THEY SHOULD ALWAYS PRAY AND NOT GIVE UP

Luke 18:1-8

Key Verse 18:1

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

I know one person who kept asking me to pray for his marriage. For some time I refused because he was not ready. But this person did not have any shame. What I told him did not affect him at all. He had deaf ear. He kept pressuring me day after day. So finally I ended up helping him. As he kept pressuring me my thought was changed from ‘he is not ready yet’ to ‘may be he is okay’. Anyhow I could not bear him any more because he kept bothering me. I could not have bible study with him or have fellowship with him because he kept bringing the matter. In the end against my will I ended up helping him.

Now in today’s passage Jesus taught his disciples to have such persistent attitude in their prayer. So let us see how we can be persistent in our prayer.

**Part I. I will see that she gets justice (v.1-5)**

Look at verses 1-5.

**“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’**

**4“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, 5yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”**

**Part II. He will see that they get justice (v.6-8)**

Look at verses 6-8.

**“6And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”**

Now here, the Lord compares the unjust judge to God. Even the unjust judge would bring about justice for the widow how much more will God who is just bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Crying out to God day and night refers to persistent prayer.

The Lord compares the unjust judge to God in order to persuade us to pray persistently. How can we pray persistently? We can pray persistently when we know God will surely answer our prayers.

God is God of justice. Justice is part of God’s character. So God cannot not be unjust. The unjust judge did not care what people thought. But God cares what people think. The unjust judge refused to listen to the widow for some time. But God never refuses to listen to our prayers. So even the unjust judge listened to persistent plea, how much more god will listen to persistent prayer of his children, chosen ones?

And the prayer topic for the widow and God’s chosen ones is the same. “Grant me justice against my adversary.” What kind of justice is the Lord talking about? Probably justice against our sin.

On the cross God fully demonstrated his justice by paying the full price of man’s sin.

**Romans 3:25-26**

**25God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.**

Our adversary demands us to pay the price of our sin again and again. It means our enemy wants us to live slaves our sinful nature all the time. This is terrible injustice because Christ has paid the full price of our sins. But our adversary is stronger than us and it keeps capturing us as its slaves. So we cry out ‘grant us justice against our adversary’.

One of the best ways to pray to establish God’s justice is to teach the word of God. The word of God will reveal the truth that Jesus paid full price of our sin on the cross, and God’s justice has been fully met for those who live by faith in Jesus. And those who hear and believe the message will know they do not need to live as slaves of Satan and their sinful nature but as God’s chosen ones.

God’s ultimate justice will be established when Jesus comes again. At that time even our enemy Satan and death will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

But Jesus said, “However when the son of man comes will he find faith on the earth?’ Jesus knew God’s justice will be established. But he was not sure whether he could find people who always pray and not give up when he comes again. Our prayer is the expression of our faith.

Jesus told his disciples a parable, and the key point of the parable is ‘persistency’. In the parable, there are three people. The unjust judge, the widow, and her adversary. The judge neither feared God nor cared what people thought. What does it mean that he neither feared God nor cared what people thought? It means ‘uncontrollable’. It means ‘evil’. Even God could not control him. So he was his own man. And the widow was very powerless person. She did not have her husband who could protect her. She was weak as a woman, and probably she did not have any person who could represent her interest. And then there was her adversary. Obviously her adversary took advantage of her, and cheated her and probably took her money away from her when she was already poor. But her adversary was stronger than her.

When she found out that her adversary took advantage of her asking her to pay double or triple times she was very angry. I am sure she did her best to protect her interest. But her adversary was stronger than her. Finally she decided to appeal to the judge. But the widow knew the judge would not care about her trouble. He was a wicked man. He did not care God or people. Why would he care about her request?

The only thing she had was to keep asking. So she kept coming to the judge with the plea, “Grant me justice against my adversary.” She kept coming to him day and night. For sometime the judge refused her. But finally he said to himself, “**‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, 5yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”** He was fearful of her because he thought her coming as an attack which means ‘harass’ or ‘weary’. In the end she won although she was weak and powerless.

What was her secret that she could be so persistent? There are two things which could make her persistent.

**First, the widow could be persistent because she knew she was powerless.** She was a widow. Her adversary was strong. She knew she could not change her social system. There was no way for her to get her justice. She knew she was powerless. But because she knew she was powerless she began to be persistent.

**In the same way, we pray persistently when we admit that we are powerless against our adversary.** Our enemy is Satan, the world, and our sinful nature. Especially we are the worst enemy of ourselves because we carry our own sinful nature and the Satan and the world takes advantage of it. How can we overcome our enemy? We cannot overcome our enemies. The first step to overcome our enemy is to realize we are powerless over our enemies.

To realized our powerlessness is one of the most difficult truth for us to accept. But until we realize our powerlessness we keep on trying to solve our problems with our own strength. It means we will rely on ourselves continually.

I made a vow in 1975 when I first had bible study. My vow basically is ‘If God helps me to obey him God will be my God and I will give my life for him.” But even though more than 30 years had passed still God did not answer my vow. So I wondered if the Lord would answer my vow at all as I did not have many years of life left. Then he spoke to me, “Why are you seeking your own obedience when Jesus’ obedience is yours?” This sentence can be interpreted in many ways. It can mean we live by God’s grace. It can mean by God’s grace Jesus’ obedience becomes mine. But I know the meaning of “why are you seeking your obedience”. It means ‘Why are you seeking YOUR own obedience which will always fail.” So the emphasis was given the word ‘your’. “Your obedience means ‘by your own power’. So God was saying ‘why are you keep trying to obey with your own strength which always fail?’ That was what he was saying. So I thought about Jesus’ obedience which God said is mine. Jesus obeyed God but he did not obey God by his own strength. He obeyed God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus obeyed God by depending on God.

One of the best examples that shows how Jesus depended on God in order to obey God is Jesus’ prayer on the Mount of Gethsemane. He prayed 3 times. Surely he did not depend on his own strength to obey God. “Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet, not my will but yours be done.” Jesus obeyed God by replying on God through prayer. That is what God wants to teach me.

Surely to realize one’s powerlessness is the first step for us to even start to pray. To realized our own powerless against our adversary is the first secret of persistent prayer.

**Secondly, the widow could be persistent because she knew the power of the judge.** Although the judge was wicked man, he was the one who had power over her adversary. She could not win over her adversary with her power. But she knew the power of the unjust judge was greater than the power of her adversary.

**In the same way, we pray persistently when we believe that God has greater power over our enemies.**

To believe that the power of God is greater than the power of our enemies is critical when we want to pray persistently. Some people might spend even 30 or 40 years to learn the power of God. Others could spend even more time to believe the power of God. It takes a long time for us to believe God has greater power than the power of our enemies. We experience ups and downs in the course of learning to believe in God’s power.

Jesus’ disciples were not exceptions. When Jesus asked them to forgive 7 times in a day their brothers and sisters who sinned against them and came back and asked forgiveness, they cried out, saying ‘increase our faith.’ Then Jesus said in **Luke 17:6**, **“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”**

Jesus’ disciples thought they had faith. So they asked Jesus to increase their faith. But Jesus told them that they did not have faith even as small as a mustard seed.

The whole life of Jesus’ disciples could be summarized to learn faith in God. When they learned to believe the power of God they could do a great work of God.

Jesus said in **John 14:12 “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”**

Surely to believe that the power of God is greater than the power of our enemy makes us pray persistently.

But still there is a very important point to think. How do you think the widow overcame such pain and suffering that came from repeated rejection and repeated failure from the judge? How do you think she could overcome such repeated humiliation and shame and disappointment and despair that comes from repeated rejection? How could she keep her persistent spirit? I know it is challenging question. But I want to hear from you. How do you think she was able to overcome such pain and suffering and shame and disappointment and despair that comes from repeated rejection and failure?

 She could fall into self pity. She could cry out in despair and give up. She just could give up out of disappointment. If her pain to go through repeated rejection from the wicked judge was too much she could simply give up. She could give up after experiencing so many rejections and failure and humiliation from the judge.

Why do we stop praying? Why we stop going fishing? Why do we give up going out for fishing and having one to one bible study and making disciples of Jesus?

We do it because we don’t want to go through pain and suffering that comes from repeated rejection and repeated failure and humiliation and despair and disappointment.

One day I was inviting students for bible study on a campus. One student yelled at me using ‘F’ words knowing what I was doing. It is so painful to experience to see our bible students leave our ministry criticizing us and ministry after many years of our service and love for them. We feel pain and suffering, despair and disappointment. So we feel like giving up.

We don’t want to go through another pain of being rejected and humiliated. Then little by little we stop doing it although we know God wants us to do. Although we know it is one of the best ways to establish God’s justice on earth we may give up.

How could the widow overcome such pain and despair and disappointment that comes from repeated rejection and humiliation from the wicked judge?

I believe she could do so because she maintained her spiritual discipline. I believe she had a spiritual tool through which God could renew her spirit and give her strength and power one day at a time. Through her spiritual discipline she could overcome such pain and suffering that comes from repeated rejection and failure, humiliation, shame, despair, and disappointment. I believe she was a spiritually disciplined woman although she was a widow.

How can we also discipline ourselves that God can renew our spirit and give us his power and strength?

One of the ways of doing it is ‘self examination of our sins’. It is called ‘daily repentance’. According to Jesus, it is expressed as ‘daily washing of our feet.’

Recently I heard Dr. John Jun used the Ten Commandments to repent every day. I heard that he repented everyday. But I did not know he used the Ten commandments. Come to think of it, it is a wonderful spiritual instrument for our personal discipline.

As I looked for my inner cleansing and repentance and personal discipline, I heard John Wesley’s 21 self examination topics. I heard it from senior staff meeting which I attended one month ago. I was curious about it as I practiced my daily repentance.
And I was looking for more vigorous spiritual tools. This is John Wesley’s 21 self examination topics for his repentance and holy life. To me, this is a powerful tool.

**John Wesley examine list.**

1. **Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?**
2. **Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?**
3. **Do I confidentially pass onto another what was told me in confidence?**
4. **Am I a slave to dress, friends, work, or habits?**
5. **Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?**
6. **Did the Bible live in me today?**
7. **Do I give it (Bible) time to speak to me everyday?**
8. **Am I enjoying prayer?**
9. **When did I last speak to someone about my faith?**
10. **Do I pray about the money I spend?**
11. **Do I get to bed on time and get up on time?**
12. **Do I disobey God in anything?**
13. **Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?**
14. **Am I defeated in any part of my life?**
15. **Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy, or distrustful?**
16. **How do I spend my spare time?**
17. **Am I proud?**
18. **Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the Pharisee who despised the publican (tax collector)?**
19. **Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward, or disregard? If so, what am I going to do about it?**
20. **Do I grumble and complain constantly?**
21. **Is Christ real to me?**

Among 21, I was moved by 3 items the most.

1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
2. Do I give it (Bible) time to speak to me everyday?

21. Is Christ real to me?

I relatively enjoying prayer. So ‘do I enjoy prayer’ was okay. But these three topics are most impressive to me. Among the three, the first one, applies to me the most. The desire to exalt myself more than who I am which John Wesley called ‘hypocrite’. This desire to exalt myself more than who I am is so deep that I found that this is the source of almost all of my sinful habits and source of my fear and anxiety. Because of the such desire many times I became restless, irritable, and discontented. It is the devil’s desire. The devil was once a beautiful angel, but it wanted to be like God. Then it became the devil. If we want to exalt ourselves more than who we are we suffer from devil’s syndrome. This desires is so deep that John Wesley used the word ‘unconsciously’. If we are brutally honest about ourselves we will see how much we want to create the impression unconsciously that we are better than we are. And when it does not work we become angry and return to all of our repeated sins. We are tired of repeating our same sins, but the source of our sins is the desire to exalt ourselves.

The second one that impressed me is “Do I give the Bible time to speak to me everyday?” Being practical John Wesley did not say “pay attention to the word of God is important”. He was talking about giving enough time for the Bible to speak to him.

And the last and in a way most shocking to me is, “Is Christ real to me?” We may passionately preach Christ. We may teach others that Christ should be our center. But Christ may not be real to us. What is real to us? Our desire to create the impression that we are better than we are consciously or unconsciously.

Because of our desire to exalt us is so strong that to confess our sins is so challenging. To confess our sins means to show ourselves as broken men and women. To confess our sins means we humble ourselves which is the opposite of our desire to exalt ourselves. To confess our sins means to expose ourselves to humility, vulnerability, shame, and we offer ourselves to the mercy of others. That is why we say “Oh, I confess every sin to God and God forgave me. And I am fine.” But much of our inner healing and cleansing will not start unless we confess our sins in the sight of other human being and thus offer our broken and contrite heart. When we are broken and contrite and when we humble ourselves in this way the Lord is right there and meets us right there and heals us. The Lord does not show himself to us when we are proud.

In conclusion, God is just Judge and his ultimate justice will be fully established when Jesus, the Son of Man, comes again. But until that time God wants us to be persistent in our prayers for his justice for us and for our brothers and sisters. We can be persistent when we admit our powerlessness against our enemy and believe God’s power over our enemy. In order to keep on praying we need to overcome the pain and suffering that comes from repeated rejection and failure and humility, shame, despair and disappointment. We can do so by repenting all our hidden sins through spiritual discipline which the Lord can use to heal us. We can be persistent as the Lord heals our inner person.

One word: always pray and not give up.