

PRAYER: ACCESSING THE KINGDOM'S GOODNESS

SERIES:

Stories for the Heart – a closer look at the words and works of Jesus

9 March 2025 – Scottsville Community Church, 9 am

READING: Luke 8:1-8 (The Persistent Widow) – (**WORDS**)



SERMON OUTLINE

- The exhortation to pray
- The motivation to pray
- The challenge to pray

INTRODUCTION

I came across the following **two Facebook posts** this morning:

*'If you are not sure whether you've applied the deodorant this morning, do it again.
Don't let us find out the hard way.'*

The second one **is by a person I know** very well:

'There is no harm in repeating a good thing. Everyday is a coffee day.'

Teme Maphalala

In today's story **Jesus will echo the same sentiment** but on a different subject.

Let's now take **a closer look** at this story.

	What the 1 st century audience saw and heard	What we must see and hear in 2025
The exhortation to pray	<i>'And he told them a parable ...'(v1)</i> The pharisees wanted to know the signs of the coming kingdom. Jesus tells them the kingdom is already in their midst... even though the consummation of all things still lies in the future. Secondly, he tells them that there are no signs to look out for 'out there', but there are signs to look out for 'in here'. We can sum the discourse in one verse: 'But understand this, that in the last days, there will be times of difficulty (not because of global warming and WW3...) For people will be lovers of self...' 1 Timothy 3:1ff <i>'to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart' (v1)</i> Difficult times make praying difficult. In the absence of the signs of his coming in the atmosphere, the natural thing to do is to assume that there will be time to engage in spiritual matters tomorrow. And tomorrow? Something else crops up: new dishes that need tasting, a need to marry, a need to establish oneself in his/her career... all worthy causes! When eternity is out of the picture, good things become ends in themselves. That's the end-time mood! But prayer is the Christian's appropriate response to the afflictions from within and without, life's hardships, and the reality of a coming kingdom. They ought to pray instead of allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by the troubles in their world. Always.	'The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers' 1 Peter 4:7 In the light of the coming kingdom, Peter exhorts believers to pray. This will be happen if they maintain a self-controlled and sober-mind. That is, if they are not moved by the prevailing mood in the world: 'A mind victimised by emotion and passion, out of control, or knocked out of balance by worldly lusts and pursuits, is a mind that cannot know the fullness of holy communion in prayer with God.' John MacArthur • You need a clear mind to pray. • Prayer keeps things in focus. Always. • Too blessed? Pray. • Overwhelmed? Pray. Jesus exhorts us to always pray. There is no harm in repeating a good thing. Everyday is a prayer day.

The motivation to pray	THE PARABLE • A judge (<i>krites</i>) who neither fears God nor respect man (v2) • ‘Give me justice against my adversary’ (v3) • The judge refused. (v4) • ‘keeps bothering me, I will give her justice...’ (v5) • ‘...hear the unrighteous judge...’ (v6) • ‘...will not God give justice to the elect...’ (v7) • ‘... he will give them justice speedily...’(v8) THE JUDGE • Fails the righteousness test on two counts (v2) • He is therefore unrighteous (v6) • Consequently, refuses to give justice (v3). Eventually, gives justice for his sake (v5) This parable must have disturbed the hearers because they must have learnt about judges from Sunday (sabbath) school: ‘You shall appoint judges...in all your towns...and they shall judge the people with righteous judgement. You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow...’ Deuteronomy 16:18-20 In his overview sermon on Judges, Mark Dever, notes: Despite their faults (12 judges including Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson...), these judges believed the word of the Lord and acted heroically in faith. God calls them to deliver his people from their oppressors, and they trusted and they obeyed’. He continues, ‘in the New Testament hall of fame... the writers refer to Gideon, Barak (who assisted Deborah), Samson and Jephthah’. The judge in the parable neither has compassion for the oppressed widow nor reverence for God. Why would a judge subvert justice? Warren Weirsbe: ‘In that day, it was very difficult for (poor) widows to get justice because they lacked the means for bribing officers who would get the judge to act.’	THE EVIL JUDGE WANTS BRIBES: The account of this judge should upset any justice-loving person. • Bribes and justice don’t go together. • There’s been outcry about unemployed doctors in SA. How is their predicament worse than that of unemployed B Sc or MA graduates? • WE DON’T WANT TO PAY BRIBES, but we don’t mind skipping the queue... when the person on the other side of the counter is our friend. • In this past week, President Trump, on national television, tried to solicit a ‘minerals bribe’ from President Zelensky. So where do we go when justice has been denied? • There are structures in place. You can appeal at the supreme or constitutional court. • But Jesus in v7 gives a better suggestion: ‘And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?’ Luke 18:7
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GOD, by contrast:

- Gives justice to his **elect** who cry day and night and does so speedily:
 1. Frees Israel from **Pharoah's** oppression.
 2. Allows the exiles to return to their land and provides **supplies for building ruins**.
 3. When his holiness and justice calls for the annihilation of all sinners, God, **as the righteous Judge**, acts:

FIRSTLY: He delays the punishment Adam and Eve **do not immediately die after eating** the fruit. They live for hundreds of years, enjoying **countless number of blessings** from the same God they have offended. In his love, he 'gives them **a fair trial**', hoping they would **come to their senses**

SECONDLY: He lovingly works out an **unprecedented** justice plan - Jesus!

'... **for all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God, and are **justified through the redemption** that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a **propitiation by his blood**... **to show God's righteousness**, because in his divine **forbearance he passed over** their sins...so that he might be **just and the justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus' Romans 3: 23 – 26

God gives justice in the following ways:

- He punishes Jesus for our sin. His justice is **satisfied**. His **love is satisfied** too.
- He not only spares the sinner but **justifies sinner** who is bound in sin and Satan's deceptive power. The sinner ends up with Christ's **imputed** righteousness, which is far better than just being forgiven. The **enemy of righteousness** becomes the friend of God, forever.
- In Jesus, God also **levels the playing field**. All are saved **by faith**.

Unlike the wicked judge, God has **compassion**. It was this compassion that looked for a **Substitute to die** in the place of sinners. That's the God we are encouraged to **bring our injustices** ...and **our sin** to. God's compassion is our **motivation** for praying.

APPLICATION POINT 1

What PRAYER is and is not:

- Prayer is **communion** with a compassionate God who loves to listen to our prayers.
'...day and night'
- Prayer is **NOT a spiritual exercise** that enables those who pray **to convince God** to act.

'...for your Father knows what you need before you ask him'
Matthew 6:8

We pray because we seek to **align our will and desires** with his. This way we begin to yearn for the 'thing' **we really and urgently need**:

'...how much more will the heavenly Father give the **Holy Spirit** to those who ask him'
Luke 11:13

The Holy Spirit is the **spirit of communion**.

This parable **exposes our wrong view of God and prayer**. We often approach God with the same worldview as the widow. She had to be **persistent because she wasn't sure** her case will be the judge's priority. And so, Jesus warns:

'...they heap up empty phrases...for they think that they will be heard for their many words...' **Matt 6:7-8**

APPLICATION POINT 2

'No people ever rise higher than the idea of God, and conversely, **a loss of the sense of God's high and awesome character** always involves a loss of a people's values...our view of God affects what we are and do...'

James Montgomery Boice

I planted this church from a **Methodist Church**. One of my criticisms against methodists is that their understanding of justice is only shaped by the Old Testament. **They never go to the cross**, to the greatest act of justice ever accomplished.

The cross humbles us because it **redefines justice**. Boice is right, we suffer from a **low view** of God (justice):

A **spouse doesn't listen** you today, has been doing that over the past 6 years...then you seek 'justice' – divorce! So, justice is whatever makes you **feel valued!** **It is never** what glorifies God.

The cross was not addressing God's self-esteem. **It was God's attempt to reconcile himself the people he loves.** That's the heart of biblical justice.

2000 years later, this idea is still bearing fruit – God's ways are **higher than our ways!** **The goal of justice is peace.**

The goodness of God is our motivation to pray.

The challenge to pray	We are now left with verse 8! There are two related ideas here that we must look at: THE TIMING ‘I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily...’ (v8a) THE QUESTION ‘...nevertheless when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’ (v8b) In the event God doesn’t come through speedily, and in the light of increasing difficulties, as the day draws near, will his followers continue to prayerfully trust him? Walter Brueggemann: ‘Persistent in conduct, in church teaching, and in prayer marks the church as a dissenter in a world of quick fixes.’	SPEEDILY Does God answer all prayers speedily? He answers some prayers speedily! He does! He sometimes take time to answer. He seeks a relationship. But when prayer is a daily walk with Jesus there will be a sense that he is also at work in us and in our world today. The kingdom will continue to grow. However, God often chooses to use people who partner with him for the long haul. All the grand ideas on our mission statement are possible because God is big. Is Scottsville Community Church ‘a weekend special’ or do we mean business about God’s desire to transform us and transform this suburb? Are we willing to put up with each other when conflict arises? What about your marriage? What about your personal vision to be a blessing in the spaces you occupy? Will you trust the good God or will you give in to pressure and discouragement? Jesus challenges us to keep on praying.
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CONCLUSION

'Ought always to pray'

We all know someone who is always **complaining**. We also know professional worriers, who **stress about everything**! And then, there is the rest of us who neither complain too much nor worry a lot. We just don't pray because we have **too many distractions**. What needs **to change today** for the sake of your prayers?

Prayer in public spaces

- Do we honestly believe it is possible to get ahead **without paying bribes** or similar dirty schemes?
- Are we willing to **keep challenging those who ignore justice** until they do what they are employed to?

Will he find faith in you? What are you trusting God for today? Are you willing to keep on praying...no matter how long it takes God to bring the relief in your life and in your world? We are in this **for the long-haul**.

NEXT SUNDAY: Jesus feeds the five thousand.

Amen.