

## **Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday March 11<sup>th</sup> 2007 Luke 18:1-8 The Parable of the Judge and the Widow**

After WWII Churchill visited his old school on Prize-giving day. His speech was 'Never, never, NEVER give up!' And then he sat down!

Do you ever feel like giving up? What difference do our silly prayer meetings make? Our prayers on world issues seem futile. We can feel like we're talking to a brick wall. Because Jesus knows this he tells a parable telling us to always pray and never give up.

A Judge neither feared God, nor man, nor widows. A widow was trying to make her way through the general mêlée, and he ignored her, contrary to what Jewish Law demanded in Isaiah 1:17, where it says that widows and orphans should be defended. The Judge had long since taken any notice of what the Scriptures said. He knew no shame nor did he feel dishonoured by his behaviour. Had she been a Scottish Widow (i.e. young and beautiful) then he might have noticed her. Day after day the old woman came back, and with an irritating voice demanded justice. Until he finally says 'I don't care about this woman, but because she is 'beating me in the face' I will give her what she asks.'

Jesus compares the Judge who, even though he cares nothing about God or men, can give justice to someone at the bottom of the social ladder just because she pesters him, HOW MUCH MORE will God give justice to His chosen ones when they cry out to Him.

This is not a 'penny-in-the-slot - pull-the-handle - out-comes-the-answer' kind of attitude to prayer, because 'quickly' for God is not necessarily quickly as we understand it. But it challenges a Christian fatalism which says it doesn't matter what you pray. Because even though the world is an unyielding place, prayer is the most powerful weapon in our hands. P T Forsyth says that 'Prayerlessness is the greatest sin of the Church.' Andrew Murray says 'Prayer is the means by which that comes to pass which otherwise would not come to pass.' Helmut Thielike comments that 'God is doing nothing less than offering to the Church a part in the Government of the world.' William Willimon went to the Soviet Union in the 70's and asked the tour guide about the state of the Church in that country. He replied 'almost non-existent, just a few old babushkas praying.' Well, we all know it was the faithful insistent prayer of these few old women that saw the collapse of communism.

Jesus tells us to 'Ask, seek and knock' in our prayer. We come to God as our Father and that is the baseline of all Christian prayer. But we must be persistent in prayer. It will not be powerful until it is importunate - there must be a certain doggedness in our asking, seeking and knocking. But it is never anxious, never legalistic, never formulaic, never manipulative, it's not the hours we spend or the noise we make, but as we come to God as our Father, in His grace He creates a space for us, and we wrestle, weep, groan, demand and persist. Prayer is like gravel thrown at a window to attract the attention of a loved one.

If you want everything measured you will never have a life of faith. The media makes us think that evil has triumphed especially when we see such godlessness and the persecution of Christians for their faith. But will God find faith like that of the old woman in the parable? A faith that, despite the world being as it is, still believes that the kingdom of this world is becoming the Kingdom of our God. Prayer sets God loose. As we revolt against the world, refusing to resign ourselves to evil we demonstrate that 'there is faith on the earth'. Generations may pass before prayers are answered, before an errant son returns, or a stubborn parent yields to Christ but when God has all your prayers, all your crying out, all your tears, all your pacing, all your sadness, then he has all of you.