

“DON’T GIVE UP”
2 Kings 19:20-37, Psalm 6:1-10, Luke 18:1-8
January 22 & 23, 2022

R. Alec Mackenzie made this marvelous statement in his book, *The Time Trap* [(New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), pg. 37]. He says, “The ability to concentrate - to persevere on a course without distraction or diversion - is a power that has enabled men [and women] of moderate capability to reach heights of attainment that have eluded the genius. They have no secret formula other than to persevere.”¹

Perseverance through difficult times and situations brings lasting results IF we are not distracted from our main focus. Philippians 4:13 says it very clearly, “*I can do all things, through Christ who strengthens me.*” If we steadfastly keep our eyes on Jesus, we can do amazing things, even more than what we thought we could ever do. Keeping our focus on Jesus gives us “*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” we so desperately seek in order to come into the Father’s presence (John 14:6).

More than anything today, we need to persevere in the Word of God, trusting that God has all things under His control. We need to remain confident that God knows His own people and will help them in times of need. We need to remember that God has done great things for His people - those who believe in Him and trust in Him - throughout the history of our world. And if He has done great things then, He can do great things again in our own day today. We are invited to have such assurance in the truth of the Word of God that we never vary from it, and never fear those who would come up against us saying that we are wrong in our belief.

We hear the same message in our Scripture lessons today. In 2 Kings 19, King Hezekiah and all of Jerusalem were confronted by the massive army of the Assyrians led by their emperor, Sennacherib. The Assyrians had already conquered Israel and much of Judah, and they had their sights on Jerusalem, too. They were not appeased with Hezekiah’s peace offering, but were hell-bent upon total occupation of the people of Israel and Judah. And the Lord God had allowed the Assyrians to have victory over

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 610)

them because they had fallen away from worshipping the Lord God Almighty. It was a tough position that Hezekiah was in, so he called out to the prophet Isaiah for advice and guidance.

In the face of overwhelming odds and bullied by Sennacherib, it would have been very easy for Hezekiah and all of Jerusalem to give up and give in to the Assyrians. But the Word of the Lord came through Isaiah telling them not to be afraid of the Assyrian army, and not to listen to the threats of Sennacherib.

God tells Sennacherib, *“Have you never heard that I planned all this long ago? And now I have carried it out. I gave you the power to turn fortified cities into piles of rubble. The people who lived there were powerless; they were frightened and stunned. They were like grass in a field or weeds growing on a roof when the hot east wind blasts them.*

“But I know everything about you, what you do and where you go. I know how you rage against me, I have received the report of that rage and that pride of yours, and now I will put a hook through your nose and a bit in your mouth, and take you back by the same road you came” (2 Kings 19:25-28).

King Hezekiah followed Isaiah’s advice, and he watched what the Lord was going to do. All the people turned away from their wicked ways and trusted in the Lord once more, and God sent an angel who killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night. This caused the emperor Sennacherib to withdraw from Jerusalem and return to Nineveh, where he was soon killed by his own sons while he worshipped his god Nisroch. When they kept their eyes upon the Lord God Almighty, the people of Jerusalem were able to endure and persevere against the threat of Sennacherib.

Now, you have to remember that God is not like a man who has limited knowledge. God knows all that is going on. He has allowed all the trials and struggles to happen around us today so that we might prove our faith in Him and turn to Him to find His help and guidance. As a nation we have turned against the Lord our God, too, so it is only right that God allows us to come upon these difficult times in our own day. When things go well for us, we forget God, but when hardships and trials come, we tend to remember that the Lord God Almighty is able to redeem us and forgive us and restore us

once more.

King David went through similar struggles as King Hezekiah, only he had a constant barrage of enemies attacking him. David didn't run off to the pagan gods for guidance and direction. He didn't trust in his own ways and try to muddle through all the attacks. David kept his eyes upon the Lord, and we see that in our lesson of Psalm 6.

David cried out to the Lord for His help and guidance. He knew the power of the Lord God Almighty, and he trusted in God's direction. He cried out to the Lord for His help, and though it wasn't an over-night response to many of his prayers, God did guide and direct Him so that he could be the best king he could be. That didn't mean David was perfect - far from it. But David kept his eyes focused upon the Lord and persevered, trusting that God would use him in a mighty way for God's glory.

I look at verses 6 & 7 of Psalm 6 and wonder how they might affect our lives today if we were to follow their example. David cries out, *"I am worn out with grief; every night my bed is damp from my weeping; my pillow is soaked with tears. I can hardly see; my eyes are so swollen from the weeping caused by my enemies."* Here's a man that poured his heart out to the Lord on a regular basis, bringing all of his worries, all of his fears, all of his burdens before the Lord so that he could find comfort and peace. Day after day, night after night, David turned to the Lord and trusted that He would deliver him from all of his enemies. What would happen if we were to begin to do the same thing? How might God respond to our prayers if we would but persistently come before Him seeking His strength and power for our lives today?

And that's not just some whimsical request from a man standing in a pulpit in a church. It is following the advice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who tells us to persevere and never give up. Listen to the instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples about being constant in prayer. This is Luke 18:1-8. (READ Luke 18:-8)

How many of us would give up on a judge if he refused to act upon our request - or if he ruled against us instead of giving us justice? We have several instances in our world today of faithful

Christians persevering and crying out to the courts to bring justice. They don't just quit, but they persevere in order to keep their rights.

Take for example, Joe Kennedy. Kennedy was unjustly fired in 2015 from Bremerton High School, as he claims, for kneeling on the field after football games to pray. Joe was there to thank God for the safety of the players, and to give praise to the Lord for their athletic abilities. He didn't have a megaphone. He didn't shout it out and make a scene. As the coach, he didn't demand that others join him. He simply went to midfield and knelt down to pray after each game was finished. And so powerful was his witness that many players from both teams would join him to thank God for the game. And for that the school superintendent fired him, saying he was violating the Establishment Clause, promoting religion as a public school employee. After 7 years bouncing around in the court system, the Supreme Court has finally agreed to hear his case and decide the outcome of his constitutional rights to pray after a football game at midfield.

Then, look at Jack Phillips, the owner of Masterpiece Cake Shop in Colorado. He is selective upon the kinds of cakes that he makes, so when asked to make a cake that went against his religious convictions, Jack politely declined. However the lower courts viewed his decision as discriminatory and told him that he had to make a cake for anyone, and to dismiss his religious beliefs to fulfill their requests.

But Jack Phillips doesn't design cakes for all events - he never has. He has a set of values based on his religious beliefs - a moral code - that guides his life, including his work. When an event conflicts with Jack's beliefs, he doesn't participate. But the courts are demanding that he put his religious convictions away and do everything that people request of him. A lawyer is still suing him because Jack holds Christian values and convictions in the work he does as a baker. His fight continues, but Jack is trusting in the Lord God to guide Him and protect him.

In His parable, Jesus calls each one of us to continue in our faith in Him, no matter what we encounter in our life. Governmental officials here in the U.S. may decide to outlaw Christianity at some

point, like what has happened in many other countries around the world. Does that mean we stop following Jesus? No. Does it mean that we give up practicing our faith, even in public? No. Does it mean that we give in to whatever that government wants us to do? No. It means that we boldly continue on in our faith so that others may see the value of having faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, no matter what the consequences may be. It means that we cry out to the Lord and seek His intervention. It means that we cling to Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. How else will a society change unless we boldly live and practice our faith in Jesus.

The Parable of the Widow and the Judge encourages us to continue to face the hardships and difficulties in our life unafraid, knowing that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us. We need to call out to Him for His wisdom and His courage and His strength so that whatever the outcome may be, we live as faithful witnesses to the love of God through the Salvation of Jesus Christ.

The woman in the parable was confronted by an unbelieving judge. He “*neither feared God nor respected man*” (Luke 18:2). This judge didn’t care about justice it seems. It sounds like he was in it for himself. He had no compassion for the meek and lowly. He had no desire to act with integrity. This judge refused to act on behalf of a widow who needed his help. He coldly turned a blind shoulder to her and refused to grant her the justice she needed.

But the woman did not give up her appeals to the judge. She knew that it was the only way she was going to get the help she needed. So she continued to call him, appealing to him for justice, seeking the right judgement from him so that she could live. Day after day and night after night she called out to the judge so that she would not be forgotten, but rather get the justice that was due to her.

And the judge finally took notice. It wasn’t because he feared God or respected men, but because of the woman’s persistence. There’s an old proverb that goes, “The squeaky wheel gets the oil.” This woman became a squeaky wheel, and squeaked loud and long until the uncaring judge finally started to care about his own health and wellbeing. He said, ‘*...because of all the trouble this widow is giving me, I will see to it that she gets her rights. If I don’t, she will keep on coming and finally wear me*

out!” (Luke 18:5). He finally comes to his senses and steps up for the widow, which is what he should have done in the first place. Yet it was her persistence that finally got her the justice she needed.

Jesus then turns the meaning of the parable for us to understand. When we pray to the Lord God Almighty, we don't pray to a cold heart and deaf ear. God hears every one of our prayers and He knows our every need. He wants to help us in our times of need, however there is an element of faith-building that takes place when we seek the Lord with our whole heart day after day. Imagine what our faith would look like if we got everything we asked for, the moment we asked for it? We would be treating God like a divine vending machine - prayers go in and answers go out. There's no faith there. Instead, we become spoiled brats demanding everything under the sun, no matter if it is good for us or not.

But God sees our hearts and knows our real needs, and He answers every prayer, but not always with a “Yes.” While God does indeed answer every prayer, sometimes the answer is “No,” because God knows that if He would submit to giving us that thing, we'd find ourselves in a worse position than what we were in before.

Like the times that we prayed that our parents or someone else would die! I know, I'm ashamed to say that I have prayed for that throughout my life. How many close friends or parents would be gone if God answered with a “Yes” to those prayers? Or how about praying for a good grade on a test that we had not prepared for? But because God allowed us to fail, we learned a great lesson of the importance of studying and preparing for tests.

Or what about praying for something that is against one of God's commands? We pray that that new boyfriend or girlfriend will accept our offer to move in with us. God says that sexual relations belong only in the heterosexual marriage relationship, yet we want God to bless our disobedience to His command and still have Him bless our shacking up with each other. We pray that we could get that item that catches our attention that belongs to another person and we seek God's permission to not only covet that item, but to steal it, too. We pray that God would bless our unlawful or shady business transactions so that we might be financially secure. Yet God demands that we deal righteously with one another in

our everyday work. Or we pray that we would get that higher paying job that we really don't have qualifications for. There are so many prayers that we heap up to God expecting Him to grant us our every request while they violate His commands and guidelines for us. Or how about our praying for a divorce so that we can take up a new husband or a new wife? God desires that we make our marriages work, and gives us the strength and endurance to work out the difficulties and grow closer to each other at the same time. But we want to toss in the proverbial towel and jump into a new relationship even before the old one is finished. How could God say anything but "No" to those requests?

But there are times when we petition God with our prayers and they seem like those prayers are falling on deaf ears. Could it be that God says to us, "I know that you need that, but you're not ready for it yet?" God desires our best, and He is willing to give us His very best at His right time when we can use that answered prayer for His glory. He wants us to be faithful people, who are willing to wait for His best so that at just the right time we might not only appreciate it but truly give God thanks for it.

Jesus calls us to have faith in the abundance of the Lord our God, knowing that He loves us and wants our very best. Jesus calls us to trust that the Lord our God knows our needs, and that He has just the right time and just the right way to bless us completely. Jesus desires that we be faithful, over anything else, so that the Lord our God might use us for His glory. It's not about our own success in life, but how we live persevering in the Word of God to touch out world around us.

Let me close with this final illustration about the importance of perseverance and faith and never giving up.

"David Brainerd, describing his early weeks as a missionary to Native Americans at the beginning of the 1700s penned these words in his journal: "My heart is sunk. . . . It seemed to me I should never have any success among the Indians. My soul was weary of my life; I longed for death, beyond measure."

"Things didn't improve much for the first two years, in fact. He felt his prospects of winning converts 'as dark as midnight.'"

“Three years into the work, though, he finally witnessed a revival among the Indians of Crossweesung in New England, and after another year and a half, the number of converts numbered 150--not much by today's mass evangelistic standards, but profoundly significant in his day. Unfortunately, Brainerd died after only five years on the mission field, at age 29.

“After Brainerd's death, Jonathan Edwards--whom some consider America's greatest theologian--published Brainerd's journals. These were read widely in America and Europe. In fact, William Carey, the ‘father of modern missions,’ the man who ignited the modern Protestant missionary movement, which has been responsible for millions upon millions of conversions worldwide, pointed to Brainerd's journals as a key source of his inspiration to take up the missionary life.

“Who, then, can judge whether our work is worthwhile? Certainly we cannot when we're in the midst of discouragement.”² Instead, even in what may look like complete failure, can come tremendous success if we do not give up and trust in the Lord God to use us and guide us.

The great question is the one that Jesus asks His disciples, “*But will the Son of Man find faith on earth when He comes*” (Luke 18:8)? That depends completely upon us. So never give up in following the Lord, and stay persistent in prayer and faith for the glory of God.

Let's pray...Father, it is so easy for us to look at the things of this world and deem them to be impossible and insurmountable. Yet, you invite each of us to stay the course, to remain faithful to Your will and Your way so that we may find Your blessings in our life, not only for us, but for many more around us. Give us the endurance we need to keep on living as You have called us to live. Give us the tenacity to stick to our commitment to Jesus Christ, no matter what we face. Guide us in all our ways so that we might rejoice in You and delight to do Your work at all times and in all places. Keep our eyes focused on You, Jesus, so that we can do all things as You make them possible. This we pray in Your powerful and holy name, Jesus, our Lord and Savior. AMEN.

² (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg.)