

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-40 Jesus & Prayer

Have you noticed that everyone knows about prayer? In desperate times, everyone prays! People pray because they can't make it on their own; they need supernatural help, from outside themselves. This is true no matter what religion one follows. But, only the one true and living God has power to answer prayer. In a previous lesson Jesus gave the disciples a model prayer, often called the Lord's Prayer. They received this teaching after they asked him to teach them to pray. The prayer details what important subjects should be included in Christian praying. In today's lesson, Jesus deals with more aspects of *how* we should pray.

To teach the principle that they should always pray and not give up, Jesus told his disciples a parable:

In a certain town there lived a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary."

For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!"

And the Lord continued,

Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I 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? (Luke 18:1-8)

This parable is often titled, 'The Persistent Widow.' The point of the story was that Christians should not give up hope while waiting for answered prayer. First century widows were especially helpless and vulnerable if they had no family to uphold their cause. It seems that this unjust judge did not care much about right or wrong or public opinion. If he could be moved by the persistence of a widow, who had no position or power in her society, how much more will God answer his children's pleas? He will not delay his support of his chosen ones.

Jesus ends this teaching with a question. "Will the Son of Man find faith when he returns to earth?" Christ was making an application of this story that looks forward to his second coming. A period of spiritual decline and persecution is predicted just before he returns. The times will require perseverance in prayer and loyalty. Will believers have the kind of faith that will pray until an answer comes?

Prayer also requires boldness along with persistence. Jesus said to them,

Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.” And suppose the one inside answers, “Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.” I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless courage he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened (Luke 11:5-10).

It was normal hospitality to give food to a guest, no matter when he arrived. The problem for the neighbor in bed was the effort to get up and give it. But because of the neighbor’s persistence, he got up and gave him all he needed. Jesus promised that God would likewise answer us. When we persist because Jesus told us to, we do it under his authority. Jesus promises that if we ask, seek and knock, he will reward us.

To some who prayed, confident of their own righteousness and looking down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

I tell you that this second man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted (Luke 18:9-14).

This last parable illustrates the correct attitude of a praying person. The Pharisee was trusting in his own righteousness and thus felt entitled to God’s blessings. He looked down on others in order to make himself look even better to God. He compared himself with the worst sinners he knew, like the tax collector praying near him. “Not only was this Jewish tax collector a traitor to his country,” the Pharisee thought, “he probably stole from God, neither fasting nor tithing.”

The tax collector, however, would not look up to heaven. He saw only his sin. He didn’t tell God about his goodness, rather he asked for mercy for the sins he knew he had committed. Jesus said it was the sinner asking for mercy who went home justified before God. The self-righteous and self-centered pride of the Pharisee kept him from being justified before God.

These **stories are important** because they teach that we need persistence in prayer, courage to make our needs known to God, and humility as the correct attitude to approach God. We will never deserve nor earn God’s blessings.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God is looking for persistence in prayer by believers and humble dependence upon him alone, apart from any good works.

Let's review this lesson—

1. Why did Jesus tell the parable of the widow and the unjust judge?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered Jesus told this parable to encourage the disciples that they should always pray and not give up, you are correct.

2. What spiritual principle did Jesus declare after telling about the two men who went up to the temple to pray?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the spiritual principal was that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted, you are correct.

3. What promise did Jesus give to believers who keep asking, seeking, and knocking in prayer?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said Jesus promised they would receive, and find doors opened to them, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the three stories and tell them to someone who has not heard them before. After telling the stories ask them this question. “What was your attitude about receiving from God the last time you prayed about a desperate need? Was it that you demanded and deserved an answer, or was it an attitude of humble trust in God’s goodness?” If the person is willing to share their need and current struggle, offer to pray with them in agreement for their need.