



TIME OF GRACE®

Pray Like a Pro: But My Prayers Are Unanswered

Study Notes

Summary

How often do you pray about the same thing? Is prayer a one-time solution you try before moving on to other options? Or do you attempt to wear God down with the persistence of your prayers? Jesus' story about a persistent woman just might change the way you think about talking to our Father in heaven.

- **Luke 18:1-8:** ¹ Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."
- Jesus' Point: _____!
- Question: Why does _____ wait?
- **Luke 18:8:** However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?
- Answer: _____

Points to Ponder

1. How often do you pray for justice in our community/world? What factors have led you to pray so little/much for this urgent issue?
2. Meditate on 2 Peter 3:8,9. How do Peter's words back up our answer to today's question?

3. List three reasons why Jesus is worth the wait, even if this life is unfair and unjust.

Homework for Next Week

Read Matthew 26:36-45 and James 4:2; 5:16.

Time of Grace Ministry
Pray Like a Pro: But My Prayers Are Unanswered
Luke 18: 1-8
September 19, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

I want to start by asking a question that many of you have asked of God, and are desperate to hear his answer. Here's the question. Why doesn't God answer good prayers?

Have you ever wondered that before? "God, I'm asking you for a good thing. I've prayed once, twice, fifteen times about something I know you care about, but you haven't answered me yet. God, why don't you answer good prayers?" Now, I picked that phrase carefully, "good prayers," because I have a hunch that a lot of your prayers are like my prayers - they're not always objectively good.

All right, so if I'm going on vacation or I have a day off, and I say, "Please, Jesus, 79 degrees, sunny, not a cloud in the sky. Would you do it?" I mean, okay, I get that there's a farmer at the same time who's praying for a lot of clouds and a lot of rain, so I kind of get why God would say no to my prayer. What doesn't always make sense is when you're praying for something good - just objectively, biblically, no questions asked, it is what God wants and you ask him for it with passion and with faith. Why doesn't God answer good prayers like that?

For example, like Jesus is going to talk to us about today, why doesn't God just say yes when you and I pray for justice? You know, justice is kind of a fancy word - when we are asking God to make life morally make sense, for things to be fair, for innocent people to be protected and have a better life, for bad people to be punished and have a not so better life. We ask God for justice. It wouldn't be right, it wouldn't be morally good, if bad people got away with it and good people suffered when they haven't done anything wrong, and so, we pray.

Now, justice, as you'll find in many places in the Bible, is God's answer to all of the unfairness and ugly-isms that mess with our world. The answer to racism is justice. The answer to sexism is justice. The answer to favoritism and nepotism is justice. When things are fair, when they're right, when this is moral and God makes it happen, that's justice. And I have a big hunch that some of you, maybe a whole bunch of you, have been asking God for justice these days.

You know, just stepping back from all of the politics and the headlines, you know, the debate that rages nationally, I have a hunch that you'll agree with me that a teenage boy should not be afraid to run down the street and worry that his life is going to end just because he's young, and male, and black. Right? It's not right. That's not fair. We don't want things like that to happen. We don't want to live in a culture where African American parents have to have "the talk" with their teenage kids. You know what "the talk" is? If you get pulled over, you keep your hands on the steering wheel. You don't reach for anything until you're told to. Because we don't want a

routine traffic stop to turn into something fatal, right? I have a feeling you want that, too. That's justice.

Nor do we want to live in a culture where everyone assumes that because you wear the badge and you're dressed in blue, that you're bad. That's not justice. The other day, downtown in our city, I saw someone with a sign that said, "Justice for All," and next to them was a person with a sign that said, "All Cops Are"... a word I can't say in church. Right? But that's not justice. We want bad cops to be disciplined, or fired, or taken care of, and we want good cops to be respected and praised for the sacrificial work that they do. That's why we pray for justice.

And it's so much more than just a, you know, a race thing, a police thing in our culture. There are a thousand different ways where you want the principles of justice to happen in your world, which is why we pray. You and I can't control everything that happens in the world. We can't snap our fingers and change systems or power structures, but God can, and so, we say, "God, make this right. At school and at work, in my church, in our community, in our nation, in our world, let justice get the last word." It's an obviously good prayer, and it begs the question then, why doesn't God answer it? "God, you're the King of kings, you're the Lord of lords. You could snap your fingers, justice would reign. So, why don't you do it?" Why do bad things seem to happen to good people?

"She was a good woman - a good mom, a caring wife, who gets a hard life. And she could care less about you, God, but she seems happy, and beautiful, and successful. That's not right." And do you know what happens when that happens? You're this close to giving up on God. You don't have to raise your hand for this part, either, but when bad things happen to you and it's not your fault, people start to wonder about God. Like, if God is full of power, and he's full of compassion, and he's full of love, and he can and he controls, then why?

And I've met a lot of people over the years who stopped going to church, and they stopped being passionate about prayer, and they stop identifying as Christian. Some of them start identifying as atheists because how can it make sense that things are so unfair in our world? "God, if I were you, I wouldn't do it this way, so I don't get you and I'm not sure if I want to follow you."

Now, if you haven't wrestled with those questions just yet, you will. In this world, unjust things happen every day. And so, today, Jesus wants to help. One of the things I love about Jesus is that he knows exactly the questions that we're asking. And so, today we're going to open our Bibles to a page where Jesus himself answers the question about justice. When life is hard and it's not fair, Jesus tells us exactly what to do and exactly what to think.

And Jesus answers this very important question, actually right in the midst of an odd and humorous story. I wonder if you've heard it before. It's Jesus' story about a grouchy judge and a woman who is so angry she almost punched the judge in the face. Have you heard of that Bible story before? I promise you it is in the Bible, and in the midst of this rather humorous story, Jesus is going to encourage us and teach us to not give up on God, but to keep trusting, keep praying, and keep our faith, no matter what happens in the days to come.

So, if you want to follow along on the screen, I'm going to open my Bible to Luke 18 and we're going to find these words, starting in verse 1. "Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." All right, there's the points, right? Keep praying, don't give up on God, don't lose your faith even if it's hard.

That's the point, now here's the parable, Verse 2. "Jesus said, "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to the judge with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary." See? I told you the judge was a grouch! Don't you love that description? He didn't fear God. He could care less about faith. He didn't believe in some higher power. None of that was his cup of tea, and he didn't care what people thought. So, if you hated him, if you disrespected him, if you left him a bad Yelp review on Judge.com or whatever judges would use, it didn't matter to him!

I picture this judge like, graduating from law school and only his mother shows up to the party, and even she leaves a little bit early, right? He's a bad judge, an unjust judge, who one day just happens to meet a widow. If you don't know much about Jesus' culture, widows were shockingly vulnerable in His day. Widows often didn't have resources, or leverage, or judicial or political options, and so, if people wanted to oppose them and take advantage of them - if maybe a strong man who had means and resources wanted to accuse a widow, he could probably get away with it because she had nowhere else to turn, no husband in that culture to protect her, and that's exactly what happens in the story.

But, one day she goes up to this judge. She knocks on the door of his chamber and she says to him, "Grant me justice. It's not fair what's happening. This guy's my adversary. He's accusing me. I can't defend myself, but justice is on my side, so grant me justice." And if you notice this little detail from Jesus' words, he said she, "kept coming to him with the plea." Like, one day she shows up. "Hey, grant me justice." An hour later, she's back at the courtroom. "Give me justice." And the judge takes a lunch break to get a falafel, or hummus, or whatever you had in the Middle East, and there she shows up at the table. "I still need justice." And he tries to escape to the bathroom, and who's in the stall next door? "Give me justice!" Until finally, finally, finally, what does the judge do? Jesus tells us in the next verse, Verse 4. "For some time, the judge refused. But finally, he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!"

That kind of reminds me of Andy Bernard. Any "Office" fans in church today? Yeah, a couple of you, I see. Andy Bernard, if you've never seen, "The Office," is one of the more annoying, and quirky, and persistent characters in the show. His personality could best be summarized by this amazing Andy Bernard quote. Here's what he said. "Every success I've ever had at my job or with the lady folk has come from my ability to slowly and painfully wear someone down." Isn't that a great line?

I think that's why Kim married me - slowly and painfully, I wore her down, and that's what this widow does, right? The judge isn't going to give in, but eventually, he says, "Fine, I'll give you what you want," and he grants her justice. So, what in the world does that have to do with you

and God? Well, here's how Jesus ends the story in Luke 18. Verse 6, "And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will God keep putting his chosen ones off? I tell you, God will see that his chosen ones get justice, and quickly." Now, don't miss the meaning of Jesus' teaching. He isn't saying that God is a lot like the judge in the story. You know, God is grouchy, he's bad, but if you keep praying, eventually he'll say, "Fine," and give you what you want. That's not the point.

Jesus is actually making an argument from the lesser to the greater. Remember that from logic class back in high school? He's trying to say if persistence works with even a bad judge, how much more will it work with a good God? If doing this can change the mind of someone who really doesn't like you, won't it persuade the mind of someone who adores you? Could the God who is love ignore his beloved sons and daughters forever? No. And Jesus says there's not a chance that that could happen. "I tell you," Jesus says in Verse 8, "God will see that we get justice, and quickly." Jesus here is affirming our belief that God is good, that God can be trusted. I know Jesus says here, "quickly," and you want to say, "Well, Jesus, it's not quick enough," but he tells us this story to not give up, keep praying.

Don't give up. Don't start thinking that God is a grouch and he's worse than some unjust judge. He's the God who invented the concept of justice. So, always pray with passion, with faith. Even when life is hard, even when you're in the pit, even when it's been 50 years of asking for the same thing, keep on asking God. And someday, very quickly, you will get exactly what you'll want. You'll get justice.

If you're taking notes on your phone or in your program, here's how I'd summarize today's big idea. Jesus' point is keep praying. Some of you have been asking God for help to forgive someone from your past who didn't treat you fairly, who hurt you. Keep praying. And some of you are grieving the loss of someone who died way, way too soon, and all of your friends agree, "It doesn't seem right, God. I don't get your timing or your plan." Jesus is saying to you, "Don't give up. Keep praying." And some of you who have lived your whole lives and you've read the headlines, and 2020, 2021, it's just like another iteration of the same story. "God, when is it going to get better?" And Jesus says, "Don't give up. Keep praying."

Now, I'm not sure what Jesus' friends did the moment he got done with the story, but if I had been there, do you know what I would've done? And Jesus would have said, "Uh, yeah, Mike, in the back?" And I would have said, "Yeah. Yeah, Jesus, sorry to interrupt. Why not now?" I'm like, "You love justice. Unfair things are bad. You could change it. Why would you make us keep on knocking? Why won't you just answer our cries and solve all of our problems now? Wouldn't that be better?"

And I think Jesus would have liked my question. It was kind of an odd ending to this odd story. At the end of verse 8, Jesus actually goes on to say this. He says, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" It's almost like Jesus knows that waiting is not our superpower. When life is hard and it's not going the way we want, he says, "When I come back, when I return from heaven, will I find anyone who's still praying, who's still believing?"

And there's this question that I would ask - Why does Jesus wait? And before I tell you the answer to that question, let me tell you an amazing story. About a month ago, I was having coffee downtown with a young woman that I had just met, and this young woman could not understand what was happening in her life. She said to me, "Pastor, I haven't used since the last time I talked to you. I've smoked a little weed," she admitted. "But all the stuff that I used to do, like, it was right there. I could've done it. Everyone was doing it and I didn't do it. Like, for the first time in a long time, I didn't do it and I didn't even want to. What do you think that was about? And Pastor, I haven't been hooking up with people." She says, "Can I tell that to you if you're a pastor? Like, I could've, but I didn't. And this Bible that you told me about, the Bible app," and she pulls out her hard copy and she says, "I've been reading it every single day." And there it is, like highlighted verses and notes in the margin, and she says, "Pastor, I don't get it. What is happening to me?"

And some of you know exactly what was happening to her. She was finding God, or more theologically correct, God was finding her - that he was tracking her down, opening her eyes to see that sin can only make you happy in the short term, but Jesus can bless you for forever, and ever, and ever. She was finding something compelling. She was being born again. This woman was being saved, and here's my point. If Jesus would have ended all of the injustice six weeks ago, what would have happened to her? This woman, whose eyes hadn't been opened, who was holding on, living in sin, who didn't know about forgiveness, or grace, or eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ - if Jesus would have ended all of your problems and said, "Okay, boom, I'm back, justice wins," what would have happened to this woman?

You get where I'm going? God is doing that kind of thing every single day. We pray, and even though we can't see his face, God cares. God is listening. God knows, and he says, "I know. I've got it. I'm going to fix it. I hate it. It breaks my heart, too. Just give me one second," and he saves people. If you want to fill in the blank, I'll give you a one-word answer. The reason Jesus makes us wait is us - us. God loves us so much, he doesn't want anyone to be lost. And I guarantee you, he cares so much about your struggle, but he cares infinitely more about people's eternity. If a hammer of God's justice came down right now, without Jesus there would be no way to be good, or holy, or saved.

And, according to Jesus, God wants people to see so much more than that. He wants them to see grace. He wants them to know that 2,000 years ago, there is a Jesus who came into this world and who was willing to suffer injustice so that we could go free. And Jesus, the only one who was ever good, was willing to suffer and die on a cross so that you and I, people who have, we have to admit, been bad, could be treated better than we deserve. So that instead of God's punishment, we would get His pleasure. Instead of a ticket to hell, we would have the open doors of heaven. Instead of having to worry about, like God finally getting back at us for all of the bad stuff we've done, we would know that His face is shining upon us and he loves us, because Jesus died for all of it.

That woman came to the judge and says, "Grant me justice," but we come to Jesus and say, "Give me mercy. Don't give me what I deserve. Treat me better than I deserve. Give me your

unconditional and eternal love." And friends, he does. He does. And conversation by conversation, person by person, God opens people's eyes to see, "Oh, man, I've got issues, too, and Jesus is the solution." And that's why we wait.

You know someone who doesn't believe those two things just yet. You love someone who hasn't embraced those two things just yet. And so, even when life is difficult, unfair, God says, "I want you to wait until I can convince and persuade their hearts of those two things." Did you hear, just, I think four days ago, what happened just outside the main entrance? This homeless guy comes and sits on a bench. A bunch of plastic bags, maybe all of his possessions in the world. And a guy comes up on a bike and stops, and they start talking, and on the security cameras you can see them just in the corner of the frame. And they laugh, and they joke, and they talk, and the guy on the bike is about to get on and leave, when one of the guys says, "You want to pray?" And the homeless guy, he sits down on the bench, and the guy on the bike kneels on the concrete, and they reach out their hands, and the security cameras capture this. Now, I don't know their story, but I have a hunch that at least one of those guys has been through some hard things. But, what did he do? He kept praying. Because when you know Jesus, you realize that he is always worth the wait.

Let's pray.

Dear Father in heaven, thank you for your patience and thank you for your salvation. God, all of us came into this world with sin, and if you weren't patient and willing to wait, none of us could have met Jesus. And so, I speak for every Christian in the room here today, everyone who's watching at home and online. God, thank you that you are the kind of god who doesn't give us what we deserve. Instead, you gave us your Son.

We are so grateful for his love, and now we pray, God, for supernatural, Holy Spirit given patience. Our lives can often be difficult, God, and it's so, so tempting to question you, and your control, and your love. Help us, like that widow, to be persistent, to keep reaching out to you, keep calling to you, because you will answer our prayer in due time.

Thank you, God, for your mercy. We don't deserve this, but you've given it. Help us to use it well, for people's good and for your glory. We ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.