

The Life and Ministry of Christ, Part 39

Luke 18 is a continuation of lessons that Jesus gave to His disciples. These lesson's primary focus is on prayer and perseverance. The previous lessons ended with preparation for the Lord's return. Four themes interweave throughout this chapter: prayer, pursuing justice, eternal life, and faith.

The Persistent Widow – Luke 18:1-8

This parable refers to all types of prayer, but it is especially relevant for times of testing and adversity. Here, Jesus compared an unjust judge with God. The judge who is much inferior to God demonstrates the value of persistence.

Luke 18:1 NIV84 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 “pray without ceasing.”

Jesus' encouragement related to persistence and perseverance. We should 'pray always and not give up.' Perseverance implies enduring and waiting even when it is faced with difficulty. Persistence suggests a relentless forward momentum. Perseverance is the spiritual strength to keep fighting while waiting. Joseph's thirteen-year trial illustrates this because he needed patience to endure and he needed to wait with earnest faith in God. There is a lesson for all believers in this.

Galatians 6:9 NKJV And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Watch how persistence paid off for this widow.

Luke 18:2-3 NLT “There was a judge in a certain city,” he said, “who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, ‘Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.’”

God is much different than the unjust judge who had no regard for other's need or position. The Bible shows us clearly that God loves and cares for all of us. The widow came to an unjust judge to try to get justice from an adversary who was oppressing her. Many of us go to God in prayer to find mercy and grace to help us in time of need. She wanted “to get justice from her adversary.” Obviously, she was being tormented or abused.

Luke 18:4-5 NKJV And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’

Notice why the unjust judge helped her. He was not impressed with her or her need and did not fear God nor regard man, but helped her

because she was persistent.

Luke 18:6-7 NLT Then the Lord said, “Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don’t you think God will surely give justice to His chosen people who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off?

If the unjust judge would grant the widow’s request because she was persistent, how much more will the loving heavenly Father hear you? Back in Luke 12:22-31, Jesus said “don’t worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on,” because “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” If God wants to take care of us in that manner, we should not be anxious about the things we need. However, Jesus is telling us to be persistent and to persevere in prayer. God will avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him.

Luke 18:8 AMP I tell you, He will defend and protect and avenge them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find [persistence in] faith on the earth?

The Lord says, God will speedily avenge those who persistently come to Him. This word ‘avenge’ means to take action, intervene, do, accomplish, and perform. Then Jesus ended this parable by asking, “when the Son of Man comes, will He find [persistence in] faith on the earth?” This is an encouragement to everyone who prays to maintain constant vigilance in prayer and not give up when delays come. Keep on praying and trusting God.

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector – Luke 18:9-14

The Lord continues His emphasis on prayer and access to God in this parable. He is reflecting on two different attitudes in prayer. The Pharisee prayed with a pious self-righteous attitude while the tax collector humbled himself before God.

Luke 18:9-10 NKJV Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

Luke 18:11–12 NIV84 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.’

Notice the tax collector’s arrogant attitude in prayer. He stood up and prayed about himself to God.

Luke 18:13 NKJV And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be

merciful to me a sinner!’

Luke 18:14 NKJV I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

If we want anything when we pray, we should approach God with a humble heart and attitude. Jesus said, “God exalts the humble and humbles those who lift up and exalt themselves.” While teaching, people started bringing infants to Him so that He might touch and bless them.

Let Children Come To Me – Luke 18:15-17; Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16

Luke 18:15 NKJV Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

The disciples were annoyed by this invasion into the Lord’s time because they felt there were more important things to do.

Luke 18:16 NKJV But Jesus called them to Him and said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.”

Some cultures believe that children are a burden until they can contribute to the family. Two important messages are included in the phrase “for of such is the kingdom of God.” First, the kingdom of God belongs to those who have childlike faith and humility. Second, any child that comes to Jesus should be encouraged and permitted to do so.

Luke 18:17 NKJV Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.

Jesus is talking about the attitude with which one approaches God.

Thus far He said we should not be arrogant, proud or self-exalting when we come to God in prayer. Then He said we should be persistent, patient, humble and child-like when we come to God. In the next parable, Jesus continues the theme of the attitude that God accepts.

The Rich Young Ruler - Luke 18:18-30; Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31

This parable challenges the very core of what it means to be a disciple.

Luke 18:18 NKJV Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Since we are all interested in inheriting eternal life, who can be good enough to be saved? Jesus recognized something in the man’s demeanor and attitude by the question he asked.

Luke 18:19 NKJV So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.”

Jesus was not denying that He was the Son of God, but was trying to

get the man to confess that only God is essentially good. His response also addressed the manner in which the rich young ruler came to Jesus. Then the Lord answered the man's question.

Luke 18:20 NKJV You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.' ”

The man was trained in the way he should live. The title “rich young ruler” probably refers to one of the younger leaders or teachers of the law. He was trained in the law and had a good understanding of God's commands, but he asked Jesus which commandments he should keep in order to be righteous, (Matthew 19:17-18). After listing some of the commandments, Jesus told him what to do if he wanted to be perfect. If anyone could perfectly obey the law of God, they would be righteous before God, and therein lies the problem.

James 2:10 NKJV For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

Here is the problem that we all face. How can we be made righteous in God's sight? Watch the response of the rich young ruler after Jesus listed some of the commands.

Luke 18:21 NKJV And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.”

This brings back into focus the word “good.” This man felt that he was “good” because he had done all these things from his youth.

Matthew 19:21 NKJV Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

Notice that Jesus did not condemn him for his efforts in obeying the law. The Lord noticed the details of his life and the one thing that was lacking. Jesus was not saying, “If you want to be saved, sell everything you have and give it to the poor.” One's salvation or entrance into heaven cannot be purchased with money. He was addressing the man's selfishness, pride, arrogance and lack of love for others.

Luke 18:23 NKJV But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

The Lord's response has raised many questions.

Luke 18:24–25 NKJV And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

Jesus was not saying a rich man cannot be saved. The language here is

referring to an actual needle that is used for sewing. Obviously, it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Many of the richest people in the Bible faithfully served God. Often riches are a sign of God's blessing. Deuteronomy 28:1-8 talks about God's blessings. It says they would be blessed in the city and country. The fruit of their bodies and lives would increase. Their basket and bowl would be full. They would be blessed coming and going. The disciples had trouble understanding Jesus' statement. One's riches can never grant a person access into the kingdom of God. No one can gain eternal life and enter the kingdom on their own efforts or merit.

Luke 18:26–27 NKJV And those who heard it said, “Who then can be saved?” But He said, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”

If those who are blessed with riches have trouble being saved, how can anyone be saved? God can do what man cannot do. Jesus was not condemning riches. The whole matter is, “can God trust you with wealth?” Maybe the question could also be, “can you trust God when you have wealth or is your trust in your own resources?” The difficulty the rich young ruler had was with his attitude toward God.

The Reward for Sacrifice – Luke 18:28-30, Matthew 19:27-29; Mark 10:28-30

Luke 18:28 NKJV Then Peter said, “See, we have left all and followed You.”

Luke 18:29–30 NKJV So He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

This statement lets us all know that anything and everything we do for the kingdom of God has its own reward.

Is it a lack of faith to pray about something more than once?

So don't you think God will surely give justice to His chosen people who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off?

How much does the Lord require of us to be His disciples?