

PRAY AS IF FIGHTING FOR YOUR RIGHTS!

Today's Text: Lk 18: 1-8

Extracts:

Then [Jesus] spoke a parable to them, that *men always ought to pray and not to lose heart*, saying, "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city, and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" [Lk 18: 1-8]

26-year old Mohammed Bouazizi was a street vendor in the rural Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid.¹ Since losing his father when he was three, he had had to take care of his mother and siblings. He had a running battle with police and other government officials who harassed street vendors for personal gains. Mohammed earned only about US\$140 per month. On 17 December 2010, police seized his wares that he had bought on credit. They also physically humiliated him. He went to the office of the local governor to complain but he could not see him, even when he threatened to kill himself. An hour later, he set himself on fire and died in the local hospital. That woke up pent-up anger of the people against official corruption and injustice. In no time, protests grew nationwide, leading to the fall of President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011, after 23 years in power! That is what has triggered the current pro-democracy protests in other Arab countries.

Mohammed was pushed by injustice from an uncaring government to fight for his rights. As believers, we receive a similar treatment from Satan, masquerading as principalities and wicked people in high places. It is a sin to commit suicide but how can we fight back? In this week's Bible text, Jesus tells the parable of a widow that came to seek justice from a wicked judge that neither feared God nor man. Jesus used that story to show us why we should pray and not faint. Therefore, praying is like fighting for our rights. Are you ready to pray or to lose heart? This week's study will help you to answer that question.

¹ Story based on "Mohammed Bouazizi," *Wikipedia*, The Free Encyclopedia; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Bouazizi

1. Background: The Parable of the Unjust Judge

John and Joan have been married for ten years. They have no child even when the doctors have confirmed that there is nothing medically wrong with both of them. Obi is on trial for corrupt enrichment and everybody who knows him says that he is innocent. Andrea graduated from college five years ago and she has not been able to land her first job. What do all those people share in common? They need urgent help before their patience snaps. Jesus has answers for them and those of us in similar situations from this week's study.

The Lord used the Parable of the Unjust Judge to draw our attention to the spiritual truth that if we find ourselves in desperate situations, such as those described above, we ought to pray and not faint [**Lk 18: 1-8**]. The woman in the parable was a widow. Let us look at the situation that she had to deal with:

a) *She brought her case before a wicked judge*

The widow came to the judge and said, "Get justice for me from my adversary." However, we are told that that judge did not fear God nor regard man [**vv. 2-3**]. That put the widow in a very helpless situation. First, she needed justice from her apparently more powerful adversary. Knowing about battles in families over estates, her adversary could be her husband's relatives or even her children. If her husband died intestate (i.e., without a legally valid will), the state bureaucracy would be part of her adversary. Second, the judge before whom she brought her case did not fear God and had no regard for others. Therefore, such a judge would not be interested in justice but in self-aggrandisement.

You may recall the case of Paul who was brought by the Jewish leaders before Governor Felix on false accusations of being "a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world." Even when Felix knew from the contradictory evidence that Paul was innocent, he kept him in detention for two years because, among other things, he had 'hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him' [**Acts 24: 1-27**]. Therefore, it should not surprise you that the unjust judge approached by the widow did not give her justice "for a while" [**Lk 18: 4**]. In like manner, your human or earthly influence may not get you the respite you are asking for. That is why you need to go to God in prayer.

b) *But the widow would not take 'No!' for an answer!*

The widow refused to give up but insisted on the judge giving her justice against her adversary. After a while, the judge relented, saying within himself, "Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me" [**vv. 4-5**]. The widow did not give that judge any rest! Why

should he sleep when injustice did not let her sleep? She was fighting for her rights and she would neither sleep nor slumber until she got what she deserved.

Jesus drew the attention of His listeners to the major lesson from that parable, namely, “Shall God not avenge *His own elect* who cry out day and night to Him, though *He bears long with them?*” [vv. 6-7]. We can only cry out day and night by prayers because praying is our main mode of communication with God [Phil. 4: 6]. But, unlike the wicked judge, we cannot wear God out. That suggests that *it is not for how long or how well we pray that God answers us. Rather, He answers us if we are fighting for our (spiritual) rights!* Let us explore how we can identify such rights.

2. Preparing for prayers that avail much

The word of God says, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” [Jam. 5: 16]. We know that some people do not pray much and yet we see results all around them. On the other hand, there are some people who can pray and fast better than Moses and yet, they have nothing to show for it! How do we know that we are on the right track and so continue praying until we get what we are asking for? The following steps will help us to answer that question:

a) *First of all, stop phishing!*

You sometimes get in your e-mail box a request from an Internet provider asking for verification of your account number or password. If you comply, you have just granted scammers access to your personal information and bank accounts. Such a fraudulent act is called phishing. Some people think that they can con God to grant them their hearts’ desires. What they have forgotten is that God sees the heart, not our physical features [1 Sam. 16: 7]. *You cannot remain worldly and expect God to answer your prayers.* That is why we are told, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your lust... Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” [Jam. 4: 3-4].

King Saul is a good example of somebody who was phishing when he prayed to God. Here was the man who had pursued David for over ten years to kill him. In the process, he had put out of Israel anybody (including mediums and spiritists) that dared to give him any unfavourable message concerning holding on to his throne [1 Sam. 28: 1-3]. After the death of the prophet Samuel, the Philistines gathered to make war against Israel and “when Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly; and when [he] inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets” [vv. 5-6]. God did not answer Saul because he was phishing.

Therefore, examine your relationship with God before you get on your knees. Are you a Christian only in name but not in practice? Do you even believe that Jesus is the only way to God or that God has a Son? How can you walk in darkness and claim to have fellowship with God [1 Jn 1: 6]? Without faith, it is not possible for you to please God because those who come to Him must believe that He is what He says He is and that He only rewards those who diligently seek Him [Heb. 11: 6]. So, stop phishing and come to God with clean hands.

b) *Next, come with clean hands!*

It takes a humble spirit for humans to accept that they are not the centre of the universe. God is the higher authority to whom we must bow with a repentant heart for the sins that we have inherited and committed by ourselves. Writing on the tragic nature of sin, the prophet Isaiah said, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not too shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that He cannot hear, *but your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear*” [Is. 59: 1-2]. Therefore, if we expect God to hear and answer our prayers, we must ***go to Him with clean hands of repentance and righteous living.***

Take the case of King Jehoshaphat whose kingdom, Judah, had been surrounded by massive armies of his enemies from Moab, Ammon and elsewhere. We are told that “Jehoshaphat feared, and *set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.*” He brought the assembly of all his people to the house of God in Jerusalem and made a fervent prayer to God, saying, “We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, *but our eyes are upon You.*” There and then, God spoke through a prophet to assure the king, “Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, *for the battle is not yours, but God’s.*” Without throwing a single weapon, King Jehoshaphat won a resounding victory [2 Chron. 20: 1-25]. That is what can happen to you when you go to God in prayer with clean hands of repentance and obedience.

c) *Next, don’t come near these borders!*

That you are in good standing with God does not mean that He will answer *every prayer* that you throw at Him. For example, just because you have decided to build a church for God has not given you the right to a piece of land that is not legally yours. You can quote every scripture you know that wherever the sole of your feet has touched, God has already given to you, but you are trespassing and He will not answer you! David had enough means to build God a temple but God refused because David

had shed much blood [1 Chron. 22: 6-8]! So, there are certain boundaries that you must not come near when you pray to God to grant your requests. Here are a few examples:

- What God cannot grant

Yes, with God nothing shall be impossible. However, there are certain prayers He *cannot* grant you. For example, He will not interfere *where He has already given you authority*. When the children of Israel cried (prayed fervently) to God by the banks of the Red Sea, He said to Moses, “Why do you cry to Me? ... But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it” [Ex. 14: 10-16]. He had already empowered Moses. Or take the case when Jesus came to the grave of Lazarus. He said to the people, “Take away the stone.” After raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus said, “Loose him, and let him go” [Jn 11: 39, 44]. It was human beings that had tied him up for burial and rolled the stone over the grave. *God will not do for you what you can do for yourself!* Jesus is standing and knocking at the door. If you are so busy praying in tongues to hear and open for Him, He will NEVER come in to dine with you and you with Him [Rev. 3: 20]!

- When God has already said, ‘No!’

Once God has turned down a request which He says you *do not need or no longer deserve*, it is futile to keep praying about it. For example, after Moses had disobeyed God by striking the rock twice instead of speaking to it, God said that he would no longer lead the people into the Promised Land [Num. 20: 11-12]. When he later prayed God to let him step on the Promised Land before his death, the Lord said to him, “Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter” [Deut. 3: 23-26]. Look also at the case of beloved Paul who was buffeted by a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan. Three times he prayed for relief and thrice the Lord refused, telling Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness” [2 Cor. 12: 7-9]. Therefore, don’t weary yourself praying for what God cannot grant you!

d) *Now, you can pray!*

Having excluded areas where your prayers will be futile, you have identified the areas to present to God in fervent prayer. He will answer them faithfully in accordance with the *A-S-K principles* (ask-seek-knock) [Matt. 7:7], as follows:

- God will answer before or while you are just praying, *in fulfillment of His promise* that “before they call, I will answer; and while they are

still speaking, I will hear” [Is. 65: 24]. The early church prayed for boldness to speak about Jesus and “when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” [Acts 4: 23-31];

- Sometimes, *the answer may not come immediately, especially if you have not yet developed the spiritual capacity to handle the problem or the outcome* you are praying for. For example, the disciples who could not cure an epileptic while Jesus was away during the Transfiguration asked Him in private why they had failed. He told them, “This kind does not go out, except by prayer and fasting” [Matt. 17: 1-21];
- Sometimes, your prayer is *being hindered by satanic forces*. For example, Daniel prayed and fasted for twenty-one days without results. However, on the 24th day, an angel came to tell him that his prayer had been answered right from the first day but that, as he was bringing God’s answer, satanic forces [prince of the kingdom of Persia] withstood him for twenty-one days until archangel Michael came to his help [Dan. 10: 1-13].

No matter what happens, the just is expected to live by his/her faith [Hab. 2: 4]. Once you are sure that you are not asking amiss, that you are asking for your rights (what God has approved for you), then you can afford to tarry because God will *surely* hear. *It may not be when you want it but God is always on time!*

3. Conclusion: Jesus came to restore your rights!

When you pray, you are communicating with a just God who will avenge speedily His elect that cry to Him day and night [Lk 18:8]. It is easier to do so if you have a warm relationship with Him through His only begotten Son, Jesus. How do you think God would treat you if He were to regard you as His friend [Is. 41:8; Jn 15: 14-16] or child [Jn 1: 12; Rom. 8: 14-17]? When you know Jesus, He will restore your rights with His Father. Then, when you pray, it will be like asking for the rights that your Father has already guaranteed for you!

Alleluia!