

The passage we study in this lesson includes two parables and an incident that happened when people brought their infants to Jesus for a blessing. The first parable was a beautiful teaching on the value of being persistent in prayer, while the second reminds us not to depend on our own righteousness. Any righteousness we have comes from God alone through our faith in Christ.

1 And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

“And he spake a parable unto them to this end” – Luke states that the purpose of Jesus’ parable was to teach us two things about prayer. **“that men ought always [at all times] to pray”** – We should never neglect to pray about our needs. The Greek word for “always” indicates that there is no occasion that is not worth praying about. There are many examples in scripture where God’s people made critical mistakes because they did not consult God in prayer before making decisions, such as when Israel was tricked into making a covenant with the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:3-27). The passage specifically states that Joshua and Israel did not consult with the LORD (**Josh. 9:14** “*And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD*”).

“and not to faint” – The Greek word for “faint” means “to become weary and quit.” Even when we have prayed and God has not yet answered our prayer, Jesus says that we should not give up. We should continue to bring out requests to God in prayer until He answers. The parable uses the interaction of two people to illustrate this principle.

2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: 3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

“Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man” – The first person in the parable is a judge, a man of authority. He is described as a man that did not fear God nor man. In other words, this judge did things the way he wanted and did not care what God or man thought of him. This judge would be an example of someone who is hard to convince to help you.

“And there was a widow in that city” – The other person in this parable was a widow who lived under the jurisdiction of the judge. As a widow, she was helpless to defend herself from oppressors and had to seek help from the judge.

“and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary” – This helpless widow came to the judge, asking for justice against her opponent (perhaps someone who was oppressing her). The Greek word for “came” is in the imperfect tense, indicating ongoing action. She did not come to the judge once but repeatedly came back to see him, insisting that he give her justice.

4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; 5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. 6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

“And he would not for a while” – Jesus doesn’t state why this judge would not give the widow the justice she deserved. Perhaps the woman’s adversary had bribed him, but most likely he was just being stubborn because he didn’t like being told what to do.

“but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man” – The judge is changing his mind about giving justice to this widow, but it’s not because he is afraid of her or God.

“Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her” – The judge was not naturally inclined to help the widow and yet he decides to do so because she has become an annoyance that will only go away once he has done as she asked.

“lest by her continual coming she weary me” – The judge gives in to the widow’s request because he’s concerned that she will drive him crazy by her relentless demands for justice.

“And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith” – Jesus insists that we pay attention to what this “unjust” judge said. The judge was considered unjust because he wasn’t inclined to administer justice because it was the right thing to do. Instead, he finally administered justice because this widow was insistent that he do so and would continue to demand it until he did.

7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? 8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

“And shall not God avenge his own elect [chosen]” – Like the judge, God fears no one and is not influenced or intimidated by what man thinks. Unlike the judge, however, God is willing to administer justice in behalf of those whom He has chosen to love.

“which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long [to be patient; longsuffering] with them?” – The fact that we cry out to God for help day and night and it seems that He isn’t listening does not mean that God has turned a deaf ear to our prayers. He is being patient (“bearing long”) with us so as to not answer our prayers prematurely. If we are praying in God’s will, then He will answer when the time is right (**1 John 5:14-15** “*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him*”). It’s been said that God answers our prayers in one of three ways: 1) Yes; 2) No; 3) Wait. We need to trust that God loves us and will answer each prayer at the best time.

“I tell you that he will avenge them speedily [with quickness or speed]” – The word “speedily” doesn’t necessarily mean “soon” but it does mean that when it’s time for God to act, He won’t waste time. His help will arrive on time.

“Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” – The context implies that this question refers to believers praying and waiting for Christ’s return. The question also implies that the wait until Christ’s return would not be immediate and that most people would begin to question if Christ will return. Peter predicts that there would be skeptics of Christ’s return (**2 Peter 3:3-4** “*Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*”). A few verses later Peter confirms that Christ will indeed keep His promise to return and the reason that we have to wait for it (**2 Peter 3:9** “*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*”). God is giving people a chance to repent and come to faith in Christ before His return.

9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

The Greek word for “despised” means “to disrespect; to consider of no little or no value.” Jesus addresses His next parable to those who were lifted up in their pride, thinking that they were superior to everyone else. Such people believed that they were guaranteed to be in God’s kingdom because of their adherence to all the religious practices that their traditions required. They believed that anyone that did not do so were inferior and unfit for the kingdom of God. This parable was directed toward these self-righteous people.

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

This parable focuses on two men, each representing opposite extremes of the religious spectrum, who each have come to the temple to pray. The Pharisee represented the ultra-religious man who followed every religious precept he was taught, including both those that came from God and those that came from man. The publican (a tax collector) represented those that the Pharisees considered to be among the worst of sinners, offending both God and man.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself” – Jesus first presents the prayer of the Pharisee. Standing was a normal posture for praying in that day. Notice that the Pharisee prayed “with himself.” This may simply mean that he was praying silently within his own heart, but it may also mean that his prayer was more a matter of patting himself on the back than talking with God.

“God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*” – The Pharisee begins with the presumption that he was more righteous than “other” men. Thanking God for being superior may sound spiritual but it was actually the Pharisee’s pride doing the talking.

“extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican” – The Pharisee identifies a few of the types of “other men” that he was supposedly superior to. He obviously had seen the publican nearby before he began praying and includes him in the list of “other men.”

“I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess” – The Pharisee then begins bragging on the reasons why he was religiously superior to “other men” and “thanking” God that he did them. Fasting and giving tithes are good things but doing them does not make someone righteous.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven” – Meanwhile the publican was also standing to pray, but he was standing some distance away. He obviously did not feel worthy to stand near to God’s presence and couldn’t even bring himself to look up toward God. Instead, he hung his head in shame and humiliation.

“but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner” – The publican was grieving over his sin and beat himself on the chest in an expression of remorse. His prayer to God was humble and simple. He confessed that he was a sinner and asked God for mercy. Unlike the Pharisee, he knew that he deserved God’s judgment and appealed to God’s mercy.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified [to make or declare righteous] *rather* than the other” – Of the two men, it was the publican whom God considered righteous and not the Pharisee.

“for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased [brought low]; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” – All men are sinners and those who are lifted up in pride enough to think that they aren’t sinful will be brought low in judgment. However, those who humble themselves by confessing their sins will be forgiven and will be exalted by God’s favor.

15 And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when *his* disciples saw *it*, they rebuked them.

Parents were bringing their newborn children to Jesus, asking that He lay his hands on them and bless them. The disciples saw this as a nuisance and/or a distraction and tried to discourage the parents from doing this.

16 But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

Mark tells us that Jesus was “much displeased [to be indignant]” (Mark 10:16). Jesus became annoyed, if not angry, that the disciples would attempt to prevent children from being brought to Him and made it clear that He welcomed it when parents brought their children to Him. The reason they were welcome was because children had characteristics shared by those who populate the kingdom of God.

17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Jesus is not saying that we have to get saved while we are children. Rather, He is saying that all who accept the kingdom of God will do so in the same manner as a child. Children are very trusting and will believe what their parents tell them even if they don’t understand. It’s only after they are older that they begin questioning what they are told. Those who would enter the kingdom of God will only do so if they believe what God says even if they don’t understand it. That is the kind of trust/faith in God that is required for salvation (**Heb. 11:3a** “Through faith we understand...” not “through understanding we have faith”).