



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

Worship Address : Cerritos High School Auditorium
12500 E. 183rd St., Cerritos, CA 90703
(Enter at Bloomfield, across Heritage Park)

Mailing Address : 11428 E. Artesia Blvd. # 4 ; Artesia, CA 90701
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October 25, 2009

Theme: God Is Listening - Commit to Persistent Prayer

Text: Luke 18:1-8

Today we continue to reflect upon the spiritual discipline of prayer. I want to begin our thoughts to day with question that has two parts. Before I ask it I want to say that I love the people who make up our church. I believe that our church has been created by God. But I want to ask this question: Do we believe that God wants the English congregation of St. Paul Evangelical Community Church to grow? When I speak of growth, I have two forms of growth in mind: (1) First there is what we call "quality growth." Quality growth means that we are growing in our experience of Christ's love and of His fullness. I pray that we are all growing in this way. (2) Second, there is what is called "quantity growth." This simply means growth in numbers. I am not an expert on church growth by any means; but I do know one thing: Both kinds of growth require a commitment to persistent prayer. Many of God's people believe in prayer in theory but not in practice. Jesus knew this would be true and so he told a parable about a persistent widow and an unjust judge.

Luke introduces this parable by saying that Jesus told it so that his disciples would always pray and never give up. There are two characters in the parable: There an unjust judge who neither fears God nor cares about people; there is a widow who kept on coming to him with a plea for justice against an enemy. The widow did not have a powerful lawyer and she had no money to grease the wheels of justice. All she had was her persistence. We are like that widow. We have no spiritual power to make things happen. What we can have is persistence in prayer. Let me ask us all: Do we believe that God wants our church to grow? Do we believe that God wants our church to have revival? Do we believe that God wants His Spirit to light a fire in our hearts? Do we believe that God wants to see people in the Cerritos are come to repentance and be baptized in the name of the Triune God? If so, we must become people of persistent prayer, because all of this requires a miracle from God.

The scene in court is quite unlike the courtrooms in this country. In those courts, the widow would have been ruled out of order. She would have been removed from the courtroom. But in this court she keeps on coming with here plea for justice. The unjust judge refuses to listen at first, but finally gives in because of her persistence. The unjust judge says that he will grant her request "...so that she won't eventually wear me out by her coming." The phrase, "wear me out," literally means, "to beat someone until they are black and blue." Even though the judge does not care about people he does care about his reputation for one reason: If he continues to refuse justice to this widow, the people of his town or village will put him out of office as judge.



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Why does Jesus use the image of an unjust judge when he wants to motivate his disciples to pray always and never give up? This is a parable of comparison and contrast. In other words, God is like and unlike the unjust judge. Like the judge, God has a reputation to maintain as the loving Father of Jesus' disciples. As such He is one who is ready to answer their prayers. That is his reputation and He desires to maintain it. He is unlike the judge in that he doesn't need to be bothered or annoyed until He grants our requests. As we saw a few weeks ago God is able and willing to do way more than we can ever ask or even imagine. Therefore we need to be persistent. Our persistence reveals our faith. Sometimes the answers to our prayers come more or less immediately. At other times they do not. When answers to our prayers do not come immediately, our persistence reveals our faith.

Jesus had taught earlier in Luke's Gospel that those who would ask would receive and those who would seek would find and to those who knocked the door would be opened. If disciples, who are imperfect fathers, know how to give good gifts to their children, God will all the more give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. This does not mean that God will jump into action every time we call upon Him. He knows our needs before we ask. He answers our prayers like a wise Father, according to what is best for us. The power of the Holy Spirit is always best for us. He is the source of quality growth and quantity growth. Therefore, like the widow in the story we must be persistent, insistent, and consistent in prayer.