

Praying and Believing

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[0 : 00] Let's pray.

Father God, we pray today that you would help us to understand your word, to understand your purposes in your world, to understand what you are like as a God, and to worship you appropriately and to live before you rightly.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I want you to imagine it was in the early hours of the morning. Three men were driving in their 1982 Ford pickup.

They spotted a black man and they offered him a ride. And they drove him to the deserted corner of the backwoods and he struggled. They chained him to the truck by his ankles and they dragged him for five kilometres along a rural road outside Jasper in the United States.

James Byrd was alive for the first two miles, but he died cruelly and savagely. The only crime that he had committed was the colour of his skin. And a few years ago, rebels in Sierra Leone launched another offensive and a rebel soldier came across a boy and he tells this boy he is too tall and so he cuts off a leg.

[1 : 34] Brutal injustice is dealt out by one human being against another simply because they stand in the way. And this is a true story. All of these are true stories.

This one happened within our own experience. In another time and another place, a child is sent off to school in an inner city suburb of Sydney. And the day goes by, much the same as any other day goes by, it finishes and the child waits at the gate for a parent.

And no parent comes. A teacher sees the child and realises something's wrong and rings home and there's no answer at home. And there'll never be an answer.

For while the child was at school, the parents had packed up and left. And the child is left alone. Anne is unemployed. She's been unemployed for a long time.

She's fought hard to maintain her self-esteem. She has faced knockbacks with disappointment but remained hopeful that her day will come. And today she has an interview for a job that looks just about right for her.

[2 : 40] She has the qualifications. She feels good about it. The interview went well and tomorrow she'll get the call. She will be told that the job is filled. Thank you for applying. We'll keep your resume on file for future reference.

Good luck. There is no way that Anne could know that the personnel director's niece has been hired without even having a formal interview. The Nuba Mountains in the Sudan have had a Christian population since the 6th century and they are now littered with mass graves.

During the 1990s and even until recent days and particularly during the 1990s, stories emerged from the Sudan about that Nuba women were systematically raped by Muslim soldiers in order to produce non-Nuba offspring.

There were tales of crucifixions. Muslim troops from northern Sudan sold tens of thousands of Christian children and women from the south into slavery and many were branded or mutilated.

Friends, the world that we live in is a world of fierce injustice. We are sheltered largely from it here but it is a world where bad happens.

[3 : 56] A world where one human being hurts another human being who hurts another who hurts another and so it goes down the line. It is a world where wrong is endemic. Where sin reigns.

Where Satan rules. Our world is a world of fierce injustice. And the Bible knows it, you see. And throughout the Bible we hear God bewail it.

You see, the God of the Bible created his world good. And we humans are those who have made it bad. And God longs to set it right again.

And everyone who knows God has the same longing as God himself does. Every godly person hears of the events that I have spoken of they see them and they cry out to God for justice.

They call out to him to end it all and to bring in a new regime ruled by God with fairness and justice and love and grace. That is what you are doing when you pray the Lord's Prayer.

[5 : 06] That is the cry of the godly. It is, How long, O Lord? How long? Until you set it right.

You hear it from Daniel in Daniel chapter 7 as he cries out to God to end the persecution of his people. Or to put an end to the persecution of his people. You hear it from the martyrs under the throne of God in Revelation chapter 6 verse 10 as they see the continual blood shed by their brothers and their sisters around the world.

You hear it from the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 as he longs to be freed from the thorn in the flesh that gnaws away at his present existence. Friends, we Christians live in a world of global injustice, of national injustice, of personal injustice.

We live in a world that is out of plum and we long, if we are godly, for it to be set free. We long for us to be set free.

Sometimes we want life to continue while injustice is done away with. Sometimes we want Jesus to return so that all injustice will be done away with.

[6 : 19] We too, if we are godly, cry out, How long? And it is that question that I want to turn to today. You see, I want you to examine it with me as we look at Luke 18.

So please turn in your Bibles to Luke 18. Now the first thing we need to do with this parable is to work out to whom it's addressed. So have a look at it in your Bibles.

And we're told in verse 1 that it is addressed to them. Now when we look back a few verses we can see who the them is. The them here are the disciples who've been listening in.

In chapter 17. This parable you see is addressed to the disciples in chapter 17 who've been listening to Jesus teach about the day when the Son of Man will be revealed.

They have heard him. They have heard him say these will be days of terrible persecution. These will be days when people wonder when injustice and persecution will end.

[7 : 15] When people wonder when will one of the days of the Son of Man be when things will be set right. Jesus speaking this parable to those people.

And that's confirmed by the mention of the Son of Man in verse 8. Jesus is therefore directing this parable to disciples who see who know and who experience the difficulty of being Christian while they wait for God's purposes to be revealed.

they will see know and experience the apparent randomness of what happens in the world. For as chapter 17 makes clear this will be a time when there will be one taken and another left.

That is it will look as though why is it this person and not that person. Can you see what I'm saying friends this is not just a general parable about prayer. This is a parable about prayer in response to and in the midst of injustice.

It is a parable about praying to God when things are not right in his world. It is a prayer about crying out to God that he will set things right.

[8 : 26] It is a prayer about waiting for God to set things right. Now as I say this we've already begun to think about the purpose of this parable haven't we? But verse 1 makes that purpose even clearer.

Look at what Luke says in verse 1. He tells us that Jesus told this parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

It has a dual purpose. You see it is designed to urge godly people to pray and it is here to design to urge the godly not to lose heart when they pray.

Now why would you want to urge Christians to do this? Well again the content of chapter 17 and the context of chapter 17 tells us you see the world of chapter 17 that we have just heard about does not appear well sorry it looks as though God does not appear to be achieving his purposes in Christ.

That's what chapter 17 seems to look like. The world in other words in chapter 17 looks somewhat out of control and when a world is like this then there is a danger isn't there that you think well actually that's because God is not in control.

[9 : 42] There is a danger of thinking that well actually God really doesn't know about these things or there is a danger of thinking well he does know but actually he can't do anything about it but that's not all.

It's the world of chapter 17 which creates the likelihood that you'll pray about injustice that you will see and you will not see any answer to it and so what you do is you pray again and again there's no answer you see injustice being prevalent and so you pray again and again there is no answer and you pray again and eventually with no answer forthcoming you give up.

So this is who this parable is attracted to Christian disciples like us and this is its purpose to encourage us to pray and not give up.

Okay with that in mind let's see what the parable has to say and the story when you read it's straightforward enough isn't it here is some unnamed little city and in that city there is some unnamed judge who is not a God fearer and not a people lover he is an ungodly judge an unrighteous judge and in that same city there is a widow who keeps coming to him to seek justice over some issue and initially he just says no way he refuses but in the end her persistence wears him down and even though he admits he's not a God fearer and not a people lover he's going to give her justice now let's take a closer look the first thing I want you to notice is the issue that is at stake here the issue is one of justice verse 3 makes that clear this widow is seeking justice against an adversary that is an opponent that she has the second thing I want you to notice is the judge look at verse 2 it tells us that this is a judge who neither fears God nor respects people now in case we didn't hear it verse 4 tells us exactly the same thing this is an ungodly unrighteous uncaring man he neither fears God nor respects people he's not a

God lover he's not a God fearer or a people lover he's neither the third thing I want you to notice is the response of the judge the judge tells us himself why he responds to this woman now let me tell you he doesn't respond because he's a kind man we already know that he's not a people lover and he doesn't respond because he fears God we've already been told that he's not a God fearer no he gives justice simply because this widow is extremely persistent and he just wants her to go away he wants to get rid of her his motivation is entirely what self centred he's not he doesn't care about God he doesn't care about people he cares about himself he doesn't want justice he just wants peace now friends I wonder if you can see what's going on here in this parable in telling this parable what is Jesus doing he's going out of his way to make sure that we do not get this wrong and I think lots of people interpreting this parable get it wrong in telling the parable

[13 : 05] Jesus is going out of his way to do this the judge is not to be identified with God if you are doing that you have got this parable wrong this judge is not a God fearer he's not a respecter of people he's not a lover of people he's a totally self centered ungodly unrighteous man and in case we miss it Jesus makes that clear in verse 6 he is unrighteous and then Jesus goes on to make the point and what he's doing is contrasting this unrighteous judge with God now in Luke chapter 11 verse 3 Jesus has already told us that God is a loving father who loves giving good gifts to his children and so he will reply because he loves his children he will give justice to the elect who cry out to him day and night you see God is not an unrighteous judge who does not care he is a loving father who loves justice but that's not all

Jesus says I want you to look at verse 7 Jesus has implied already implied why God replies and now he tells us now he explains it now he tells us why God replies he indicates by rhetorical question that God will not delay and then in verse 8 he pushes it home and look at what he says he says it categorically I tell you he will give justice to them speedily you see God's not going to tarry he's not going to be slow he will give justice and he will give it speedily and without delay there's one more thing that Jesus has to say about this parable you see Jesus puts a sting in the tail of this parable and most in the eyes and he asks him pointedly and yet he says in other words even though God loves his people even though God promises the revealing of the

Son of Man which will end in justice Jesus says when the Son of Man does come will he find faith on the earth I wonder if you can see what he's saying he's saying in other words will he find people that actually believe these things about God will he find people that actually believe that God does love his people will he find believers who believe that God loves to bring speedy justice to his people friends I want you to ask yourself again why did Jesus need to tell this parable why well because why was it needed well I suspect it is because so many of us view God as either unjust or uninterested there he sits in heaven you know thrown exalted being worshipped by all the earth and he really doesn't care that much about the earth he doesn't care that much about us so we need to get his attention so what we do is we knock and we ask and then we yell and we shout and somehow we think that through all of these things we'll get

God's attention and get some action out of him and we don't or at least we perceive we don't and so we give up and somewhere deep inside our psyche we think that well maybe that's because he's not interested he's just not there maybe or if he is he's disinterested he's indifferent to the injustice in the world but worse than that he's indifferent to the injustice his people suffer and so we can have no reasonable hope that things will ever be right and so we just simply give up I wonder if you can hear what the parable is saying can you hear the challenge Jesus puts out it is potent really the whole of the Bible is clear God has a purpose for his world God's purpose for his world is justice and good and peace

God also has a purpose for his people and that purpose is justice and good and peace and God is determined to work toward that purpose and nothing but nothing will stop him God is pushing on toward that purpose and nothing will stop him despite the contra indications that we see or we feel one day God will intervene God will end injustice and evil all injustice and evil and Christ will come and the days of the son of man will be revealed and justice will be done but when the day comes will there be anyone who actually believes that anymore will there be anyone who still really believes in a God that is good and who has good in mind for his people will there be anyone who trusts that there is actually a good and righteous judge who loves justice friends will you believe it when that day comes do you believe it even now or have you just stopped praying for it or decided that if God can't sort it out you're going to sort it out for him you see if we

[18 : 50] Christians have stopped praying for this then it's really because we have stopped believing in it how do you stand do you still have faith or have you lost heart and if so then I want today for you to remember who your God is he is not some ungodly unrighteous judge who does not care for you or his humanity or his world he is a God who loves to give good things to his children and he will be swift to bring justice for he loves justice and good and peace so when he comes on his day when the Lord Jesus comes on one of the days of the son of man how will he find you on that day still believing still knowing a

God who can bring justice still faithful friends as I said remember who our God is he's not an unrighteous judge who does not care he longs to give good gifts to his children and he will be swift to bring justice so later on in this service I understand we're going to pray for persecuted Christians around the world friends when we pray for them believe it believe that he does care and believe that he wants justice for his beloved people around this world who are persecuted pray it believing let's pray now father we thank you that you are a loving father who loves to give good gifts to his children and father we see gross injustice in our world all around the world not just with your people but also just because of man of human sinfulness in our world there is injustice so prevalent throughout our world we think particularly though today for those among your people who suffer injustice because they love you and they love your son please father be speedy in bringing them justice come lord Jesus amen