

Sermon Topic: Persistent Praying Till God Shows Up by Pr Wendy Chiang-Cheong
Sermon Text: Luke 17:20 - 18:8
Big Idea: Persistent praying keeps us attentive and allegiant to Christ till He returns

INTRODUCTION

The Parable of the Persistent Widow is not a story by itself. It is:

- framed within a dialogue about end-times
- starts with a question by the Pharisee
- ends with a question by Jesus
- with a comparison and contrast sandwiched between
- What is the message we are invited to reflect and apply?

PHARISEES' QUESTION: WHEN WILL THE KINGDOM OF GOD COME?

A valid but tragic question by the Pharisee who did not recognise Jesus' identity. Their question is one of Jewish and national curiosity:

- when will the Messiah come to overthrow the dictator?
- when will the throne of David be re-established?
- when will "make Israel great again" happen?

Jesus responded:

- Don't go looking for God's Kingdom through political signs, castastropic signs and external signs
 - ⇒ These may be characteristics of His return but not to speculate.
 - ⇒ In fact, with Jesus' presence in their midst, the Kingdom of God has already come. His Kingdom is among them and within their grasp (vs 22). Yet how can they possess the kingdom if they reject the King?
- The Kingdom is here and now but the full Kingdom of power is also future. It will come:
 - ⇒ Suddenly and swiftly (24)
 - ⇒ Separate the saved and the unsaved, the faithful and the faithless for purpose of judgment (vs 31-35)
 - ⇒ Shake the whole world in devastation

Lesson 1: **Don't go looking for a Kingdom out there when the Kingdom is not first happening in our hearts.**

JESUS COMPARES: ATTITUDES OF MEN IN LAST DAYS LIKE IN DAYS OF NOAH AND LOT

What's common in these 2 catastrophes:

- In Noah's days, the people ate, they drank, they marry (vs 26)
- In Lot's days, the people ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built (vs 28)
- And they were destroyed by the flood, fire and brimstone

The people were destroyed not by primarily by immorality but:

- An ordinary life, a busy routine of earthly things:
 - o With little attention and little allegiance to God: habits of indulgence without concern for God
- Not necessary sinful temptations or painful trials that turn our hearts away from Jesus.
 - o Good stuff can also block our senses to God's reality and lead us to compromise.
 - o A busy home, social and business life can blunt our responses to God's kingdom

Lesson 2: **Good stuff have the potential to empty us of attention and allegiance to Jesus.**

JESUS' COMMAND: REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE AS WE WAIT FOR JESUS' RETURN

Why her instead of Sarah, Hannah, Ruth or Mary?

- She had **privileges, possessions, prayer coverage yet perished**
 - o Involved in the spiritual experiences of Lot and Abraham
 - o Involved in the generosity of God who blessed Abraham
 - o Involved in the potential deliverance out of Sodom when Abraham interceded for Sodom
 - o Yet her lot becomes her treasure and she looked in disobedience and unbelief towards God's stern judgement against godless living
- Remember her action and consequences. Those who seeks to save his or her life will lose it, while those willing to lose their lives will save it (vs 32-33).
- We are also blessed with much privilege, possessions and prayer coverage:
 - o No lack of churches available to us, in fact different styles for different preference
 - o An abundant supply of Bibles, bible resources and Christian conferences
 - o A Christian parent, spouse and relative praying for us
 - o Prayer groups and churches naming us before God's throne and pleading for our souls
- Are these good stuff of privileges, possessions and prayer coverage:
 - o Strengthening our faith and cultivating our loyalty to Jesus?
 - o Been used responsibly for the kingdom?
 - o Do we forget His goodness, abuse His mercy, disobey His voice and provoke Him to anger?
 - o Do we leverage the good things in life just for a luxurious lifestyle?
 - o Do we subscribe to a kingdom or consumerist agenda?

Privileges, possessions and prayer coverage don't save us. Be careful not to be like Lot's wife who held to her lot and died as she lived. Ignoring the reality of God's kingdom is a careless life.

JESUS' COMMAND: BE LIKE THE PERSISTENT WIDOW AS WE WAIT FOR HIS RETURN

Lawlessness will increase and the love of many will grow cold prior the days of Jesus' return (Matthew 24:12). He asks, "when I come, will I find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8)

The prescription to endure well till Christ shows up is prayer, persistent praying(18:1). The verb “should” indicates a duty that is necessary, needful, right and proper.

Lesson 3: **Being attentive, allegiant and ready for Jesus’ return requires patient, perserving prayer.**

- The widow has no position in society, no person to represent her case, no power to engage anyone to help her.
- These obstacles did not stop her from her single-eye attention on the unjust judge.
- Contrasts Jesus makes:
 - ⇒ The poor woman is a stranger but we are the children of God
 - ⇒ The poor woman has no access to the judge but we have an open access to God, anytime, anywhere
 - ⇒ The unjust judge did not care but God cares for His children’s needs
 - ⇒ He cares enough to deal with our adversary who aims to disqualify and sabotage our faithfulness to Christ

Why persist if God already knows our needs? Why persist if God would not give us what we ask?

Lesson 4: **Persistence in prayer is for our sake, not God’s.**

- Persistence compels us to know the true center of prayer: it is not about the stuff but the Savior
- Persistence cultivates spiritual growth: not to use God but to love God
- Persistence changes the way we pray: it purifies and transform our desires, changes how we pray and what we ask so we come closer to the heart of God’s will
- Persistence conditions us to be attentive and allegiant to Jesus. It keeps our eyes on Him in commitment while the world lives without concern for God

JESUS’ QUESTION: WILL I FIND SUCH FERVANT FAITH WHEN I RETURN IN THE LAST DAYS?

- a question left open for our examination, reflection and application.

Summary

Christ wants us to hear His promise and exhortation in this sandwiched text:

- Jesus promises to return to bring justice and fully establish His powerful Kindgom.
 - The longer we wait for His return in a world of injustice and self-pleasure, the higher chance we will faint and fall out in this race.
 - As days get darker in lawlessness and seasons turn colder in love, we must guard ourselves against complacent, convenient following of Jesus.
 - Jesus exhorts us to watch and wait with persistent praying
 - Until He returns, He protects us and calls us to persistent praying. Will he find us in such patient fervency when He returns?
1. **Don’t go looking for a Kingdom out there when the Kingdom is not first happening in our hearts.**
 2. **Good stuff have the potential to empty us of attention and allegiance to Jesus.**
 3. **Being attentive, allegiant and ready for Jesus’ return requires patient, perserving prayer.**
 4. **Persistence in prayer is for our sake, not God’s.**

Discussion Questions

1. What is the general sentiment of people towards political, catastrophoic, social chaos and unrest? How do they usually respond?
2. From Jesus' description in verses 20- 37, the movement of His 2nd coming is hinted to the disciples. How would you describe this movement?
3. From the given example of Noah and Lot's days, those who sought after God were ready for His judgement and delivered. Those who did not pay attention perished. From your observation, do you think we are a people living with eternity in mind or too attached to the world?
4. Do you look forward to Jesus' 2nd coming (we recite the creed weekly)? What would you do differently after this sermon?
5. From a scale of 1-5, how would you describe your prayer life? Do you consider yourself persistent in prayer? What obstacles do you need to overcome to be persistent in waiting and watching for Jesus in prayer?
6. How can your cell group pray for you to endure in this journey of faith?