

Praying for Renewal

Luke 18:1-8

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Emphasis: To help men realize the importance of renewal in their spiritual lives.

Teaching: In almost every town in Mississippi, there's an informal gathering place where the latest political issues are discussed. Men may gather at a restaurant, convenience store, farm supply center, or coffee shop. If you have listened to these rap sessions, you have probably heard someone say, "This country is in a mess!" Well, in many ways that is true. Foreign threats to our peace, financial uncertainty, and rampant immorality indicate that our world is in chaos, confusion, disarray...a mess. Many people see no hope for their communities and nation to be pleasing to God. But, does talking about problems seem to solve them?

During his ministry, Jesus faced a similarly messy world. His people, the Jews, were oppressed by the ruling government. Many religious leaders were more concerned about what they could get from people than what they could do to help the hurting folks around them. Widows were mistreated. Children were ignored. What a mess!

To instruct his followers on how to live in an unstable world, Jesus told a simple story. This type of story is referred to as a parable. You will find an introduction to the story, the details of the parable, and the truths Jesus stressed in explaining the parable in the Gospel of Luke (Read Luke 18:1-8). Please note that Luke was compelled by the Holy Spirit to tell us why Jesus told the parable. He said that the Son of God told the story to remind us that "men always ought to pray and not lose heart." Sounds like a story we need to hear today.

The story features an unjust judge, who was not concerned about God or what other men thought of him. The judge was asked by a desperate widow to rule in her favor against someone who had become an adversary. The judge delayed making a decision. But, finally he decided to rule in her favor in order to keep her from, as a modern translation reads, "wearing me out."

Jesus stressed that a major lesson could be learned from the actions of this unjust judge. If an ungodly man can do what is right, certainly God will answer believers who cry out to him day and night? Jesus asked, "Will he keep putting them off?" Of course, he will not. God has done some mind-blowing things to prove he loves us (See John 3:16). He does not like the mess sin caused in this world, but He will not abandon His people who are willing to be used by Him to be a transforming instrument by sharing the love of God with unbelievers.

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Notes

Notably, in another follow up to the story, Jesus demanded a decision from his listeners. He referenced the promise that He, the Son of Man, would return to the world someday and he questioned "Will he really find faith on the earth?" In other words, if Jesus returned today, how many faithful and prayerful men would he find busy trying to make a difference for God? Or, will he find churches full of people who have given up on their community and are doing nothing to reach people who are facing an eternity in hell without Christ? Will he find men who are all talk and no action? Will he find us praying and not giving up?

Mission Application:

- Answer the following questions: "How often do I pray for the spiritual renewal in the life of my church and community? Recently, have I spent more time "talking about" the shortcomings of the government or "praying for" leaders of the local, state, and national government? Do I pray more in public than in private? Do I really believe that my community and nation can be transformed by the power of God? Have the men in your group answer these same questions.
- Challenge the men to think of real ways they could address the "messiest" concerns they have listed. Examples: If crime is a problem, assign someone to contact someone in law enforcement to see what the church could do to help address needs. Explore prison ministry by calling the Men's Ministry department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (1.800.748.1651).
- Take time to pray that your church would be renewed and recommitted to engaging the community evangelistically. Make this a frequent prayer.
- Mention the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering will be collected next month. Pray that the funds would be used to reach the nation for Christ. Cite the church's goal. For more information, access www.anniearmstrong.com.