



THE GOSPEL OF

MARK



Sermon Series Notes

“Persistence & Prayer” (Mark 1:35, Luke 18:1-8)

Danny Hodges - NT3661

Intro: Jake, the rancher, went one day, to fix a distant fence. The wind was cold and gusty, & the clouds rolled grey and dense. As he pounded the last nails in and gathered his tools to go, the temperature had fallen, and the snow began to blow. When he finally reached his pickup, he felt a heavy heart, for the sound of the ignition, he knew it wouldn't start. So Jake did what most of us would do if we'd been there, he humbly bowed his head, and sent up high, a prayer. As he turned the key for the last time, he softly cursed his luck. They found him three days later, frozen stiff in that old truck. Of all the saints in heaven, Jake's favorite was Peter. I've always heard, Jake said to Pete, that God will answer prayers. But one time I asked for help, and God just plain weren't there. Does God answer prayers of some, and ignore the prayers of others? That don't seem exactly square, I know all men are brothers. Does He randomly reply, without good rhyme or reason? Maybe it's the time of day, the weather or the season. Now I ain't tryin to act smart, it's just the way I feel, And I was wonderin' could you tell me – what's the deal? Peter listened patiently, and when Jake was done, there were smiles of recognition, and he said, “So, you're the one! That day your truck, it wouldn't start, and you sent your prayer a flyin, you gave us all a really bad time, with hundreds of us tryin. A thousand angels rushed to check the status of your file, but you know Jake, we hadn't heard from you in a while. And though all prayers are answered, and God ain't got no quota, He didn't recognize your voice, and started a truck in North Dakota.

We've paused in our study of the gospel of Mark at verse 35 of chapter one. Read Mark 1:35.

Prayer is learned. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray.

Jesus gave us a pattern for prayer, we call it “The Lord's Prayer.” Daniel Henderson in his book, *Transforming Prayer*, suggests the 4/4 pattern of The Lord's Prayer, based on music's most basic beat: Reverence, Response, Requests, & Readiness.

Prayer requires a clear mind

- I Peter 4:7...be clear minded...so that you can pray.
- Acts 24:16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.
- The reason some people have no meaningful/powerful prayer life is because they are not right with God, or not right with others.
- Psalm 66:18-20 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened...
- I John 3:21-24; 5:14-15
- Matthew 5:23-24 If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift...go and be reconciled...then come and offer your gift.
- Rom.12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Prayer requires discipline

- I Peter 4:7...be self-controlled...so that you can pray.
- Try journaling; Keeps your thoughts in order, & great to have record to look back and see what God has done.
- Read samples from my journals, copies for translators

We are told to pray without ceasing (I Thess.5:17)

Prayer should be scheduled

- Jesus often withdrew alone early in the am (Mark 1; Luke 5:16)
- Daniel had a scheduled prayer time three times a day (Daniel 6:10)
- Peter & John went to the temple at the hour of prayer (Acts 3:1)
- What time in your schedule is set aside for prayer?

If I do not learn to hear God in the quiet, it will be difficult to impossible to hear Him in the noise.

My original intention was to teach today on intercessory prayer, but the Lord seemed to lead me in a different direction. I trust I have truly followed His leading.

Today our prayer focus takes us to the gospel of Luke, chapter 18. Read Luke 18:1-8. Pastor Vivian Laird used to say to me, "Bro, I believe prayer and faith are the two most important aspects of the Christian life."

This widow had no husband, and was being taken advantage of by "an adversary." The Greek suggests she followed this judge around, constantly asking for help. The phrase "so that she won't eventually 'wear me out'" is a boxing term referring to giving someone a black eye! She is tenaciously persistent!

A parable is a story from everyday life intended to teach us valuable lessons. What are the lessons of this parable?

The unjust judge is not like God/God is not like the unjust judge

If an unjust judge who neither fears God nor cares about men will grant justice to this widow just to get her off his back, then God, who is a just judge and cares greatly about men, will certainly grant us justice.

Matt.5: 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

James 1: 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

I John 4:8...God is love.

John 3:16

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

The widow has an adversary

We have a very real adversary

- I Peter 5: 8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.
- John 10: 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The widow ultimately gets justice

What is justice? Justice is when wrong is made right. There are lot of wrongs in this present world that need to be made right. Everything about a fallen world is wrong. Any imperfection is wrong, right? If this widow gets justice from an unjust judge, we will surely get justice from a good, loving, and just God. The word “quickly” can mean soon in time, but it also means that when justice comes, it comes quickly. Soon in time is relative, because with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day (Ps.90:4; II Peter 3:8). Someone asked God, “God, how long is a million years to you?” God said, “A million years is like a second.” They then asked, “How much is a million dollars to you?” God said, “A million dollars is like a penny.” They then smiled and said, “God, could you spare a penny?” God smiled back and said, “Sure, just wait a second.”

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

Rev.22:7, 12, & 20 Jesus says he is coming soon.

This does not at all mean that God will not work on our behalf here and now, it only means that the ultimate justice is at His second coming. See Rev.8:3-5; The context of this passage of Scripture is a future time when God will right all wrongs, bring every evil doer to justice, including Satan himself, and usher in a new world for all who have trusted in the shed blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, a world where all righteousness exists. In that day every prayer you have ever prayed to be freed from the pains and wrongs of this present world will be answered.

But between the cross and His second coming, our adversary will attempt to rob us of our faith. And guess what is the greatest way to keep him from doing that? Persistence in prayer.

Some reminders that hopefully will help us be persistent in prayer.

Ultimate justice will be realized when Jesus returns.

God is a supernatural God that has created laws of nature, and placed us in a natural world that is subject to those laws. God manifests Himself supernaturally on an occasional basis, but for the most part He encourages us to live within the laws of nature, by faith, looking forward to a supernatural new beginning. I don't see a lot of Christians healed, or delivered from very painful and often perplexing circumstances, and I do not believe it is solely because of our lack of faith.

The reality is we live in a fallen world where Satan rules, and here we as Christians are the minority that is hated, persecuted, and taken advantage of. Add to that the fact that, even though our spirits have been made alive through faith in Christ, our bodies are still diseased by sin that dwells within our members.

One of the greatest practical aspects of prayer is that it keeps me focused on a good and loving God who will one day soon grant me justice against my adversary in this present world.

Heaven will make right all the disappointments in this life.

I Cor.15:19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

The reality of an unseen spiritual battle

Ephesians 1:12...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

See I Kings 22:19-23 (summarize the story); Ahab thinks by his own ingenuity he can escape harm, even though he is living a self-centered, rebellious life. He does not realize that the battle goes beyond the realm of the physical world. His ultimate destiny is determined physically is determined in the spiritual world. Fascinating! Expound further?

Because of this very real battle, sometimes the answers to our prayers are delayed. See Daniel 10:12-13

Romans 8:28

- It was the adversary who tormented Paul the apostle with a thorn in his flesh. It was the adversary who caused all of Job's pain and misery. It was the adversary who put Jesus on the cross, using Judas as his key agent to arrange for Jesus' arrest.
- I Cor.2:6-8

- Who thought the cross was a good idea? Who understood the cross? Nobody initially! How was the cross good for Jesus? He obeyed the Father's will, made the ultimate sacrifice, and inherited the ultimate prize.
- Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown...
- We must never forget that the Lord has an eternal purpose behind every suffering he allows His saints to endure in this life.

Willingness to accept unpleasant answers

- Rev.6:9-11; There are those that are destined to suffer the same fate of these martyrs, and no prayer will alter their destiny, in the same way no prayer would alter the Father's will for Jesus Christ. They are destined to die for their faith, and justice for their undeserved deaths will come not in this life, but in the one to come.
- John the Baptist, are you the one?
- Paul's thorn in the flesh
- One great challenge connected with this point is that I must continually keep from comparing God's will for my life with God's will for someone else's life. See John 21:18-22; Peter miraculously delivered from prison while John the Baptist was beheaded; Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech, & Abednego, miraculously delivered from a fiery furnace, the lions while other prophets were killed, sometimes in the most brutal ways; Elijah taken up in a whirlwind while Elisha died of an illness...Moses buried on Mt. Nebo while Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land.

Eternal perspective

- Psalm 73, Asaph
- One of the greatest advantages of prayer is that it keeps our focus on spiritual realities, and eternal treasures. Pray with me, so that YOU will not fall into temptation (Luke 22:40).
- II Cor.4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen...
 - Note the context of this verse.

Patient endurance

II Cor.1:6

Ultimately things are going to get worse before they get better.

Rev.1:9 I John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the WORD OF God and the testimony of Jesus.

Read Rev.13:5-10 (Daniel 7:25); 14:12

Matt.24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he stands firm to the end will be saved.

"Sometimes the power of prayer is the power to carry on. It doesn't always change your circumstances, but it gives you the strength to walk through them." (The Circle Maker, p.79).

Faith in a miracle working God

Mark Batterson in his book *The Circle Maker* says this: "Our family has a handful of sayings that have been passed down from generation to generation. They are part of our family folklore. I'm not sure where this one originated, but I remember my grandmother repeating it more than once:"

"You can't never always sometimes tell."

Translation = "Anything could happen." (The Circle Maker, p,63)

"...I have come to expect the unexpected because God is predictably unpredictable." (The Circle Maker, p,63)

He goes on to say in this statement: God always has a holy surprise up his sovereign sleeve! The only thing I can predict with absolute certainty is this: the more you pray the more holy surprises will happen.

In standardized math tests. Japanese children consistently score higher than their American counterparts. While some assume that a natural proclivity toward mathematics is the primary difference, researchers have discovered that it may have more to do with effort than ability. In one study involving first graders, students were given a difficult puzzle to solve. The researchers weren't interested in whether or not the children could solve the puzzle; they simply wanted to see how long they would try before giving up. The American children lasted, on average, 9.47 minutes. The Japanese children lasted 13.93 minutes. In other words, Japanese children tried about 40 percent longer...Researchers concluded that the difference in math scores might have less to do with intelligence and more to do with persistence quotient. (The Circle Maker, p.85)

A little more than ten years ago, Berlin's elite Academy of Music did a study with musicians. With the help of professors, they divided violinists into three groups: world class soloists, good violinists, and those who were unlikely to play professionally. All of them started playing at roughly the same age and practices about the same amount of time until the age of eight. That is when their practice habits diverged. The researchers found that by the age of twenty, the average players had logged about four thousand hours of practice time; the good violinists totaled about eight thousand hours; the elite performers set the standard with ten thousand hours...potential is only tapped via persistent effort. (The Circle Maker, pp.85-86).

Elijah praying for rain (I Kings 18:42-45)

II Kings 13: 18 Then he said, "Take the arrows," and the king took them. Elisha told him, "Strike the ground." He struck it three times and stopped. 19 The man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times."

James 5: 16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

God honors fervent, consistent, persevering prayer.

CONCLUSION

If you do not have a time daily set aside for prayer, I pray you will determine to do so. I pray you will be persistent in prayer, in season and out of season. May the Lord through prayer keep your focus on a future day when all wrongs will be made right, the reality of a spiritual world, a very real adversary, the confidence and faith that in the end God's plan & purpose will prevail, and that as we persevere in prayer, "You can't always sometimes tell."