncertainty. It could be fear of letting God down. It could be that you haven't seen that lightning flash from heaven or heard that voice calling down to you. Let me tell you, there's not many who do hear that. I know of one, Saul of Tarsus. There could be others, but if there is, I certainly don't know that. It could be one of the things that's holding you back, but I hope not. And I certainly hope and pray it's not pride, but it's keeping someone here tonight from making a profession of faith and trusting our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Matthew Henry wrote, it was good that the Pharisee was no extortioner or unjust or any of the other things that he said, but the devil made him proud of this, to his ruin. He was doing good things in his own heart and he was doing good things. He wasn't an extortioner. He wasn't unjust, all these things, but the devil came in and made him proud in his heart, to his ruin. He was lost and unless, like the tax collector, he turned to Jesus. He was lost eternally. So keep your guards up, my friends, and keep looking to and trusting in Jesus and pray that this seed of pride would never enter into your heart, my heart or anybody's heart.

I read a short poem or a short version in closing. I'm just going to read it to you. It relates to what we've just considered. The Lord, their different language knows and different answers he bestows. The humble soul with grace he crowns, whilst on the proud is anger, friends. Dear Father, let me never be joined with the boasting Pharisee. I have no merits of my own, but plead the sufferings of your son. I have no merits of my own, but plead the sufferings of your son. And it's my prayer tonight that that will be the testimony of each and every person gathered here in these days. And as you go out and as you praise God and tell others of this God, the lights and perseverance and the lights and prayer and who is ever willing to answer and to change our hard hearts. Amen.