

## Luke 18

In our parable today Jesus uses something called an argument from the lesser. He tells a parable about a scoundrel. And the argument is: if even a scoundrel, a lesser example, will give the poor lady what she needs, how much more will God, who is no scoundrel at all, the greater example, give her what she needs?! He will give so much more.

And if your mind is like mine the next question that immediately pops into our heads is: “well why doesn’t he give me what I want then!?”

And so now, as we do in every sermon or class about prayer, we then launch into all the reasons why God might not give you what you ask for. So we talk about how we pray according to His will and his will is greater and grander and we might not be able to see his plan for us. Which is why Garth Brooks sings the song about how he prayed to marry one girl, God said no, he married the other girl and wouldn’t you know it – thanks God! It’s a bit sappy, yes, and a bit harder to see when we aren’t praying for romance, but for the lost, or the sick. But you see the point, ya? The cry of faith is to say, “God is working for Good, even if we can’t see how.” The Cross is the perfect example of this, “how is God working through the murder of an innocent man and a dead Messiah?” Oh, he was working in a grand way – to save the whole world! So maybe we should confess that we don’t

always have it figured out and God has a decent track record for saving people, maybe we can rest knowing that we are in his hands.

Then we have to point out that Jesus, in our text today doesn't promise us *everything*, today he specifically promises *justice*. "And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night." Yet even there we wonder as the psalmists do: "Then why are the corrupt prospering and the good oppressed? That doesn't seem like justice." True enough. Which is why we cry day and night for it. And while we might debate with God - who to him a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day - we might debate with him on the definition of "speedily," can we confess that one day, one day, the corrupt will have to give an account and they will receive their due reward - justice? Yes, they will, we know they will. "Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." Psalm 2

And of course, when God says no to your prayer, you don't find yourself in the worst of company. As the Father said no to Paul, when he asked for the thorn to be removed from his side. But the Lord did offer him "grace sufficient" to bear the burden. Likewise the Father says no to the Son, as he prayed in the garden that the cup of the cross would pass from him. But he was given angels to minister to him

as he moved toward the cross. And so while we might read our text today and say, “God didn’t grant my prayer I must not be one of the elect!” Well, no, we can’t make that correlation. We know we are elect because those he has chosen he calls (Romans 8), and have you been called? Baptism, the word you are hearing now? I don’t think those are accidents. Likewise, “Maybe I don’t believe enough, or I prayed wrong,” go out the window, since I find it hard to believe Jesus prayed wrong. When God says no to your prayer, you are in good company.

So now that we have spent this much time talking about why God says “no” to our prayers at times. It is time to recall that that is actually the exact opposite point Jesus is making in this parable. Jesus is telling us this parable to say that God WILL give you what you pray for. He is telling us that even though it doesn’t seem like God is listening or cares or is answering: prayer does work. A crooked judge will give a request, the Father certainly will. So pray. And don’t lose heart.

I think Jesus says this because he knows that it’s easy to lose heart when you pray. I think he is showing sympathy to his people here. It’s easy for me to say, “Jesus never promises you a new truck.” But I don’t think we often pray for that do we? We pray for healing of body, and healing in our relationships. We ask for forgiveness. We pray for that lost person. And days and years go by and people die and just get more mad at us, and man, it’s really easy to lose heart. “God don’t you care?”

And then we despair, “There’s no point to prayer. Because if God answered prayer he surely would have spared that person, or done this or that, or stopped that war.” And so we stop coming to the just judge, which means we have lost heart. Or we just go through the motions, “I’ll say my rote, habitual prayer without thinking, but hey I did it!” But is that how you talk to your earthly fathers? A script? With no thought, with no feeling, no relation? So why would we talk to our heavenly Father in that way? Bring him your struggles, fears, sins, pains, anger. He already knows you have them in there. But we just don’t bring it up? We just don’t talk about the elephant in your heart – that sin, that struggle, that doubt, that fear? How weird is that?

So when you have lost heart and you think, “surely if God was real or cared, he would have answered this prayer...” Well, remember this text and his encouragement to keep coming to him in prayer. And let us remember, for how sure we are that God must have answered that prayer if he cared... well try this scenario on for size: Let’s “pretend” there was a perfect person. One who did not sin at all. He was loving, kind, stood for the truth, was faithful to God, and showed great compassion to the people even as he stood up boldly to corruption. Hmmm, do we know anyone like that? \*Cough\* Jesus \*Cough\* Now we might think a person like this, SURELY God would bring justice to speedily, surely he would answer prayers for him. Surely he would! It would be madness if he didn’t work

for their good. It would be a miscarriage of God's goodness and justice to not answer that person's prayer! If he didn't answer his prayer, then maybe that's a God I don't want to believe in because there is no way that God could be good....

And yet, as we already said... we know this perfectly good and just and compassionate man. And we know God did not answer his prayer and that man was given to death and condemnation even though he was the one person undeserving of it. You deserve it, I deserve it, he didn't. But is that because the judge, the Father, is corrupt? Because he is capricious and evil? Because he's the divine child abuser? Or because his will was for the ultimate good of saving the world. And because the faithful Son submitted to that will and boldly and gladly for the joy set before him in the resurrection endured the suffering of the cross?

When you are tempted to lose heart. Look at the cross of Jesus and his mighty resurrection. And there find a God that cares, and is just, and is good. There may your heart be renewed and refreshed to come to him once more and know his will is for your good. He would not do that if he did not care.

Brothers and sisters, God is real. Jesus is risen. He has told us to pray. He wants to hear from you, because he has a relationship with you his child. He has told us to not lose heart. And he has a track record of working for the good of his people. So pray, and don't lose heart. His saving work has been done and is being done, for

you. So that when that heart of yours stops beating even when all of us are praying it won't, fear not, he will give you a new one that will beat new and strong for eternity. And on that day I think we will all say, in spite of the heartfelt prayers that seemed to go by ignored, I think we will say, "God is just. God is good. And God be praised."