

## **BLESS – B – Begin with Prayer**

Good morning church. So good to be with you today, for those that are online for whatever reason, welcome. For those with us in the room here today – welcome.

Last week we kicked off a 6-week series using the word BLESS – and remember what we’re trying to accomplish. We’re trying to put language and actions around what it looks like to live our lives on mission – for the glory of God and the good of our friends, family and neighbors. Not like, here’s another program to run – instead just trying to put language and actions around the reason you and I have breath.

And from last week, we looked at God’s promise to Abraham – with our main idea that you have been blessed to bless others. Blessed to be a blessing. And well, if we buy into this idea – that we’ve been blessed to be a blessing to others – where do we start in seeking to be a blessing to others? We begin with prayer. This morning we’re going to look at 2 parables of Jesus found in the book of Luke – centering on prayer.

Now, when we look at the parables of Jesus – just keep in mind the goal isn’t to overanalyze every spec and comma. How I’ve learned to study the parables of Jesus is to zoom out, and try and understand the big picture – said another way, what overarching theme is Jesus teaching here that we need to run with.

The first parable we’ll look at is in Luke 11, right after Luke records the Lord’s Prayer (or better understood as the model prayer) Luke records this parable. Turn with me to Luke 11:5-8

### **READ Luke 11:5-8**

<sup>5</sup>He also said to them, “Suppose one of you<sup>[a]</sup> has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, <sup>6</sup>because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I don’t have anything to offer him.’ <sup>7</sup>Then he will answer from inside and say, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can’t get up to give you anything.’ <sup>8</sup>I tell you, even though he won’t get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his friend’s shameless boldness,<sup>[a]</sup> he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

Now, the cultural implications here are largely lost on 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century context, there was a huge emphasis on hospitality. And, it wouldn’t be uncommon to have someone travelling through and just drop by to stay overnight or whatever. And you’d be expected to host them and provide for them. So the situation, while uncommon to us, would be common in a 1<sup>st</sup> century context.

Additionally, there would be this ENORMOUS embarrassment if you couldn’t feed people. It would have been shameful to not be able to provide for a house guest – and there’s was an honor/shame culture. Now some of you know me, I’ve got this fear of running out of food when we’ve invited people in. It’s why when I was charged with drinks for the Christmas party, there was enough for every person to have like a 6-pack of coke and a couple of bottles of water.

So the guy, has an unexpected house guest drop in, but has an empty pantry. To make matters worse it's midnight. So he goes and knocks on his buddy's door.

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't want to even get a text message at midnight much less a knock at the door. If someone knocks on our door at midnight, Victoria will probably get me to check it out, and depending on how awake I am, I'll show up at the door with either a hammer or a loaded gun.

Well in the parable, the brother comes to the door and says – “get out of here man. My kids are already down and you're going to wake them. I got nothing for you.”

It says in V8 that the dude's friendship isn't enough to get him to help him. But there's something that is – what Jesus said, it's translated to **SHAMELESS BOLDNESS**. Not because they're friends, but because of the brother's shameless boldness, he gets all that he needs.

That phrase “Shameless Boldness” could be translated persistence, or audacious. It gives a picture that the dude isn't embarrassed at all for asking. **He knows what he needs and he's not afraid, ashamed, embarrassed or timid – he's boldly asking for it.** You got what I need. I know you got what I need. And I'm not afraid or embarrassed to ask you for it. No shame, no fear, no embarrassment. **AND HE HAS NO OTHER OPTION.**

#### TRANSITION...

So we see this persistent, shameless, boldness as a posture of prayer before the Lord. Now if you turn over to Luke 18, just a handful of pages to your right, here's another parable on prayer with a story about a widow and a wicked judge in Luke 18:1-8

#### READ Luke 18:1-8

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

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

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

Now in context, the way I read this parable is praying for Jesus to return. And while that is the direct context here, we can certainly unpack some mega themes on prayer from this parable as well.

The Judge – not a good guy. Crooked as they come. Doesn't fear God or respect people – this is an incredible type of insult against the judge's character.

**The widow – in an age before retirement accounts, life insurance, social security and Medicare – the widow is helpless.** Her only option is to convince this crooked judge to help her. And, because of her persistence, her never ending plea to him, the crooked judge gives her what she wants.

Then in V7 Jesus gives us the comparison – look at how the crooked judge responds. How much more freely will God respond to his elect who cry out to him?

Elect – When you see that word, don't let it scare you. In this context – simply means Christians. **God hears and responds the cries of His children.** Just like – parents in the room – you know your children's voices and you respond to them. And kids in the room – your know who to go to for help. If you are a Christian, in a far greater way, God hears you and responds to you. If you are not a Christian, you have no basis by which to cry out to God. **INVITATION!** But for the Christian, God hears and responds to his children who cry out to him.

#### **TRANSITION...**

What do these 2 parables have in common? What do we today take from them?

1. Persistence – Don't give up, don't stop praying. See we want things now – instantly – and because of this there will be this tendency to give up. And hear me, sometimes the Lord answers instantly. That can happen. But sometimes the answer to our prayer isn't instant. The Lord says wait, or not now, and we're tempted to give up. Maybe we don't think praying will work (either we doubt the Gospel or the character of God). Maybe we're just tired of waiting.
2. Urgency – Eternity is at stake. We don't know when we will breathe our last breath, we don't know when our family and friends that don't know Jesus will either.
3. Desperation – Knowing that we have no other option but the grace and mercy of God. As desperately as a friend in need at midnight – willing to get the HOA prize for neighborhood's worst neighbor. As desperately as a widow seeking justice from a crooked judge. Desperation.
4. Humility – Realizing that there are things only God can do.

#### **CLOSING**

What if we prayed this way? With persistence, urgency, desperation and humility? Trusting in the character of God, who for a Christian, God is a good and loving Father – ready to provide. Knowing what we need before we even ask. And using our prayer to change us, and to make us more like Jesus.

If we desire to be a blessing to others – sharing and showing the greatest blessing we will ever have (life in Christ) – **we start with prayer and we don't ever stop praying.**

And my encouragement to each of you today – is start with 3 people. People that you know personally, that you have an existing relationship with, and begin praying for them. Pray that God would save them, pray that God would give you or some other person an opportunity to share Jesus with them. For the next 30 days, commit to pray.

And, what if you don't know how to pray? Great question. I'm not going to assume anything of any of us. Turn back to Matthew 6 – this is where Matthew records the Lord's Prayer or the Model Prayer. His disciples come to him, ask him to teach them to pray, and he says pray like this...Not these exact words, but use it as a guide. What another pastor says riff on the Lord's prayer like a jazz musician riffs on a melody.

Use the Lord's prayer as a guide:

- Recognize the holiness, the greatness, the perfect character of God
- Recognize your relationship with him as FATHER
- Cry out to him that His kingdom would come in your friend's life – that He would save them. That His kingdom would come in Bradenton, in your neighborhood, on your street, in your school, at your work, in your homw
- Ask God to use you however he sees fit, in being a blessing to your friends, neighbors, and classmates and coworkers.

So much more we could say on this – but for today – I specifically challenge and encourage you to commit to pray every day for 3 people that you know, for 30 days. That God would use you to be a blessing to them, and that God would save them.

**PRAY.**