

Why Keep Praying

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: 27 October 2024

Preacher: Don Kiang Yap

- [0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you with our hearts open, open to hear you. As we explore the story of the persistent widow, we ask that you cultivate in us a faith that never gives up, a trust that endures, and a hope that is anchored in your justice. Amen. Before I begin, I would like to ask a question. On the screen, please. What is the capital city of Indonesia? A, Tokyo, B, Jakarta, C, Manila, D, Kuching. Shout the answer. The answer is Jakarta. All correct. If you answer Kuching, then you will go back to school again to study geography. One primary five student, standard five student, he went to church and he listened to a sermon on keep on praying.
- [1 : 15] One night, he was praying in his room. His father walked past the room and the father overheard the son praying over and over again. Manila, Manila, Manila. Next day, the father asked the son what he was doing. The son replied to the father that yesterday, my class had a test and I gave the wrong answer for the capital of Indonesia. I was praying. I prayed and prayed that Manila would be the capital of Indonesia. We laugh because we know this is not how we should pray. The question is, how then should we pray? Why should we pray? Why keep praying? Praying means talking to God.
- [2 : 19] But who among us here, instead of talking to God, is actually questioning God? You are questioning God. Why God is not answering the prayers you have prayed for so long? Why is my family member not getting well, not getting better, even though I have prayed again and again? Why is my work situation still so unfair despite my prayers? Why keep praying when God doesn't seem to listen to my prayer? Many Christians will question God in this manner at one time or another. But the good news is that Jesus has already anticipated, he has already anticipated our questioning. He knows our question. And so to help us, Jesus tells us a special parable. Let's see what we can learn from the parable of the persistent widow.
- [3 : 37] This parable is a bit different because the point, the purpose of the parable is given at the beginning. For most of the other parables, you have to read first. You have to read first and try to figure out what it might mean. You might have to scratch your head to try to understand the meaning. Sometimes, Jesus will explain the meaning after telling the parable. But, the parable of the persistent widow is special because right at the beginning, the point of the parable, the purpose of the parable is already given.

In verse 1, verse 1 says, Jesus told his disciples a parable to show that they should always pray and not give up.

Notice that Jesus is aware that sometimes we will feel, we will feel like giving up. There are times we feel like throwing in the towel.

[4 : 54] Jesus knows that this is the common temptation we all face. It's not wrong. It's not wrong to feel like giving up.

What is important is how we respond to this feeling of giving up. What is the context of Jesus making this statement?

what makes him think his disciples might be tempted to give up? What is the context? In the previous chapter, chapter 17, Jesus was teaching about the kingdom of God and his second coming.

Pastor Brian preached on this passage last Sunday. While waiting for Jesus' second coming, the disciples might lose heart.

The disciples might be discouraged because of the trials they are going through. Jesus knows his followers will face far more hardships than what they are experiencing now.

[6 : 08] In the midst of their suffering, they might ask, when is God going to bring justice? In fact, the majority of the twelve apostles will die as martyrs.

They will die for their belief in Jesus. Today, looking at the situation of the world, we also wonder whether God will ever bring justice.

We are also tempted to give up. Jesus reassures us here. He reassures us here. Yes, God will surely bring justice.

So, keep on praying and do not give up. There is a connection between prayer and giving up.

You don't pray. You don't pray because you have given up. But, if you keep praying, you will not give up. If you keep praying, you will not be discouraged. So, if you don't want to give up on your faith, keep praying.

[7 : 21] If you don't want to give up, if you don't want to be discouraged in your walk with God, keep praying. So, pray always.

What does it mean to pray always? Jesus is not referring to non-stop talking. Talk, talk, talk, 24 and 7.

You know people like that, like, talk, talk, talk, talking 24 7. He is referring to an attitude of being conscious of God all the time.

An attitude of being aware that God is with us. That God is actively involved in our thoughts and in our actions.

When our thoughts, when our thoughts turn to worry, when our thoughts turn to fear and discouragement, we are to consciously and quickly turn every thought into prayer.

[8 : 22] As we go through the day, prayer should be our first response to every fearful situation. Prayer should be our first response to every anxious thought.

Prayer should be the first response to every task that God commands. Pray first. Pray first before you worry. Pray first before you argue.

Pray first before you complain. Pray first before you begin a task. Why don't we always pray? Why don't we pray always?

I want to suggest three reasons. Firstly, as I mentioned earlier, unanswered prayers. We have spent so much time praying for certain issues, and that issues are not resolved.

No answer. So, we think that prayer is the least, prayer is the least effective way to respond in many situations.

- [9 : 29] What difference does it make? What difference does prayer make? So, why waste time praying? Second reason, distraction.
- Distractions. When we are about to pray, our minds are easily distracted. every little sound interrupts us, and when there is no sound, even the silence can also disrupt us.
- And when we are ready to pray, our minds will quickly think of ten important things to do for the day. So, we put off our prayers.
- Third reason, no consequences. There are no immediate consequences for not praying. We get into trouble if we don't show up at work.
- We get into trouble if we don't show up at school. And if we don't pay our bills, try not showing up at work, try not showing up at school, try not paying your bills. See what happens.
- [10 : 37] But nothing happens. Nothing bad happens when we don't pray. So, it is very easy to give up praying. Because, because there are no immediate consequences.
- But you know, what happens when you don't pray? According to Jesus, we lose heart. We become discouraged. Our souls need prayer.
- Without prayer, our souls shrivel up. Thomas Moore writes, the great melody, this melody means problem, the great problem of the 20th century, still applicable to 21st century, implicated in all our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is loss of soul.
- When soul is neglected, it doesn't just go away. it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning.
- Our temptation is to isolate these symptoms or try to eradicate them one by one. But the root problem is that we have lost our wisdom about the soul, even our interest in it.
- [11 : 56] our soul needs care. And the best way to care for our soul is to pray. Spend time with God.
- This is the best way to care for our soul. If you don't spend time with God, what happens? We lose heart.
- We get discouraged. Life becomes too great a burden to bear. Prayer is how we remind ourselves that God is with us, that God is involved in our life, that God is in our world.
- Prayer helps us see, prayer helps us see that God is at work in our life. Pray always, what does he look like?
- What does it look like in practice? Jesus tells us a parable. He tells us a story to show how to put it into practice.
- [13 : 06] This story has two characters, the widow and the judge. Let's look at the widow first. Sometimes, we picture the widows as old women.
- women. But we must remember, widows could also be young because at those times, they married quite young. Regardless of their age, they had a very difficult time in the first century.
- Many become destitute after their husbands died. They were targets for oppression and scams. Often, they were cheated by conmen.
- In order to survive, a widow had to learn how to fend for herself. She must learn how to seek for justice. in this parable, someone must have wronged her and she wants a judge to put things right.
- Let's see how she does it. On the first day, the widow went to the judge. Your Honour, please hear my case. Avenge me.
- [14 : 24] Vindicate me against my adversary. Vindicate me against my enemy. The judge rejected her request. Go away, lady.

You are bothering me. I have got more important things to do. The second day, Mr. Judge, it's me again.

The lady you turned away yesterday. Please, I'm begging you. I have no help apart from you. You are the only person in the world that can help me to bring justice.

please help me. The judge said, I told you to go away. I'm not going to hear your case. Stop bothering me.

The third day, your Honour, it's me again. I was here yesterday and the day before. All I'm asking is that you hear my plea, that you listen to my case.

[15 : 27] You are a judge, aren't you? Isn't this what God wants you to do? To give justice to the helpless? But now, the judge must be getting fed up.

Why can't this lady stop knocking at the door? Didn't she get the message? So the judge said, you don't seem to understand, lady.

I don't believe in God. I don't fear him either. The widow pleaded, but certainly you must believe in people and I'm a person.

I am helpless. The judge responded, I don't care about people. Go away and stay away. Get lost. But of course, on the fourth day, again, knock, knock, knock.

Your honor, please, help me. Help me. You are my only hope. Jesus told us what happened next.

[16 : 39] The judge said to himself, after a while, even though I don't fear God or care about people, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won't eventually come and attack me.

Jesus said, listen to what the unjust, listen to what the corrupt judge says, and will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?

Will he keep putting them off? This parable is a parable of contrast. It is not a parable of similarity.

Jesus did not say that God's people are similar to this widow. We are not like the widow. In fact, he said just the opposite.

Because we are not like the widow, we should be encouraged in our praying. Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater.

[17 : 44] If a poor widow got what she deserved from a selfish judge, how much more will God's children receive what is right from a loving heavenly father?

Consider the contrast. You can refer to your notes. It's all there, the notes. Contrast. The widow contrasted with God's chosen ones. You can please refer to the notes so that you can follow easily.

I want to clear so that you can flow faster. To begin with, the woman was a stranger to the judge, but we are children of God and God cares for his children.

The widow had no easy access to the judge, but God's children have an open access into his presence. We can come into his presence at any time to get the help we need.

The woman had no friend, at the court to help her case, but we have a savior. Jesus is our advocate, and he is our high priest to represent us before God.

[18 : 56] When we pray, we can open the Bible and claim the many promises of God, but the widow, the widow had no promises that he could claim. Perhaps the greatest contrast is that the widow came to a court of law, but we as the children of God, we come to a throne of grace.

The widow pleaded out of her poverty, but we have God's riches, God's wealth available to us to meet our every need.

Now the judge contrasted with the father. The next one. If you see, if you don't see, if you don't see that Jesus is pointing out contrast, you will think that God must be argued, God must be bright.

We think that God must be argued into answering our prayers. God is not like this judge, for our God is a loving father. He is attentive to our every cry.

He is generous with his gifts. He is concerned about our needs. He is ready to answer when we call. God wants us, God invites us to come to him.

[20 : 17] The judge in this story didn't want the widow to come to him for justice. The widow was a bother to the judge, but God loves to hear us talking, talking about our needs.

God never gets tired of us. You never hear God say what the judge said in this parable. This woman is bothering me.

She is driving me crazy. She is wearing me out with a constant plea. God never gets tired of us coming to him. The only reason the judge helped the widow was because she is driving him crazy.

God answers our prayer, not because we are driving God crazy. God answers our prayer for his glory and for our good. Jesus says, if a crooked judge, if a selfish judge can find a way to do the right thing, surely a righteous God will give justice to his chosen people who appeal to him day and night.

Will he keep putting them off? God I tell you, he will see that they get justice quickly. God answers prayer, not reluctantly, but willingly and quickly.

[21 : 45] God is not like the judge. But there's one thing God has in common with this judge. They both have authority.

authority. They are in charge of their jurisdiction. The judge has his jurisdiction. God also has his jurisdiction. And God's jurisdiction is the entire world.

God's jurisdiction is over the entire world. So, we can be assured that God will bring justice for his people. This is a profound promise.

it assures us that God will not overlook the cries of his people. A just and righteous judge, a just and righteous God will act on behalf of his children.

He is not indifferent to the cries of the oppressed. He listens to the prayers of his chosen one. How then do we explain delays in answers to prayer?

[23 : 00] Especially when Jesus said that God will grant justice quickly. Remember that God's delays are not the delays of inactivity, as if God is doing nothing.

Rather, these delays are delays of preparation. preparation. Preparation takes time. God is preparing the circumstances, preparing all the events to help answer the prayer.

And he is also preparing, and God is also preparing our hearts to receive the answer. Perhaps, God is preparing to grow us, to grow us in our character, to grow us in our perseverance and faith.

God is always answering prayer. Otherwise, Romans 8, 28, a powerful verse. If you haven't memorized the verse, better memorize it.

Romans 8, 28. God is always answering prayer. Otherwise, Romans 8, 28 could not be in the Bible. God works in all things, at all times, causing all things to work together for the good of his people to accomplish his purpose.

[24 : 27] Powerful verse. Memorize that verse. That verse in the Bible, it means God is always answering prayer. The moment we send him a prayer request that is in his will, God begins to work.

We may not see it now, we may not see it now, but one day, the answer will come. However, we must understand that God's definition of justice may not always agree with ours.

His definition of justice, God's definition of justice, might not align with us. We may cry out for certain things, vindication, retribution, relief from suffering, but God may bring justice in a way we may not understand at first.

God knows the best answer for us. There was a man, he went to a photo studio to take a picture of himself. When the photo was developed, the photograph did some touch-up.

He put some color there, he put some color here. After all this was done, he showed the picture to the customer. The customer looked at the picture and his face turned sour.

[25 : 49] He was disappointed. He said this to the photographer, this picture doesn't look like me. You are not doing justice to my face.

The photographer looked at him and said, what you need is not justice. What you need is grace. what I have given you is grace.

That you look so much better in the picture than you really do. Sometimes we don't know what we need.

We think we need justice. But what we actually need is grace. Grace to help us through life. Grace to face all the injustices with God's strength.

In this way, we experience God's sufficiency in a deeper level. Our God knows everything. And He knows what we actually need.

[26 : 53] We always ask for justice, but God in His wisdom has given us grace. Although this parable is about praying for justice, we can extend the application to include praying for other things.

You may ask, how long, how long should I pray for something? One pastor gives this general rule. The general rule. On the screen, please.

Nathaniel, are you there? Yes. He said, this pastor's name is Ray Pritchard. He said, you should pray for something until the answer comes.

All the circumstances change, or God changes the burden on your heart. It is difficult to define a burden, but we know what it is like to have a deep concern for others.

God may give you a burden to pray for our church, to pray for revival, to pray for the spread of gospel in other regions. burdens come in all shapes and sizes.

[28 : 08] We should be sensitive to those burdens and use these burdens as incentives for prayer. But, we need not feel guilty when our prayers begin to change.

God may be calling us to focus our prayers in a new direction. salvation. Obviously, we will always be burdened to pray for our spouse, to pray for our children, to pray for our immediate concern.

But beyond this inner circle, our prayers will change over time. In the meantime, with so much injustice in the world, we can rest assured that God will bring justice for his people in his way.

Now, I want to talk about the final, the final justice that is found in Christ. Ultimately, God's justice has already been secured in Christ.

The cross is where God's justice and mercy meet. all of us have wronged each other. We have wronged others and others have wronged us. All of us have sinned against God.

[29 : 27] If God were to mete out his judgment on every, if God were to mete out his justice on every one of us, we are all doomed. Doomed because we all deserve to be penalized for our sin.

But Jesus died for our sin to satisfy the justice of God so that we can receive mercy and grace. In the book of Revelation, we see the final judgment Let me say again.

In the book of Revelation, we see the final fulfillment of God's justice when Christ returns to make all things new. Every wrong will be made right.

Every tear will be wiped away. and death will be no more. In light of this, how then should we live?

Praying is not just about asking. Praying is not about asking for things. It's about living in the hope of God's promises.

[30 : 38] Jesus ends the parable with a sobering question. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

This question challenges us. Will we be found faithful? Always trusting, always praying in God's justice, even when it seems delayed?

Or, will we by our prayerlessness show the unbelief in our hearts? Are we saying to God by our prayerlessness, I don't believe you.

I don't believe you are good. I don't believe you are just. I don't believe you listen to my prayers. Jesus is asking whether we will continue to believe, whether we continue to trust and continue to pray, even when the answers are slow in coming.

Will we keep the faith when it feels like the world is against us? Will we be always praying? Or, will we give up? Let us always come before God.

[31 : 55] knowing that He hears us, He cares for us, and He will bring about justice in His perfect time. When the Son of Man returns, when Jesus returns, may He indeed find faith on this earth.

May He find faith in our hearts, in our lives, and in our prayers. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You that You always hear us when we pray.

Help us to keep praying and to keep on trusting in Your goodness. May we live in the hope of Your justice and the promise of Jesus' return.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.