

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Luke 18:1-17

Key Verse: 18:1

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."

Study Questions:

1. Read verse 1. What was the point of Jesus' parable? Why do people sometimes give up instead of praying? Why should they not? (1 Thes 5:16-18)
2. How does Jesus describe the judge? What is the prayer topic of the persistent widow? If the judge did not fear God or man, what did he fear? What was his decision? Why?
3. Read Philippians 4:4-7 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. What does Paul teach about prayer and patience? What do you know about Paul's own prayer life? What kind of faith must we have when we pray? (Mk 11:24)
4. Read verses 9-14. What do the men in this parable teach us about the right attitude of prayer? About the attitude that is unacceptable to God?
5. Read verses 15-17. What must we learn from Jesus and from children about the attitude we must have to receive the kingdom of God?

In this passage, Jesus prayerfully teaches his disciples how to pray. They should always pray and not give up. There are many defects in Jesus' disciples. The worst one was their lack of prayer. Once a student asked Paul Tillich, "Do you pray?" Then the eminent theologian of the time answered, "I don't pray, I meditate." If somebody asked the disciples, they would have answered, "Jesus prays and we eat." They saw that Jesus prayed every day. But the disciples didn't grasp the meaning of Jesus' prayer. Mark 1:35 says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." When Jesus was praying early in the morning, still it was dark. The disciples were excited by the fact that the people were coming to Jesus for his help and that the

future prospect of Jesus' business on earth seemed to be successful (Mk 1:37). When Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, they wanted to participate in Jesus' prayer (Lk 22:42). When Jesus was praying to overcome his will and follow God's will, they grappled for the time being and fell asleep. In our Christian faith, "Bible study," "prayer" and "hymn singing" are the foundation of our Christian faith. They are the same, though each expression is different. How we pray determines what kind of life of faith we would have. Therefore, it is very important for us to hear Jesus' word today about prayer.

First, persistent prayer (1-8).

Once this nation was glorious. Whatever they did, they began with prayers and ended with prayers. Even in the classroom, prayer was essential to their studies. But one married woman joined the army in Germany. She had an affair with another married man. She became pregnant. She should repent her sin and find a new way in God for her future life. But she became an atheist to cover up her sins. Because of her, on June 17, 1963, the Supreme Court ruled that reading the Bible and prayer in the classroom were unconstitutional. And this applied to all states so rapidly like a plague. This small event caused the people of this nation to lose national direction and divine purpose, that is, "In God we trust." If the Constitution did not include school prayers and Bible reading, the Supreme Court should improve the Constitution. The Supreme Court justices should have had a sense of history. When school prayer was forbidden, devoted Christian parents and young kids gradually began to drink and enjoy physical pleasures. After 30 years, junior high school kids' moral standard was most damaged. They make up heavily to draw attention of boys or girls. What is worse, their moral depravity is largely condoned in society. Those who have no immoral experience are despised and rejected by their peers or groups. Here we learn that when the root is corrupt, the whole body of the tree corrupts very soon. We also learn that the national Constitution is not everything, but the law of God should be alive in the Constitution of this nation. Prayer gives us access to the holy God. These days, without prayer, no one can remain uncorrupted.

Look at verse 1. "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." In this verse, "always" spells out both in the time of happiness and adversity. It is hard for us to pray. But it is very easy not to pray. Those who pray superficially do not know what they prayed right after they prayed.

What is the definition of prayer? Prayer is, as of first importance, listening to God. Prayer is not the time of preaching to God. When we don't pray and do not listen to God, we lose the vision that God has for us and we forget that God wants to fulfill his will through us. Prayer is also talking to God. We weak human beings need God's counseling daily. When we pray, God speaks to us unutterable wisdom from above to solve the problems. Prayer gives us inner strength in our souls. Paul was too old to evangelize the Roman Empire. But he said in prison, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Php 4:13).

Sometimes prayer seems to be unanswered and we become impatient. In this part, Jesus teaches us to be patient in our prayers. How patient should we be? Without patient prayer, nothing can be done. For example, God prayed to fulfill the world salvation plan three times of 14 generations. Jesus tells his disciples a very interesting story to show how we can be patient people of prayer. Jesus said, "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men" (2). Contrary to this judge, there was a woman who needed God's grace. She kept coming to him with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary." Maybe because she was a widow in a man-oriented society, she could not maintain her human right with her widowed situation. The judge in the community saw the woman's determination to obtain justice from him. He said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming and nagging time and again!" The judge did not fear God and he did not fear anybody. But he feared the widow. The judge should have feared God. Then he did not have to fear the widow and

all the unnecessary things of the world.

Jesus 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 he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly" (6-8a). Here Jesus teaches us that we should not give up or despair at any situation, but come to God to pray. Then we will see that our prayers are answered. We live in the last part of the 20th century. Human freedom and the development of technology rule over the law of God and the integrity of true humanity. In this generation, God chose us to shepherd God's flock. When we want to shepherd God's flock, we can hardly find the children whose hearts were not badly broken when their families were broken up. When we want to feed God's flock, we can hardly find those who are not enslaved with bad habits. Feeding the sheep seems to be impossible. So we despair. When we want to pray, "May God make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," we feel that our hearts are clouded by unbelief. But we must remember the persistent woman who received justice from an inhuman judge. Outwardly, this world is filled with ungodly people. But there are holy children of God in every corner of the world who pray like us.

George Washington was the first president of the United States of America. So he must be regarded as the number one man in U.S. history. But most people regard Abraham Lincoln as the number one man. There is a strong impression that George Washington was a great general and Abraham Lincoln was a shepherd-like president. Why is it so? Everybody knows that during the time of the Civil War, in the midst of catastrophic accidents that had happened here and there, President Lincoln had to give instructions. But he delayed all the decisions and knelt down and prayed every day at least one hour. He worked for the unification of Union and Confederacy. But ultimately, he fought the war to please God. He knew that all men are equal before God. As a result, the United States of America has not become like South America, divided into many nations. How difficult it was for President Lincoln to pray during the wartime every day (1861-1865).

But he prayed. He had had so much hindrance to pray, but he prayed. Then God heard his prayer and blessed this nation not to be divided into two, but to be blessed as the United States of America.

Among the apostles, St. Paul was a most exemplary prayer servant. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." God made us to maintain love, joy and peace (Gal 5:22). But these days, secular humanists do not pray and they diligently hinder those who pray in school or at the house of prayer. As a result, they lost the love of God. They also lost the peace of God.

Men must experience joy all the time. But secular humanists excluded God in this nation. Most people are not joyful. Instead, they look very irritable and nervous like paranoid patients. For example, in driving, when the red light changes to green and the driver in front lingers two seconds, then the driver behind honks to the maximum degree. When we hear such a honk, we are frightened as if we had committed a crime.

Peace is God's gift to each person. But the anxiety for future security and the hidden fear of death eats people up moment by moment. So they cannot experience the peace of God. But we must experience the peace of God. When we pray, we can experience the peace of God. Paul lived a life of faith and experienced the peace of God even in prison. He said in Philippians 4:4-7, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." He was in prison. If he were an ordinary man, he would be consumed by his own anxiety. But he prayed even for others and the most impressive words in the verse are "with thanksgiving." In that terrible situation, he was too old to be a prisoner. But he was a prisoner to proclaim the gospel of salvation to the Roman world. He had nothing

to be thankful for. But he was full of thanksgiving. Philippians is one of the prison epistles. But the word "thanks" is most repeated in this book.

Prayer is very personal. But our prayer topic should accord with the Lord's prayer (Lk 11:2-4). We must pray that all peoples of the world may love like brothers and sisters by calling God, "Our Father." We must pray that the kingdom of God may extend more and more. Most people feel that there are so many wicked people that this is the end of the world. They think that this kind of world should not continue. But Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come." Prayer is the measure of faith. Mark 11:24 says, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." When we pray we must use present perfect tense. Jesus said, "When you pray, believe that you have received it." We must believe that God has already answered our prayer. America is a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Amen. Jesus tells us, "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (8b) Of course, Jesus is very sorry to see the ungodly in this world. But Jesus is happy to see us who pray.

Second, God hears repentant prayer (9-14).

In this part, Jesus teaches us what kind of attitude we must have when we pray. When we pray, we must humble ourselves, realizing that we are sinners before God. There is a great danger for us to be proud when we keep up the life of prayer. So Jesus warns his disciples to be repentant and humble when they pray. "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell

you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Third, the kingdom of God belongs to a childlike person (15-17).

On one occasion, people brought their babies to be blessed by Jesus. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them for their selfishness. But Jesus stopped his disciples' rebuking and let the little children come to him and said in verse 17, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." This verse tells us the attitude of a child who believes simply and absolutely. This world is full of petty things and too much common sense. Therefore, the hardest thing is to make our hearts simple like a child and to listen to the word of God simply and absolutely. To have simple and absolute faith is almost impossible. But we must study the Bible and cleanse our hearts and common sense and be like the children of God who deserve the kingdom of God. In this passage we learned that we must learn how to pray. We must learn not to give up, but to pray. We experience every day that we cannot but despair. We experience every day that we want to do something to please God, but we just give up. Let's pray and not give up.