**Always Pray and Not Give Up**

 November 1, 2015

Luke 18:1-14 / Key Verse: 18:1,

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

Last week, we learned that the kingdom of God comes in two aspects. First, invisible, spiritual, personal kingdom comes in one soul at a time when we individually accept Jesus as our king. Second, visible, worldwide kingdom will come on earth when Jesus comes again as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Jesus warned that the time of his second coming will be like the days of Noah and the days of Lot. In the days of Noah and Lot, people were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, buying, and selling, plating and building. These are not wrong but normal and ordinary life and then why did Jesus say these? Jesus was warning that when we are only engaging in busy ordinary life, business life, the ordinariness can make us insensitive to the reality of God and the Kingdom’s work. Becoming lukewarm Christians is spiritually dangerous because lukewarm faith cannot save us when Jesus comes again.

As Dr. Henry Kim mentioned in the last week’s message, even many believers are more interested in their own achievement or success instead of participating in the kingdom of God. Their success is their goal and God becomes the means for their goal. This is exactly the opposite of what the Bible teaches. They can be like Lot’s wife who after all lost her salvation.

In Matthew 24:9-13, Jesus also warned that as his second coming becomes closer and closer, there would be persecution, hatred by all nations because of Jesus, many people’s turning away from the faith, deceiving false teaching. And most of all, Jesus said, “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” When we hear such Jesus’ warnings, our natural question is how then we can endure to the end to be saved?

 In today’s passage; verse 8, Jesus’ final warning is, “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” We believe that here the faith Jesus meant is enduring faith to the end. Then again our natural question comes up. “How then can we have enduring faith to the end until Jesus comes again?”

The answer is in the title of today’s message. “Always pray and not give up!” Jesus doesn’t just give warning but also teaches about how we can avoid the spiritual danger for us to lose our heart and faith. It is to always pray and not give up. In another word, it is persistent prayer. And another acceptable prayer to God is our humble prayer repenting our sins earnestly. Let’s learn these two prayers through today’s passage.

**I. Persistent Prayer (1-8)**

Look at verse 1. “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” Jesus understands very well that the life which his disciples should go through in this world will not be easy but tough. Believing and following Jesus is basically life of self-denial, taking up God-given cross. There is cost to believe in Jesus and follow him. But in carrying out such Jesus-centered, God-centered life, we are sometimes easily overwhelmed by burdens of life, or storms of life such as heavy study load, or job problem, marriage or children problem, financial or health problem, or troubles of people whom we help and love, etc. Worldly peer pressures that press us to fit ourselves to worldly life style also can seem overwhelming. We sometimes are tempted to give in to that fear. But whatever issue we have in our life, Jesus encourages us to always pray for God’s guidance and help and not give up.

Look at verses 2-5. Jesus’ parable begins with two people in a town, one a judge, the other a widow. At that time a judge was to be God’s representative. When a judge fears God and loves people, the people can enjoy the freedom and justice in God’s community. But this judge did not fear God. He didn’t care about people’s opinions or their suffering, either. Probably he cared most only about who would give him bribes. The people of that town all suffered because there was no justice.

But no one suffered more than the weak and powerless, like the widow. Having lost her husband, she must have suffered from sorrow and loneliness. In addition to loneliness, the widow had to worry about how to survive on a limited budget. If that were not enough, she had the added burden of an adversary. We don’t know the details. Perhaps someone was after her house or trying to take her children to pay a debt. To whom could she go? There was no one except the notorious unjust judge in her town. What could she do? She had nothing like bribes to give to him. Finally she decided to keep coming to the judge no matter what with unceasing plea in one sentence, “Grant me justice against my adversary.” The pain of her situation became a strong motivation for her to keep coming to the judge. Although it required lots of humility to beg the judge continuously, she kept coming to him with her pleas. To her there was no other option available. Her strategy was simply persistence.

The judge cared nothing for the widow. In fact, for some time he refused. “No way!” “No way!” “No way!” But the widow did not give up. She began to plea to him every day. When he came to work, she was already there. He took a vacation, oh, men! She was there, too. Now this judge began to become haunted by her. So, 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 come and attack me! (wear me out with her coming!)” Out of self-preservation, he finally gave up and caved in. That day, he went to the court and dealt with the adversary. The widow received justice and her agony and suffering were lifted. Persistence had won the victory.

Here, what is the point that Jesus wanted to teach? Let’s look at and read verses 6-8. “And the Lord said, ‘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?” Here, we learn this parable story is not about the widow and the unjust judge but our prayer to our God Father. In these verses, Jesus says, “If such an evil man can be motivated to bring about justice in response to a persistent plea, how much more our God will bring about justice for his chosen ones! This is the point of Jesus’ teaching. He said this story to encourage us to always pray not giving up by showing to whom we are praying.

Since we are crying out to God, not just an unjust judge, we are in a much better position than this widow. She was making an appeal to a stranger judge, but we pray to our Father God, who loves us as his precious children. She was pleading with an unjust man, but we are pleading with the Righteous Creator God. She was limited in her opportunity to plead her cause, but God is listening to us day and night without limit of time. Her judge cared nothing for her justice or well-being, but our Father so loved us that he gave his One and Only Son so that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Even our human mothers sometimes grow tired of the constant pleas of children but our heavenly Father does not grow tired. He is never annoyed nor worn out by our constant pleas. Though he may put us off for time, Romans 8:28 says that it is for our good and eventually he gives us the best always. It says, “And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who has been called according to his purpose.

Therefore, on the basis of this parable, as verse 8 says, Jesus’ ultimate desire toward us is that we have enduring faith until he comes again and the only way that enables us to do so is to always pray persistently (verse1) to our Father God. Someone said, “Faith is the furnace of our life. The fuel of this furnace is the grace (unfailing love) of God. The divinely appointed shovel to feed this furnace is our prayer.” So if you lose heart and lay down your shovel of prayer, your fire of life furnace will go out and your heart will grow cold and hard. Then when the flashing lightning-like the Son of Man appears in glory from sky to sky; from horizon to horizon, how can you stand firm before him?

For a long time I have felt that the fire of my heart has been cold, dry, and hard instead of warm and burning. Outwardly I have attended church activities as usual regularly but when I examine my heart, I see myself that my heart has been cold and I always wish to have more burning heart of love. In preparing this message, I deeply realized that my problem was laying down my shovel of persistent prayer; in another word, I have become lazy in prayer. But now I am restoring my persistency in prayer. Persistency means to continue to do something in spite of difficulties, opposition, and adverse environment or situation. Persistency is one of the most representative character of God; his love. Apostle Paul discovered this truth and said in 1 Corinthians 13: 7, “Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” I have several prayer topics in my life; prayer for finance, health, children, mother, and sisters and coworkers and bible students in God’s ministry. I believe that there is nothing too hard for God to deal with. All I need is to bring everything to God in prayer persistently. James 4:2b-3 also teaches, “You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motive, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” May God bless each of us to learn persistent prayer with right prayer topics to glorify his name and advance his kingdom by serving one soul at a time.

**II. Humble Prayer (9-14)**

In verses 9-14, Jesus teaches whose prayer will be accepted to God. Let’s read verses 9-14. “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked 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 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.’” In this parable, Jesus put clear contrast between two men. The first man was a Pharisee and he was full of self-righteousness. In his short prayer to God, he repeated use of “I” 4 times. He had no sense of unworthiness before the holy God. Instead, he condemned others in his prayer, rather than pray with tears for their salvation. The basis of his thanksgiving was not because of anything God did in his life. Rather, his repeated use of “I” 4 times reveals that he saw only himself, not God. On the basis of his righteous deed, he bragged before God. His fasting twice a week and offering all tithes look very faithful to God but there was one more significant thing he didn’t realize. According to Romans 3:10b, “No one is righteous, not even one.” But he did not know this because he did not live before God. In contrast, the second man, a tax collector would not even look up to heaven because of his deep sense of sinfulness and unworthiness before the holy God. He had broken and contrite heart toward the holy God. So he beat his breast and said to God in trembling heart, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” He knew his wretched sin and admitted it with broken and painful heart. In verse 14, Jesus made a conclusion, “I tell you that this 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.” Humbleness or humility means admitting us as we are before God. Humbleness does not mean having inferior complex or having low self-esteem. Humbleness is simply admitting as we are before God accepting the fact that we are sinners before him and we become his adopted children when we repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Going beyond this according to their own human thought is pride and exalting their own ego. To enter the kingdom of God, we should be humble enough to admit our helpless sinfulness and accept God’s grace; his gift of eternal life.

In conclusion, today we learned two important points to have enduring faith until Jesus comes again. One is persistent prayer based on our heavenly Father God’s love and grace and the other is humble prayer with repentant heart. If we lose heart and lay down our shovel of prayer, the fire of our life furnace will go out and we will grow cold and become like dry branch who cannot produce fruit of love; the most important fruit of life. May God bless each of us to commit ourselves to persistent prayer and repentant heart-broken prayer! Amen.