

I. Read Luke 18:1-8

- A. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* defines parable (*parabole*) thusly, "...denotes a placing beside...it signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison." To understand the parable of the persistent widow, one must know what a parable is. In verses 1-8, Jesus is making an important point in his comparison. What is it?

Jesus is comparing an unjust judge who doesn't care about justice or about the widow, but who nevertheless yields to her persistence, with our just and loving God who cares about both justice and His children. The point is that if an evil judge would listen to the widow for all the wrong reasons, *how much more* should we expect our loving God to listen to our requests! Further, our confidence that God will indeed answer our prayers is, at least in part, based on His character and attributes, i.e. His justice, mercy, and goodness.

A secondary point Jesus makes with the parable might be:

That we should be persistent in our prayers. Many mistakenly see this as the primary point Jesus is making, which can be confusing. The point of persistence does bring into consideration the interplay between God's sovereignty and our responsibility to pray. Once again, I recommend *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?* To help resolve some of the tension students might feel about this.

- B. Why does God hear any of our prayers?

Note to Leaders: The Scripture references should be read out loud by volunteers in your class. Though there are a great many and some may seem redundant, His Word won't return void, and this is a very important topic!

Psalms 4:1; 6:2, 9

He has been gracious to us.

Psalm 17:1

He is just.

Psalm 32:1-6

Because you are forgiven, if you have confessed and trusted Christ.

Psalm 54:1-4

Because He has promised to help us and care for us.

Psalm 61:1, 5

Because it is part of our inheritance as His children.

Psalm 66:20

Because He is loving and kind to us.

Psalm 84:8

Because we are beneficiaries of the Covenant of Grace, the same Covenant God made with Jacob.

Psalm 102:1, 2, 17

Because we acknowledge our *absolute dependence* upon Him alone.

Proverbs 15:8
Because we are righteous (upright) in Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 15:29
Because of the righteousness of Christ.

Psalms 28:6-7
Because our heart delights in pleasing Him.

James 5:15, 16
Because we pray in faith.

1 Peter 3:12
Because God hears the prayer of the righteous.

1 Peter 3:7
Because we are obedient to God in our relationships, particularly in those involving covenants and vows, such as a marriage.

Colossians 3:1-3
Because we are *in Christ*.

Matthew 7:7-11
Because God is our loving Father.

John 15:16; 16:23-24, 26
Because we ask in Jesus' name. (This simply means that we come before God the Father solely on the merit of Christ's sacrifice and perfection.)

John 17:23
Because God the Father loves us as He loves Jesus!

- C. The Scriptures consistently and repeatedly promise that God hears the prayer of the righteous. Who are the righteous? (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24)
Those who have trusted in the gospel of Christ, and have received Christ personally.

Are any able to please God apart from Christ? (Read Galatians 2:16; 3:6, 7, 11, 26, 27; Romans 3:10, 12, 23, 24.)

No, all are lost except for those who have faith in the work and person of Jesus Christ.

What does this mean to those who *pray* for help in a time of trouble?

The only prayer God promises to *hear* from the sinner is one of repentance. The lost one in trouble should trust Christ before expecting God will answer any other prayers he might offer. Of course, a prayer to trust and receive Christ must be sincere. It is not uncommon to see folks going through a time of trouble experience a *fox-hole conversion*. Time will tell if they were sincere. (Please understand that when we say God doesn't *hear* the sinner's prayers, we mean that *He has no obligation to answer* them. Of course He hears all things said and knows every thought.)

- D. Are there sins or behavior that could cause a believer's prayers to be hindered?

Yes. 1 Peter 3:7 makes it clear that a husband's harshness toward his wife may hinder his prayers. But there is a *qualitative* difference between the prayers of the lost and the prayer of a believer (even a disobedient one). A lost man's prayer is an offense to a holy God because it supposes that the one praying is fit to come into God's presence by his own merit.

The prayer of a believer is received because Christ has taken the stench of sin away and our position before God is now based on Christ's righteousness. However, the relationship between God and the believer is like that of a Father and his child. While a father hears his children's requests and cares about what they want, he doesn't grant *all* their requests, especially if they want something harmful or if they are engaged in destructive behavior. (See Hebrews 12:4-13; James 4:3.)

- E. What sorts of things may happen as we persist and persevere in prayer?
God will answer us according to His will and His eternal time frame. Often *our desires and wants change* to conform to His will as we persist in prayer. Our faith is also strengthened as we learn to rely on the character of God and His Word, rather than what we see. Persisting in prayer is presented by Christ in Luke 18:1-8 as a good thing!
- F. Is prayer an integral part of the Christian's life? (Read Acts 8:22, 24; Romans 8:26; 2 Corinthians 13:7, 9; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; 1 Timothy 2:8; James 5:13, 14, 16.)
Yes!