

Prayer Life – “The Complaining Prayer”

Luke 18:1-8 (focus on vv.7-8)

- I. Introduction – Prim & Proper Prayer
 - A. A question for the kids...*Raise your hands if your parents love to listen to you complain.* Nobody!? No one!? (maybe a couple jokers in the crowd)
 - i. Why don't your parents like to hear you complain?
 1. Maybe it's because complaints are often selfish.
 2. They're a little annoying.
 3. They don't show appreciation for the good things we *do* get, only dissatisfaction with what we *don't* get.
 - ii. Now, adults and kids together...*Raise your hands if you think God loves to listen to you complain.* Nobody!? No one!? (raising your hand...) I happen to think it's one of God's favorite prayers.
 - B. When we're young we are taught the proper decorum of how we should pray.
 - i. Someone give me an example of prim and proper praying...
 1. Fold your hands (or raise them to God)
 2. Close your eyes
 3. Bow your heads
 4. Bend to your knees
 - ii. Those are good things to do when praying and when learning to pray
 1. It teaches and shows respect.
 2. It reminds us that we are under God's care and that He is above us.
 3. God is our Father; Jesus is our Brother; the Holy Spirit is our Comforter – but God is still our maker, so signs of respect are very important.
- II. The importance of the *Complaining Prayer*
 - A. If the life we live out with God is not always so prim and proper, then why the expectation for prim and proper prayer?
 - B. In fact, if we only pray the nice and neat prayers, I think we are excluding God from some of the most formative moments in our spiritual development.
 - i. He has the capacity of doing the most in us when things seem the worst around us.
 - ii. But if we shut Him out of our truest feelings, our biggest worries, we shut ourselves off from His guidance when we need it most.
 - C. Perhaps the time we most need to talk to God is when we don't feel like it, when we aren't ready for it, when we are feeling like He is not upholding His part of the bargain.
 - i. Do you ever feel like God is *not* on your side?
 - ii. Like He is not living up to your expectations?
 - iii. Like He is not being *nice* or *neat* about how He takes care of you?
- III. The *Complaining Prayer* in the Psalms
 - A. I don't know if you realized it or not, but most of the Psalms are lamenting or complaining prayers.
 - i. We learn the psalms of praise. We like the psalms of praise. They're nice and neat.

1. The Lord is my Shepherd.
 2. Create in me a clean heart, O God.
 3. Our help is in the name of the Lord.
 - ii. We don't enjoy the psalms of complaint. They're nasty and negative.
 - iii. These are the Psalms we don't use in church very often.
 1. They're the ones that don't make it into our hymnals.
 2. They're the psalms that we want to avoid.
 - a. They wish for the punishment and destruction of our enemies – that's not so prim.
 - b. They even question God's motives – that's not so proper.
- B. The beauty of the *complaining prayer* in the Psalms is that it always begins with an invocation of God's name.
- i. Invocation is fancy church language for *calling up*.
 - ii. The psalmist *calls upon* God, by name, to intervene in a situation that doesn't seem right.
 1. This invocation is an essential part of the complaining prayer.
 - a. It keeps the prayer from becoming an exercise in self-pity
 - b. It keeps the prayer from becoming an exercise in self-indulgence.
 2. The invocation is a turn *to* God when everything in the person's life suggests that God has turned away.
 - iii. Life isn't adding up! What the psalmist sees with his eyes betrays what his faith has taught him about God.
 1. It looks like God's against him.
 2. It looks like God has forgotten His promises.
 3. It looks like God is no longer present with him.
 - iv. Have you ever felt that way in the rough patches of your life?
 1. If so, you're not alone!
 2. Even Jesus prayed the complaining prayer.
- IV. Jesus' complaining prayer from the cross
- A. As we march along in Lent, by the end of the season, we see Jesus hanging on the cross.
- i. We've heard the words that came out of his mouth enough times that they no longer surprise us.
 - ii. But when we pause to think about what He says it doesn't sound so prim and proper as we would normally expect from Jesus.
 1. But remember, He is experiencing life where God is against Him.
 - a. The Father has turned His back on His own Son – that's what *forsaken* means – to turn against someone, ignore them, treat them like they're nothing to you.
 - b. That's the way a perfect God has to react to imperfect sinners – He has to reject sin and reject the sinner.
 - c. But Jesus endured the rejection to gain our acceptance before God.
 - i. Having no sin of His own, Jesus took on the sins of the world – yours, mine, our neighbors' – and paid

the price that our sins deserved to buy God's acceptance for each of us.

- ii. Jesus was experiencing in reality and in all its fullness what life sometimes feels like to us.
 - 1. God is against me.
 - 2. God's no longer looking out for me.
 - 3. God's punishing me.
 - 4. God's not living up to His part of our relationship.

B. So, Jesus prays from the 22nd Psalm, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" That Psalm continues, "Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest." (vv.1-2)

- i. Not so nice and neat! Not very prim and proper!
- ii. This is raw and real! This is suffering and sorrow!

C. Why would Jesus complain like this?

- i. First, this was His reality. God *had* forsaken Him.
- ii. Second, Jesus knew that even in the middle of apparent rejection – or real rejection as He experienced – the Father is still in love with His children.
 - 1. Jesus knows that by invoking God, as the complaining prayer always should, God will bring relief!
 - 2. Jesus knew He would have to suffer His demise first, but that this would result in the demise of death.
 - a. Jesus knew His punishment, however unfair, was leading to the destruction of death.
 - b. Jesus knew, that with the only true God, this sacrifice would have to be honored and this apparent defeat would result in victory, this death would end up in life, His burial would finish with resurrection.

V. Learning how to complain to God, with the help of the complaining Psalms can help us with some of the most significant problems in our lives.

- i. How many of you, if heard a friend speaking the words of Psalm 22 would question that friend's faith?
 - 1. We accept those words from Jesus because we figure He wouldn't say anything wrong.
 - 2. But when we say those words, or when we want to say them...when we hear them from our family and friends, we might automatically jump to the wrong conclusion.
 - a. Complaining to God can't make God happy!?
 - b. Complaining to God is not a sign of faith!?
 - 3. On the contrary, the complaining prayer is an amazing act of faith!
 - a. In the middle of a life that *seems* void of God's intervention, the complaining prayer calls on God to remain true to His promise!
 - b. In the middle of a life that *seems* like God is the enemy, or at best an uninterested bystander, the complaining prayer

reaches out in faith to the true presence and promise that God will never leave us or forsake us, that *He will be with us always to the end of the age.*

- VI. The Parable of the Persistent Widow
- A. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus told the parable of the Persistent Widow.
 - B. In this story, the woman who is oppressed by an adversary, goes before a wicked judge – the text says he neither respected God or man.
 - C. When he does nothing to help her, she goes back to him again.
 - D. Jesus doesn't reveal how many times she went back for her appeals.
 - i. But it was enough to make the judge give in to the request.
 - ii. He says, "Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming." (Luke 18:4-5)
 - iii. The widow's constant complaint – her continual appeal to justice – brought the result she needed.
 - E. Now, Jesus doesn't tell this parable to suggest that God is reluctant to give justice.
 - i. Jesus tells this parable to contrast the wicked judge with our righteous Father.
 - ii. If the widow's complaint is heard even by a wicked judge, how much more will our compassionate God hear our pleas for mercy!?
 - F. While the widow's complaint was an exercise in persistence; our faithful complaints to God are an exercise in faith.
 - i. If we trust in God, we will pray. If we lose faith in God, we will neglect prayer.
 - ii. "Believers act out their faith by seeking Him for help." (Kleinig, p.175)
 - iii. Even prayers of complaint – especially prayers of complaint – show our faith that despite our circumstances, we know that our God is good.
 - 1. We know that our God is love.
 - 2. We know that our God is present.
 - 3. We know that our God is listening.
 - 4. We know that our God is victorious.
 - iv. If Jesus who was rejected for our sin, was also raised up out of death, then we who have God's acceptance will live in our struggles, through our struggles, and out of our struggles with God's continual favor!