

RECONNECT – Prayer

Luke 18:1-14

Good morning church. So good to be with you this morning. For those on the Facebook Live feed – welcome. Glad to have you with us today. I encourage you to engage with us during this time. We have a dedicated member of the team monitoring the FB feed, and she tries to hit up in the comments the slides and information from the screens. So...don't just turn it on and go make breakfast. Instead turn it on, open your Bibles, and do your best to stay with us.

This morning we are continuing in our “Reconnect – Back to the Basics” series that we started on Easter Sunday. And if you remember, the object lesson for the series is this softball tee. Because there are some things so basic to our life with Christ, that we never “get past”. Just like hitting off a tee is the starting point in learning to hit a softball, but no matter how good you get at hitting a softball, you never get over hitting off a tee. So basic to your development as a softball player, that you never stop practicing that way. In a similar way, there are some things so basic to following Christ that we never get past.

On Easter Sunday, we started with the Gospel. The good news that Jesus offer life, meaningful life to all who turn from their sin and trust in him. And that this good news isn't just the starting point with our life with Jesus, it's the starting, ending, middle, and every point in between. We never move on from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And then last week we talked about generosity. How generosity isn't just like "next level Christianity," but instead how it's basic Christianity. As God has been generous to us – we are called to live generously. If you remember from last week, I closed by encouraging each of us, even the kids, to make an honest assessment as to whether or not you are living generously. And then, I encouraged each us to take faithful action.

This morning as we continue in Reconnect Back to the Basics – we are looking at two of Jesus' teachings on prayer from Luke 18. Two parables on prayer – the Parable of the Persistent Widow and the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

MAIN IDEA: The basic posture of prayer is persistence, humility and desperation.

Turn with me, if you have a Bible, turn with me to Luke 18:1-14. I'm going to read these two parables, and then we'll talk through them.

READ Luke 18:1-14

18 Now he told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not give up. ² “There was a judge in a certain town who didn’t fear God or respect people. ³ And a widow in that town kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’

⁴ “For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or respect people, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps pestering me, ^[a] I will give her justice, so that she doesn’t wear me out ^[b] by her persistent coming.’”

⁶ Then the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ Will not God grant justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay helping them? ^[c] ⁸ I tell you that he will swiftly grant them justice. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: ^[d] ‘God, I thank you that I’m

not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth^[e] of everything I get.’

¹³ “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, ‘God, have mercy on me,^[f] a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

PRAY.

Two powerful parables from Jesus on prayer. Now, before we jump in, just a reminder – parables are used to teach illustrate kind of 1 main point. We run into problems with parables when we try and look for things that aren’t there.

And sometimes, Jesus even gives us the reason behind the prayer – earlier in Luke’s Gospel he had been teaching on the Kingdom of God – the rule and reign of God through the church. And Luke goes right into these parables on prayer. And Jesus himself gives us the reason behind it:

V1 – On the need to pray ALWAYS and not give up

Pray always, and not give up. Persistence in prayer. To pray, and to keep praying. Can I share with you – I've been a pastor for a little while, I've been in the church my whole life, and a Christian for most of my life – I've never, ever heard someone tell me they thought they spent too much time in prayer, or that they were glad they'd given up praying for a specific person. Don't ever give up praying for someone. Pray always.

This first parable on prayer that Luke gives us is the story of the persistent widow. And Jesus sets the parable up with telling us about the judge.

THE JUDGE

- Didn't fear God or respect people – this is a huge indictment. Jesus would have been teaching to religious Jews, their judges were charged in the OT to be impartial, to be careful in their judgments, but most importantly they were called to Fear the Lord.
- Not surprisingly though, power corrupts and the judges in Israel wouldn't always meet these criteria. So this story would have resonated with them.
- This judge was wicked – no fear of God – the judge was completely immoral.

THE WIDOW

- Then in V3 we're introduced to the widow.
- Now, the fact that she's coming, we know she's a widow, but the fact that she hasn't sent her son to the judge says she's all alone.
- She's desperate – there's no one else to plea her case.
- In the ancient world, widows were helpless. No life insurance. No pension plans and 401(k)'s. No social security. Literally surviving on the generosity of others.
- This widow – she's looking for the judge to give her justice in her case.
- V3 – she 'kept coming to him'
 - She was going to wear him out until he listened.
 - She was desperately persistent
 - Illustration – a young child wanting something that he or she just keeps after asking...

THE RESPONSE

- Re-Read V4-5
- See the response – this wicked, unjust judge, answers because of her persistence.

GOD'S RESPONSE

- So, if a wicked judge will respond because of the desperate persistence of this widow
- How much more will our good, and loving, and gracious God respond to those of us who are willing to beg of Him to act.
 - Don't read this parable and think that we have to pester God to overcome his resistance. Like a young child pestering a parent. That's not the point at all.
 - Instead read this parable and see that we **GET TO** pray and commune with God as a way of seeing His willingness come to life
 - Pray, and keep praying. Never give up praying.
- V7 – Will he delay helping them? Of course not. His help will be in his way, and according to his timing, but he will not delay. V8 – He will swiftly grant them justice.
- But the question of V8 – will he find faith on earth?

So the first parable is a call for us to keep praying – the 2nd parable is a warning to those who trusted in themselves and “looked down on everyone else:” Here, Jesus gives us the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector – both men going up to the temple to pray.

THE PHARISEE:

- Standing – probably by himself so other people would see him. Standing was an acceptable posture of prayer prescribed in the Old Testament, but the suggestion here was this was an act of arrogance.
- The Words – Interestingly his first 4 words were ok. I he'd have just stopped there, it would have been ok. Just put a period there bro, stop talking after, "God, I thank you."
 - The older I grow, the more my prayer life has been an act of thanksgiving to God.
 - If the brother stops after the first 4 words he'd be ok, but he doesn't.
- But he doesn't stop there. He uses his prayer as a way of self-promotion and self worship. He thinks he's awesome and he's telling god how awesome he is in the words of his prayer.
 - I thank you that I'm not like those evil and wicked sinners and especially like that dude way back there that can't even lift his eyes up
- His pride even has him reciting his awesomeness back to God, as if God didn't already know all about his religious activity
 - To be clear – fasting and tithing aren't condemned. It's the self-righteous posture that's being pointed out
 - Fasting and tithing (giving 1/10th) are good and Biblical ways of worshiping the Lord

- So the problem isn't with the activity, the problem is with this dude's arrogance. He may have well have said "I'm better than all of you. I'm awesomer than all of you. All of you are wicked and evil, but look how awesome I am."

THE TAX COLLECTOR

Enter the tax collector.

- Says he's standing far off – he wouldn't have been allowed in the closer areas of the temple, and from his prayer, he wouldn't have gone there even if he was allowed.
- Can't even lift his eyes to heaven – looking down – beating his chest – begging for God to have mercy on him
- Bro knew he was wicked – knew the only way to peace was begging for God's mercy.
- I think the same thing we see in the persistent widow – the same desperation that she had – is this same type of desperation here in the heart of the tax collector – he has no other option but to beg God for mercy.

THE RESULTS

- The tax collector experienced God's mercy.

- The one who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

So what are the takeaways for us this morning? Our main idea from today is that the basic posture of prayer is persistence, humility, and desperation...

PERSISTENCE

- If Jesus has given us this story, the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write this teaching down for us, for Christians on the need to pray always and not give up → why do we so often give up in prayer?
- Do we really trust in the goodness of God. That God will answer. And yes, often his answer involves changing our own hearts. But God always answers.

HUMILITY

- Prayerlessness = supreme arrogance. Says to God “I’ve got this, I can handle this, I’ll talk at you later.”
- No amount of religious activity can save you or me

- The only possible way, is to out of humility run to Jesus. And in the same way as this tax collector, as for His mercy. Turn from your sin and trust in Jesus. Run to Jesus alone.

DESPERATION

- Desperation from the widow – she had no hope other than the moving of the judge.
- Desperation from the tax collector – he knew he was a wicked sinner, and his only hope was the mercy of God
- Do we pray with this type of desperation? Probably not if we're honest.
 - Only happens when/if we see ourselves for who we really are, and we start to see Jesus for who he is.
- There's a boldness in her prayer – SHE'S ASKING and SHE'S NOT STOPPING until she gets a response.

So...this morning:

- 1. Where are you desperate for God to move/act/respond?**
- 2. Will you go to God humbly and seek him, and his purposes, and trust in his goodness**
- 3. Will you keep going to him?**