

Don't Stop Praying

James D. Martin, a program analyst at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, was standing in the parking lot of a Wheaton, Maryland grocery store last Wednesday when he was killed. He was there to buy groceries for his church.

James "Sonny" Buchanan was known as a man with a big heart who was always ready to help others. He was mowing the lawn of a car dealership near Rockville when he was shot in the chest and killed.

Buchanan was an active volunteer at the local Boys and Girls Club. A friend said, "Sonny was the dad to literally 400 kids."

Sarah Ramos was sitting on a bench reading outside a shopping center when she was shot in the head and killed.

She was an immigrant from El Salvador, who was a member of several church groups and babysat for a number of children and worked as a housekeeper. Ramos was married and had a 7-year-old son.

Lori Ann Lewis-Rivera was getting ready to vacuum out her van at a Kensington gas station when she was killed.

She grew up in a small town in Idaho and recently moved east with her husband and pre-school-aged daughter. She was 25 years old.

Pascal Charlot was killed on a Washington street. He emigrated to the United States from Haiti and was a retired carpenter. He is survived by his wife.

A 13-year-old boy was shot in the abdomen after his aunt dropped him off outside of middle school in Bowie. As of Wednesday, he was in critical but stable condition and was on a ventilator.

Dean Harold Meyers was shot once in the head after he had finished pumping gas at a Manassas, Virginia, gas station.

All the Nation is watching the events unfolding in our area with shock, horror, and anger. This past week I was at a conference in Chicago and the lead comment by the first speaker was the horror of these shootings.

We wonder, how could anyone be so cold and calculating? Where is the justice in our world when innocent people, just going about their business, are made the targets of a mad man?

How do we process events that seem so senseless? So reprehensible? So unjust?

Turn with me to Luke 18 pg 1014 Read vs 1

Luke chapter 18 begins with a parable that obviously talks about prayer. The theme of our service this morning has been prayer. But this parable isn't just about prayer. it's about prayer, but it's set in a particular context.

Last week we examined the end of chapter 17. There Jesus was asked when the kingdom of God would come.

We took some time last week to investigate that phrase "the Kingdom of God." We saw that it really covers a lot of ground but that it's ultimate focus was on the future when Jesus Christ would return bodily to earth and rule from David's throne in Jerusalem.

When that happens, the rule and government of God will be in force on the planet. The OT prophet Isaiah detailed a great many of the facets of God's kingdom.

For instance Isaiah 9 contains this great Messianic prophecy: *For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

In that one passage Isaiah takes us from Jesus' birth to His rule. We go from His first coming to His second coming.

In chapter 11 he prophesies: *There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*

His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Nations shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious. (Isaiah 11:1-10)

This is what we refer to as the kingdom age. Jesus Christ will return. The kingdom will be established. The very creation will be changed. And justice will be done.

That promise that justice will be done is crucial for us to understand. We live in a world of injustices. Snipers target innocent people. Terrorists inflict their terror by slaughtering innocent people.

Christians around the world are imprisoned, raped, beaten, tortured, sold as slaves, and murdered.

Children are abducted and horribly abused and murdered.

Have you ever looked at our world and longed for justice? Have you ever said something just isn't right with the planet?

The NT paints this picture for us: *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Romans 8:20-22)*

Something is wrong with our planet. Our world's under the bondage of corruption. The kingdom age is the time when the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption.

Luke chapter 18 comes right on the heels of Jesus' explanation about the coming judgment when He returns and the coming kingdom.

Remember, the Bible wasn't originally written with chapter and verse divisions. In fact to save valuable parchment space there wasn't even spaces between the words.

The chapter divisions in our Bibles were invented in 1205 by Stephen Langton. They're really handy because they help us navigate around, but they weren't inspired.

Just because there's a chapter break between 17 and 18 doesn't mean there was a break time-wise. In fact, the Greek text words 18:1 as a continuation of 17:37. This is still about Jesus' return, His judgment, and His kingdom.

Here's the problem for His disciples and for us. The time between Jesus first coming and His second coming is a long time.

The disciples thought for sure it was going to happen in their lifetime.

In Acts 1, just 40 days after His resurrection, before He had ascended back to the Father, His disciples asked: *"Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

It wasn't going to happen then. The whole church age had to take place and it's been going on for 2000 years now. God had plans to get His message out to the world. Over the years millions and millions of sons & daughters have been added to the kingdom of God. That's exciting!

But at the same time, injustices have multiplied as sinful human beings have seemed to have their way. And that's enough to make us throw up our hands in despair. Have you ever thought, there's no hope? The tide of evil in our world is just too overpowering? Have you felt despair, or frustration, or fear?

Jesus zeros right in at the heart of what we need to hear: *men always ought to pray and not lose heart...*

Don't give up. Don't throw in the towel. Why?

I. Keep On Praying Because Sometimes The Answer To Prayer Will Be Delayed. Read vs 2-4a

Luke mentions widows more than all the other gospel writers combined. In Jesus' day widows usually had a difficult time making ends meet, in spite of the care that God had instructed Israel to provide.

To put this in its context listen to this description from Warren Wiersbe. He writes: The judge, not the law, set the agenda; and he sat regally...surrounded by his assistants. Anybody could watch the proceedings from the outside, but only those who were approved and accepted could have their cases tried. This usually meant bribing one of the assistants so that he would call the judge's attention to the case.

The widow had obstacles to overcome. Being a woman, she had little standing before the law. Since she was a widow she had no husband to stand with her in court. She probably couldn't have afforded a bribe if she'd wanted to. Some how this widow had been wronged. She was in court because she wanted justice. In some way she had been treated unjustly.

She had a big problem though. Her only point of recourse was an ungodly, proud judge. He didn't fear God or man. He was a law unto himself and he was supposed to adjudicate the law.

Doesn't that sound like the world in which we live? Our culture is losing any sense of right and wrong. People make decisions based on what seems right to them.

The Justice Department recently announced that 1.8 million Americans were behind bars. They're there for a lot of different reasons but basically they wanted what they wanted, when they wanted it, and were willing to do whatever it took to get it.

Terrorists target innocent civilians to further their agenda. Child abductors prey on children to gratify their own twisted desires. Dictators rule with an iron fist to satisfy their lust for power. Snipers kill strangers who are minding their own business to fulfill their craving for god-like status. Politicians make crucial decisions based on what's going to keep their party in dominance.

True justice is a scarce commodity these days. In fact, justice has always been a scarce commodity.

In Deuteronomy 32 Moses commends God to the people. Moses had sinned and God wasn't going to allow him into the Promised Land.

He had to lead God's people for 40 years while they wandered in the wilderness, grumbling and complaining. Now he passed the mantle of leadership over to Joshua.

Moses was sad but he wasn't bitter. Moses would have loved to step foot in the land of promise but he knew he wouldn't. And this is what he says:

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As raindrops on the tender herb, And as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the LORD: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He. (Deuteronomy 32:1-4)

God isn't some unjust human being with self-serving agendas. He's the Holy One. Perfect in all His ways.

There's justice coming but it will be in God's time. We're still in the church age. It may end today. The rapture, or the removal of believers from the earth might happen today. We don't know the day or the hour.

But we know this. Until the day of God's Kingdom we don't need to give up. We don't need to allow bitterness to creep into our lives, confusion, or fear. We need to pray. We need to continually acknowledge our dependence on God, and one of the predominant ways we do that is pray.

I. Keep On Praying Because Sometimes The Answer To Prayer Will Be Delayed.

II. Keep On Praying Because Perseverance In Prayer Is Essential For Success.

Read 4b-5

She didn't take "no" for an answer. Instead, every time court was in session, here would be the widow, asking for- demanding - the justice she was entitled to. Everyone in town knew about her case. If she had kept quiet, things probably would have died down. But since she kept on demanding justice, vocally, publicly, time after time, the inevitable questions would begin. "Maybe she is being cheated." "Maybe she does have a case." The judge's credibility may have been called into question. She was a squeaky wheel demanding oil.

This woman may have lacked power, position, and resources, but there's one thing she did have: a spirit that said, "Never give up!" Why, because she didn't have any other options, and she knew it.

Her only option was to keep asking the judge to help her; persevering was essential for success! She had no other alternatives.

We need to realize that we *must*, not should, but *must*, persevere in prayer because we have no other source of hope or help.

Too many times we kind of pray as an after thought, or an add on. It's like, "Oh, by the way God, could you add Your blessing to all the schemes and plans that I've devised."

Jesus knew full well all the struggles His people would face during this age.

John 16:33 *In the world you will have tribulation...*

Luke 21:12 *...they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.*

II Timothy 3:13 *...evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

II Thessalonians 2:7 *...the mystery of lawlessness is already at work*

We should work for justice. Hosea commanded: *By the help of your God, return; Observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually.*

We need to practice and pursue that which is just but we have to realize it will always be an uphill battle.

David said in the Psalms: *Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face. I will sing of mercy and justice; To You, O LORD, I will sing praises.* (Psalm 89:14)

Isaiah gives this explanation: *In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.*" (Isaiah 16:5)

Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him. (Isaiah 30:18)

I do not think we'll really pray, and especially keep on praying, until we come to the place of complete desperation and have no other plan or recourse. We need to get to a

place like Jacob did, when he wrestled with God. When he had no leg to stand on, no strength of his own, all his self-reliance was gone. It was then that he held on and wouldn't let go of God until he got the blessing. In his weakness he knew that perseverance was essential.

Only the living God is the ultimate source of true justice and mercy. We should be desperate for Him.

This weak little widow made the powerful judge feel some heat. The judge says: *...because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'"*

The phrase "weary me" is from the Greek word *hupopiazō*, literally, "give a black eye to, strike in the face."

The judge was speaking in hyperbole or exaggeration -- she wasn't threatening him with bodily harm. But the figurative meaning of the word is "to bring someone to submission by constant annoyance, wear down, browbeat."

This widow's constant appeals were hurting the judge's reputation. Whatever he had been paid wasn't worth the hassle she was causing. He decided to grant her what she was due just to get rid of her.

I. Keep on praying because sometimes the answer to prayer will be delayed.

II. Keep on praying because perseverance in prayer is essential for success.

*III. Keep on praying because you're special to God. **Read vs 6***

Isn't that interesting? Jesus doesn't say, "Look at the example of the woman," although she's obviously an important example in this story. Instead, He says, "Hear what the unjust judge said."

The unrighteous judge granted the widow justice, not because it was the right thing to do, not because the Old Testament law required it, and not because a helpless widow requested it, but simply because it served his interests to do so. The unrighteous judge administered justice on the widow's behalf because he was selfish.

I believe Jesus' point is, "Look at the contrast..." **Read vs 7**

There may not be a lot of true justice in this world but you can be sure of this...God will act justly toward His children. It may not come as quickly as we'd like to have it but justice will come. God's justice will come, and it will come in God's perfect time.

He is truly just. He hears the cry of His children.

You say, If He hears why doesn't He change everything? If He hears why doesn't He end all the pain and trouble?

Read vs 8 When it comes time to set things right, everything is going to happen really fast. Jesus will come as a flash of lightening.

Here' the contrast...the sharp contrast. We persist in prayer because of the character of God, which is the opposite of the character of the judge. God is righteous; the judge was unrighteous.

God cares about His disciples because He has chosen them. The unrighteous judge has no feelings and no relationship to the widow. He has no compassion toward her, while God has great compassion on believers.

The unrighteous judge delayed because he didn't care about God or man; the Lord Jesus delays out of compassion on guilty men, giving them time to believe and be saved.

Aren't you glad that Jesus didn't come back as judge to set up His kingdom before you placed your faith in Him? We saw last week at the second coming of Christ there is a fiery judgment. Times up!

We saw last week how II Peter says scoffers will question the second coming. They'll say, "Where is He. Every thing just keeps going on like it always did."

Peter writes: ...*The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.* It will happen and when it does it will be a surprise.

Then he gives the reason for the delay. *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.* (II Peter 3:9-10)

Jesus isn't late. He didn't get sidetracked. He didn't change His mind. He's just giving people time to be saved.

See, Jesus Christ came the first time to face the absolute horror and agony of the cross. He was sinless but He took our sins upon Himself. In fact the Bible says, He who knew no sin became sin for us...

The sinless Son of God took our sins upon Himself so that we can be forgiven and share in His resurrection life. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

God isn't late with His plans. He's right on time. Jesus' point here in Luke 18 is this: "You can count on the fact that I'll return and that I'll bring about justice on the earth when I come. The issue for you to concern yourselves about isn't whether I will fulfill My promises, but whether you'll have faith in Me."

God's looking for faith. He's looking for saving faith. He's calling people to recognize Jesus' death and resurrection as the totality of the payment for sin.

He's looking for people to realize that if Jesus had to die on the cross, then there's nothing we can do to atone for our own sins.

God's also looking for sustaining faith. That's the faith that God's children express when they say, "God, I not only believe you are my salvation, but I trust you with my daily life. I'm going to persistently, doggedly, tenacious, unrelentingly call out to you in prayer. I'm not going to lose heart. I'm not going to quit. Because I know by faith that you will fulfill your promises and see me through."

If God's work is going to be accomplished by God's people, it'll be accomplished by prayer and faith. If we enter a covenant of prayer with God and by faith call continually on his Holy Name, that's the prevailing prayer that God honors. That's the kind of prayer God wants to answer. That's the kind of prayer that makes life exciting and expectant, that's the kind of prayer that will change our hearts, habits, hurts, hostilities, even our homes.