

Luke 18

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Lessons on praying!

I suspect most of my readers start their mornings on their knees. I've always argued there is no specific required prayer model (with the Lord's prayer as a possible exception) or body position. He cares about our hearts first and foremost. He desires that we glorify Him with our lives. This section of Luke called Chapter 18 doesn't give any specific models on how to pray. It's more about things to think about when seeking God! Jesus gives parables (made up stories) to emphasize His points. He also gives insights on eternity. The idea is all the insights given are designed to help our prayer life. I'll argue one purpose for prayer is to get our will to be lined up with His will. As most of us know, we can ask God for anything, but He's got every right to say no, or not now, to any request.

Keep in mind Jesus is traveling His way to Jerusalem (on foot) with the disciples. As He's walking, He is teaching them what is important. He gets into the crucifixion story even though it didn't sink in until after the resurrection. He talks about dealing with children with the idea being we must fully trust Him the same way a child is fully dependent upon their parents for guidance. Then He shares a few made up stories (parables), with the idea of teaching what God desires when we pray to Him. As a good teacher knows, we must repeat important points as not everything sinks in on "Day 1". A good teacher "pounds the pulpit" to pass on key lessons! A great advantage of living a long life is developing a desire to pass on knowledge to the next generation. With that said, let me discuss the stories in this text and see what God desires we take away from those stories!

Chapter 17 ended with a "very mini version" about end time events. Point being that Jesus wanted His disciples to learn what's going to happen after He is gone. The chapter breaks (added centuries later) is a good spot as Jesus wanted to teach the disciples a few lessons on prayer. The first (made up story) is about a woman begging a judge for justice. A few background things might be helpful. In that culture at that time the Romans picked the civil court judges. Also, women (don't blame me) were supposed to go through men for court decisions. In this made-up story Jesus says the judge hates his job as he could care less about justice or even God. The woman in this story got justice by being a thorn in the judge's side by constantly pestering the judge for justice. The point here is if someone who does not care about God can be won over by "being on their case", doesn't that imply God wants us to pray persistently?

Obviously, I don't believe God helps us because we're pestering Him! Jesus' point is God cares for His people (those trusting in Jesus' sin payment) and wants us to use our lives for His glory. A mistake lots of people make is they think God only cares about our salvation, then otherwise it's up to us! A favorite scripture of mine is "God will never leave nor forsake us" (Hebrews 13:5). This doesn't mean God will give us whatever we ask for. God is not, "A genie in a bottle to grant us wishes"! God created us so we can use our lives to glorify Him. That ties to the "crooked judge story": if someone that bad will do the right thing to get the "nagger off their back", we must accept the fact a perfect God desires to guide our lives for His glory!

That leads to the second made up story in this chapter, a made-up story about two people praying. One is a very religious man who is basically bragging about all the wonderful religious things he does as he points out the fact: he's not like the other guy praying. The religious guy started insulting the other guy saying he's not a horrible person like that guy (who must have been known for his sinful acts). The guy

with the bad reputation simply beat his breasts (a Jewish method of showing sorrow), and asked God to forgive him. Jesus simply commented that the second guy was forgiven and not the first one. I should add that because God forgives us doesn't excuse us dealing with authorities or those we may have hurt!

Does that mean God says it's ok to sin badly and we can beat our breasts afterwards? As I say way too often, God wants us to use our lives for His glory! Of course, no one is perfect and He desires we think about our lives on a regular basis of ways we mess up and confess sin. I'll also add the breast beating is a Jewish thing, and confession method isn't nearly as important as our sincerity. As far as the guy who is justifying his life by his actions, the issue isn't doing the right thing, it's the fact He wants us to know that we can't prove our worth to Him by our actions. Good works are ONLY about being a witness to Him throughout our lives as Christians and NEVER about justifying our lives to Him!

Of all things Luke then switches to the fact people were bringing babies and children for Jesus to touch them! I want to point out the Bible never comments on Jesus' smiling, but I've yet to see a child decide to go into the someone who isn't happy! The point is much bigger than the act itself. Luke includes it, as Jesus wanted to make the point, we must trust Him the same way a child will be trust their parents to guide their lives. Let me expand a little on that: Do we have to pray to say brush our teeth after we get up in the morning, no as it is just a healthy thing to do. I start my day praying for wisdom for decisions I make through the day, then I simply assume God is guiding my life for His glory! As I was taught, it is important to live as if it's 100% up to us but at the same time realize God's guiding us for His glory!

Then comes another famous story of Jesus being confronted by a financially successful young man at a synagogue as he was put in charge there! That man called Jesus "Good teacher" thinking Jesus isn't the Son of God (Divine). However, this local leader realized Jesus had powers based on the miracles he is performing so this guy wanted to see if he "pasts the mustard" as far as being good enough to get saved based on his works. Jesus quotes part of the 10 Commandments and the guy said in effect, "Been there done that". Then Jesus said to be perfect He must sell all He has. Jesus is NOT calling us to be poor as to be beggars for now on. His point is salvation is strictly based on God's grace and not our works! The reason Luke includes this story is another example of not trying to prove ourselves to God, but only for us to trust in His sin payment and nothing else when it comes to salvation.

Then of all things, Jesus explains to the disciples He's about to die and rise again. Realize every time in the Gospels we read of Jesus explaining this, He includes the rise again aspect. The disciples didn't get it. He explained it here because they're about to enter Jerusalem and the disciples wrongly thought this is the time Jesus would overthrow Rome and do the "Second Coming" bit! Even though it did not sink in, it was necessary to understand so we can get the "game plan" when we pray through Him!

The final story in this section is Jesus healing a blind beggar. That act was Jesus last public miracle we read in Luke (other than Jesus healing a man's ear that Peter cut off right before Jesus' arrest!). We get this miracle partially because the beggar referred to Jesus as "Son of David" acknowledging who Jesus is. This story took place around Jericho. (I should point out this is close to where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, so Jesus' popularity is spreading and we're coming to the Palm Sunday story as we'll see in the next chapter!) Obviously, salvation isn't about guaranteeing any miracle other than eternal life! I would argue Luke included this miracle among other things to remind the disciples that it's worth it for them to go through all the suffering each would endure for being a witness for Jesus. Yes, I'd argue the formerly blind man was saved with him regaining his eyesight as a bonus! The point is all this is worth it, as far as trusting Jesus complete payment for our sins!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on the link for the detailed study. It's still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for everyone who reads this.