



“Prayer: the approach to God”

Luke 18:1-14

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Luke 18:1-14 *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3*

"Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 "And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 'yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" 6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" 9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The first of these two parables that Jesus told, is one of the famously tortured passages of scripture. For many, this story is taken as an encouragement to what is sure to become an repetitious chant or the likes of a child prodding mom for a cookie before dinner. Certainly God calls upon us to have a faithful life of ongoing communiqué with Him, but that is not the point of this account.

Again, this passage is so often received as a mandate for fervent and repetitious requesting. We can easily misunderstand Christ's objective by not clearly grasping the individuals in the story and their roles therein. Are we to actually understand, as is so often accepted, that the “judge” in the story is representing a picture of our heavenly Father? For this judge was unprincipled, ungodly, and lacked the moral fortitude to do the right thing and was only ultimately convinced by the fact that he was so personally bothered by the widow that he finally gave her what she requested. Is this the picture of the God that we know? And if it is, do we in truth want personal satisfaction and a single answer to our request, even if it is not God's will and plan to give such to us? Are we really being encouraged in this passage to bug God until He gives us the cookie that we want so bad?

How about the woman? Are we to be like her? To push beyond the realm of faith in a just and loving God and into a relationship where He is subservient to us, a spiritual Santa, and too busy to hear our needs? Are we to simply bug God until we get what we want? This position and scriptural understanding is nothing less than a gross misrepresentation of our Creator and truthfully not a God I wish to follow! How else can we rectify other passages Jesus taught on this subject, such as Matthew 6:5-8 where He tells us “...when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For

they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”

The picture that Christ is presenting of His Father here in Luke 18 is in fact that which is the opposite of this judge. The truth is that if this judge can be so convinced, surely our perfect, loving, and attentive Lord will be far more responsive, aware, and attentive to our needs! The fact is, God is *extremely* faithful to His children and is *constantly* aware of our life situations. While we should be faithful and consistent in our communication with our God, our hearts should always be in the realm of the perfect prayer: “*Thy will be done...*”

But the fact is, much of the greater church today holds to an understanding where if we fail to get done or receive what we want with one discussion with our Father, we can accomplish such through repeating ourselves to God over and over. That if we just keep asking, God will suddenly give us His attention and/or suddenly change His mind and say yes to what He repeatedly said no to in the past. It is as if God is holding back what is good and we are compelled to beg, or worse, that He is ignoring us until we get loud enough or persistent enough to garner His attention. Doesn't that then say ultimately that the *result* of our prayer is essentially up to us? What a sad testament as to our very erroneous understanding of the person and nature of Jehovah God! The fact remains that to accept such a position is to fundamentally alter the historical and biblical nature of our Creator.

While we forever have an “open door” to the throne of Christ, and can and *should* speak our hearts openly and plainly to our God at every opportunity, we must never lose our foundational understanding of who and *what* God is. For He will not act or BE contrary to that nature! He says that He is a God who “never changes.” (James 1:17) Malachi 3:6 says “*I am the LORD, and I do not change.*” And Numbers 23:19 says “*God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?*”

The fact is we will never *receive* from God what is not His will and plan for us. And further, we should never want such! To walk in a life of Christ is to seek *His* will and plan for us, not to seek to use His power to achieve *our* plans and desires. Knowing this fact should compel many of us to re-evaluate how we pray and live before the One we call our “Lord” and “Master.” Certainly, God has and will allow us to pursue plans and a life path that is outside of His perfect plan for us. Hence the existence of ‘free-will’ still affects our lives, just as our decisions to sin does. But His allowing such via the promise of free-will, does not mean that it is His *sovereign* will...His *supreme* desire and plan, His loving design for us that was laid out “before the foundations of the earth were formed,” does not factually exist and is not His greatest desire for His creation.

I remember a young lady who attended here in the past that was courted by a young man who eventually showed he was of questionable character. They wanted me to support their desire to marry and give my blessing to their union, but I could not, and it cost me the relationship I had with the young lady over many years. When I questioned the young man about his love for her, he said he could not say that he loved her, but felt she was a fine woman and would make a fine godly wife and that he would eventually fall in love with her after marriage. I was shocked and horrified at the premise! He took the opportunity to attempt to turn the tables on me and justify his position by ridiculing the idea of God's gift of a “soul mate.” Meaning that God did not have one person for which He planned for each of us to marry...his supreme will and plan for us in marriage. Ironically, the young man believed God was sovereign and had foreknowledge but such apparently did not extend to this one singular issue: *whom he should marry.*

I guess that issue was a free-for-all, and open for his decision alone. I gave opportunity for this young man to back-peddle from his position but he did not, but he did later lie to her and her family about what was said. For this man, it was all about him, and not about her or about the plan of God who obviously was not Lord of his life. It was amazing to witness such a position! One where God has a plan for one's life, except when we don't want Him to, or we don't want to wait until He shows us such.

God promises to care for us...for our needs, *not just here but throughout scripture*. The question has never been and will never be, *will He be faithful to us?* But rather, will we be faithful to *Him?* Jesus is asking...*will I find faith here on this planet?* Perhaps I am reading into it too much, but it seems to me to be more than just a question: *it sounds more like a verdict*. For what is faith accept a clear acquiescing to God to do, to be, and to have, and to show HIS will and plan?

In His second parable, Jesus went on to speak of the individuals who fail to have such faith. He begins in verse 9 by saying that this parable was for "*those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*" Paul spoke of the same issue in 2 Corinthians 10:12. He wrote of those that "compare themselves with each other, and measuring themselves by themselves." He goes on to effectively say, "What foolishness!" It is a common thing to look at God as if He grades "on a curve." We are apt to believe, "If I am not as bad as others I am therefore okay in God's sight." Or "I'm a smart guy and God loves me so I can ask what I want of 'God the genie' and He will give it to me."

After all, isn't that what scripture tells us in John 15:7? **No**. That passage begins with an "if." And that "if" excludes such individuals who have their own agenda and plans outside of God's. That passage says "***If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you,you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.***" Because, you know, if I am abiding in Him and His words are abiding in me, then I want nothing short of His divine and sovereign plan, and I will ask for nothing less!

Surely there is not a more detrimental enemy we face than the one that lies within us. For pride is surely a clandestine enemy that moves subtly into the power seat of our lives and ultimately blinds us to the truth. Once the truth is beaten down, there is no telling where the path of life will take us, or what insane directions we will pursue. No single issue has destroyed more men, removed more from church and fellowship, wrecked more marriages, and enslaved more earthly lives than the enemies of *pride and self-will!*

So many are apt to see redemption, salvation, and subsequently then *Lordship*, as being necessary for those who are openly wicked, certainly more so than for themselves! Because we do not indulge in a particular list of sins that we have constructed as being indicative of the "sinners" of this world, we think that we are alright with God and that He is ok with us. Or because we have our life together as fine upstanding Christians, we are apt to feel we have more "elbow room" on this whole "plan of God" thing and we can make a few more decisions for ourselves because we're pretty smart and spiritually mature. All that "sovereignty" stuff is good when you are a baby Christian but when you get as mature as me, *well*, God gives us more leash and greater control! Except He doesn't!

This danger is so great for us as the years of our faith march on and especially after we have experienced some stuff, done some spiritual stuff, and matured in our understanding. Ironically, such maturing holds within it the danger that we will only become more confident in ourselves and see our communiqué with God as an

opportunity to illicit God to “get on our train” of desires, plans, and wants, rather than growing in our dependence upon His grace and sovereign plan for us from cradle to the grave.

Scripture places all of humanity into the same sinner basket, without regard to spiritual maturity. Psalms 14:3 “... *all* have turned away from God; *all* have become corrupt. *No one does good, not even one!*”

Isaiah 53:6 “*All of us have strayed* away like sheep. We have left God’s paths to follow our own.”

Isaiah 59:13 “We know that we have rebelled against the LORD. We have turned our backs on God. We know how unfair and oppressive we have been, carefully planning our deceitful lies.”

Romans 3:10-12, 23 “As the Scriptures say, ‘No one is good—not even one. No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God. All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one.’ For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”

The cloak we most often wear to cover the truth of our heart condition is that of *religiosity*. Because we go through the overt acts of religion, we feel that we stand righteous in comparison to those who do not. But God looks deeper than the earthly surface of men...He looks into our very hearts, minds, and souls. He knows us better than we will ever know ourselves. In this we may hide before men, but we will forever stand naked before our Creator. For us, it is often the fact we attend church or serve occasionally that bolsters our bravado, even if our hearts show we attend and serve out of compulsion rather than passion.

But some have **not** forgotten who they *were*, where they came from, and most of all, who they know they are in their hearts presently. And every day they live in awe that God would receive them and love them, and even more, *use them to serve His kingdom!* We stand in awe that despite our shortcomings and failures, that God *still* has a plan for us, and *still* guides us through the minefield of this world.

Psalms 32:6-11 “...*let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment. For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory. The LORD says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.” Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the LORD. So rejoice in the LORD and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!*”

Isaiah 30:21 tells us “*Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” Whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.*”

These are those that can never get enough of God’s kingdom. The passion to serve the Lord and His church is evident in their faces and their lives as they seek out every chance to place God first in their lives, and seek out His plan for their lives and live it out with joy. They do so in recognition of the fact He loved them enough to die in their place, but also for a fact so very close to home: despite their past, *He desires their participation in His kingdom*. Because of this, these people will never forget. For these folks, like this tax-collector, remain humbled before their Savior.

Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore! 1Ch 16:11

I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only. Psalms 71:16