

Prevailing in Prayer

Luke 18:1-8

By John Owen Butler

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Luke 18:1-8

Preached on: Sunday, January 11, 2015

Heritage Presbyterian Church

14500 N Western Avenue

Edmond, OK 73013

Website: www.heritagepca.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/heritagepca

Please remain standing for the reading of God's word from our Old Testament reading this morning, Psalm 29. And before we read, let's pray.

Living and true God, we ask as we come to your word, help us to so hear it that we may truly understand, and in understanding that we may believe, and believing that we may follow your way in all faithfulness, and we would seek to honor and glorify you in all that we are and all that we do. We ask in Jesus' name and God's people say, amen.

Psalm 29,

1 Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. 3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, "Glory!" 10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. 11 May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Our New Testament reading, two passages out of the New Testament, the first is Luke 18, beginning at the first verse.

1 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself,

'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

And then Luke 11 at verse 5.

5 And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. 9 And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God endures forever. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Please be seated.

Last week we saw that God blesses his people exceeding, abundantly, more than we could hope for, even ask. He delights as our heavenly Father to give us everything that we have need of and how do we respond to this? Well, the right response is that of gratitude to God and the primary way, the chief foundational way that we go about this is in prayer. God wants to be recognized and glorified in our daily worship, in our daily fellowship with him, and the way that we chiefly go about doing that is through prayer. It's not the only means but that is the foundational means by which we return thanks to God.

But not only does God seek out prayer from us as we read through the Scriptures and he does this in a number of ways, he instructs us to pray and gives us every encouragement and every inducement to pray, but we need prayer as we saw last week. God doesn't need prayer in the sense that somehow he's incomplete if we don't pray. He is complete within himself but I think that everyone in Christ recognizes and resonates to the fact that we

need prayer. Not just we need others to be praying for us but we ourselves need to pray, to be engaged in prayer.

Let me ask you a question this morning: when you did last pray, that is outside of the context of this service or outside of Sunday school this morning, when you last prayed and I hope you have been in prayer, maybe this morning earlier when you met with the Lord in reading his word and praying for the worship service today, maybe last night before you went to sleep or with your family when you were reading a portion of Scripture and then going to the Lord together in prayer, maybe you have been in prayer each and every one of those times, but it is also possible that you might be squirming in your seat when I just read that; that your own heart is sinking because right now your conscience is pricking you because I just read this list of moments for prayer and you have missed them and it could be the case that you're left wondering just when it was you actually last were in prayer. It is a fact, it is a fact that often our prayer life is directly proportional to the sense of need that we currently experience. For the most part, we think we can manage quite well without God, to be truthfully honest in how we go about things if someone were to examine our lives based on our behaviors this would indeed be indicative of how we go about things. For the most part we think we can manage quite well without him but there are those times when he sure comes in handy. You know, it's the breaking case of emergency type of thing or when we see that the need is huge and dire and we feel like there's nothing else that we can do.

So thinking back to when you last were in prayer, I want to ask you another question: what did you expect from God by way of an answer? Or another way to put it is how do you conceive of the way that God responds to your prayers? Well, some of the answers that we might come up with on that is, "Well, God's sovereign so God is going to do what God's going to do so my praying is pointless." Or, "I've already prayed about that. I don't need to be constantly dogging God with these particular things. God's sovereign and he's going to take care of business and I've already put in that particular request. I can drive on." To others it might seem that God seems distant and unlistening because of the frustration of prayer and of going to him over and again. You sincerely have petitioned him for some time about some deeply felt need that you have, some deeply felt thing you feel that God is perhaps deaf to your cries, and in that frustration and in just that hopelessness because your hope just fizzles out because, "Lord, where is the answer in this?" You've asked and asked and asked and again and nothing has come to result out of all of this. No answer has been given and you're ready to give up and move on or maybe just to slide away from the faith altogether.

In both of the passages that we read just a few minutes ago from Luke, we have folks who are in dire circumstances, we have folks that are in very tough circumstances situationally or in the circumstance of the persistent widow who is there with the unjust judge. As we consider both of those passages but particularly I want us to home in on Luke 11 and in the context of this, it immediately follows Jesus' teaching on the Lord's Prayer and that friend at midnight. It teaches us about the attitude of God toward the needs of his children.

You see, we oftentimes have come looking at that passage, haven't we, we look at it from the point of persistent, the point of constantly hounding God and for constantly hanging in there; that we just need to tough it out and to see that we're constantly just hanging in there. God's going to give us an answer in this so you just need to persist in this and to persevere in this. But I think it actually teaches us more of the attitude of God towards prayer and towards the needs of his children because we're going to examine the nature of the response but first we need to look at the nature of the request, in particular here in Luke 11.

Well, what's the setup of this? It's quite straightforward. You've got a guy, a friend has come late at night and, you know, this being a Middle Eastern setting here, you provide hospitality for this friend that comes and it appears that this might have been a friend coming unannounced. A circumstance that just caught him off-guard. There is nothing in the cupboard. There is nothing to provide to set before him and in this culture of honor and shame and especially how you go about taking care of folks who have been welcomed into the hospitality of your tent or the hospitality of your house, is a faux pas with a capital F, capital P.

This is something that is just as embarrassing a circumstance that you could imagine and it's unusual, it comes at midnight. I'm sure we all would be willing if our next door neighbor showed up and asked for a loaf of bread or extra sugar, maybe a wrench of a certain size, during business hours or at least before we've turned in and we've gotten into our jammies and we're there in bed and we've just kind of hit that just right warm spot in the winter time, haven't we, and just right and then ding-dong. In our culture, we think home invasion or something like that, and to be roused out of bed in this way is just totally beyond our comfort zone in this.

But this man goes to his next door neighbor and begs of him of this bread. This traveler has arrived. He's in this embarrassing circumstance. You know, there hasn't been any emails or text messages tipping him off about this. He's left there empty cupboard and can't provide for this guy and not only that, he goes next door and drags his neighbor into it. So understanding in this, as well, this is also dragging this neighbor in and there's a sense of obligation that kind of extends not just from the original host but also now in this context also ropes in the next door neighbor and he has something to give and it would be a major major thing not only honor/shame with regards to that traveler who has come in, but now with his next door neighbor and he's got to live next door to this guy.

So we see that he is there and he's begging of this and notice the answer this fellow gives in this, "Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything." Now, those all seem fairly legitimate kinds of things. You know, "Come back in business hours. Come back at some other time that I can accommodate. You know, this is a bit of a stretch, fella, that you've done all these things." Maybe you've got the kids in bed, you don't want to wake them up. Well, they're now awake because he's having to answer in this way. The neighborhood is probably awake because of all of this going on in these particular circumstances and his only hope

rests in the generosity of the one who has the bread and it's at midnight and he goes to him.

Notice Jesus says, "I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, but he will get up and give him because of his impudence." In some ways, this word is translated "persistent" or to use a good Yiddish term, his "chutzpah" in all of this. He's coming and just pestering about this, he's going to give up and give him whatever he needs and the point is Jesus is making, yeah, that's how we might respond to being inconvenienced in this sense. We don't do it out of a sense of friendship, we do it out of a sense of, "Just get him off my back. Let's move on from this and drive on." And really the focus a lot of times we have is on this fellow who is constantly there asking or on that persistent widow, but I think in both passages Jesus is teaching us, he's telling us, "Look, it's not on the persistence of that individual," although we are as the preface there in Luke 18 says, to keep at it and not give up hope, but we do that not on the sense of our own fortitude. We don't do that out of a sense of our own, you know, "I'm just going to gird up my loins and I'm going to go after this," but in the context of who it is that we're petitioning. We are not petitioning the unjust, unrighteous judge who does this just to get the widow off his back, to get her out of his office, she's bad for PR, she's constantly there bugging me and all this, I'm going to answer this. Nor in the circumstance of this guy getting up, "I'm going to give it to this fellow because of his impudence, because of his brazenness, his brashness and all this because I want to go back to bed."

You see, when we are petitioning our heavenly Father, it is one who is in relation to us and one who loves us as his own children and who will get up and who will answer prayer and will not do it out of exasperation. "You again? I thought I gave you what you needed yesterday? You again? And you screwed up with what I have given to you? You've been an unjust, unfaithful individual and you come to me again?" Our heavenly Father will never ever ever ever answer us in that way. He delights in the prayers of his people. He delights in coming and answering of your particular needs of these things.

Now, it is indeed the case that some have said in the past that God answers prayer one of three ways: yes or no or wait. Another variation of this: no, not yet but it is going to come. And so in those times when he tells us to wait or no, not yet, we need to be convinced, we need to be encouraged that our heavenly Father is not blowing us off nor is he answering us just to get us out of his hair, so to speak, but he is answering in such a way that is for his glory and for our own good, we confess and we have to acknowledge over and again.

You look at the motive of these guys here, the unjust judge and of that householder who gets hit up for the bread, certainly not the best of motivations, is it? But you can take this to the bank that your heavenly Father always has the best of motivations concerning you and that he will provide for your needs according to all of his riches and glory in Christ Jesus. There are no questionable motives in the mind of God, no selfishness, no vindictiveness, no peakedness with us, no stinginess in the mind of God nor in his actions. There is only love for those whom he has adopted as his own and lavished upon us.

There is only a heart that bursts with loving compassion, a heart that cannot contain the love that he feels for his children, a heart that is like this cup constantly overflowing and spilling out with streams of blessing and provision and this is the love that you may test with your prayers. This is this one that we come to and pray and to seek after. This is the love that will give you either the much sought after healing of a physical or mental illness or the calmness of spirit that is going to enable you to face even the valley of the shadow of death. This is that love that's going to fill that empty void that's left with the passing of a loved one. This is that love that's going to lift up your soul, weary and beaten and bruised and battered, and it's going to set you back on the road to salvation. This is that pure love that is exceeding, abundantly more than we could hope or even ask, and certainly far better than we deserve.

This is that love that is boundless, this love of our Father in heaven, Christian, for you and for me. Outside of Christ, you don't have any expectation of this love. Outside of Christ, you have no hope of this love. But the graciousness of God is this offer of the Gospel, is to all who repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that he comes and loves and loves you freely in his Son Jesus. Have you this Father? Do you know this one in whom there is this love, this love that is not stand-offish? This love that is full and free and expresses this love that will come and conquer you?

O believer, take this to heart when you pray. There may be that item or list of items that you've been long pursuing the Lord with and you may be in times of frustration and care, you may be to that point of wanting to give up, you need to know, we need to know our heavenly Father hasn't forgotten these things. You know, one of the glorious things about this is everything for the believer is a front burner issue for God. Your heavenly Father keeps every one of your concerns on the front burner and that means he's got a pretty big range. He's God and he's got this.

This love that knows no bounds is that love that we experience and we're reminded of when we come to his table in a few minutes, this love that won't let us go, this love that conquers us and overwhelms us, this love that we often forget, this love that, sad to say, we sometimes despise. But he says to you, Christian, "Come. Sit down and feast on me." There will come that day when we will eat and drink it new in our Father's kingdom with him and the cups will never run dry and we will all be there celebrating and rejoicing in him and his banner over us is indeed love.

Let's pray.

We praise you, Lord, that you have mightily and marvelously worked all of this and when folks may fail us, you never do. When we are dealing with people whose motives are selfish, maybe hateful and spiteful, even vindictive and overbearing, you are never any of these things. How much more then will our Father who is in heaven hear his children when they come to him in prayer? O Lord, we come and we would lay those things spoken and unspoken that are upon our hearts and we can come with a boldness and a confidence not in ourselves but in your work for us and in your invitation to us and in

your desires in love that you manifest toward us. O, our God, we praise you that as a Father that you indeed honor your word that you have given to your children. We rejoice that you will provide for us according to your promises that are our seal and sign to us that are our yeah and amen in Christ Jesus, and it is in his name we praise you. Amen.