

Fellowship Group Notes – 23/24 February 2011

Luke – 18:1-17: Approaching God.

These first seventeen verses of chapter 18 can be divided into three sections each teaching us one important truth about man's approach to God, and the attitude that we should have:

v1-8 – The Parable of the Persistent Widow (**Persistence**)

Background – normally in Palestine at this time the widow of a deceased husband had no rights to inherit her husband's estate, if her deceased husband had no children then the estate reverted to her husband's male relatives on his father's side. So when her husband died she couldn't take for granted living in his house, on his land.

- Describe the judge in this parable. What do we know about his motivations? (v2, 4-5)
- Describe the widow. What motivates her? Why do you think she is so persistent? (v3)
- What is the purpose of Jesus telling this parable? (v1)

Jesus is teaching continual prayer, again and again, rather than continuous, non-stop prayer. To "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13; 5:17; 2 Timothy 1:3) is to pray repeatedly, time and again. To say, as some do, that praying more than once about anyone thing, displays a lack of faith is clearly opposed to Jesus' teaching that we should pray continuously until we have an answer.

- What kinds of things can happen that cause us to lose hope, and lose heart to pray consistent and believing prayers? How can we get out of these "pits"?

- v8 – Notice how Jesus relates this parable of persistent prayer, to us waiting for the second coming ... sometimes it can seem so long, what does Peter say? (Read: 2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-10) God's timing is perfect ... justice will prevail! The question for us is will God find us persisting in our faith or will we be tempted to give it up? How are you challenged by this personally?

v9-14 – The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (**Penitence**)

- v9 – Jesus points out his intended target – who are these people?

Self righteousness comes about in our lives when we are "confident in," and begin to trust in our own holy standard of living to save us and make us right before God. When we begin to do this we will inevitably begin to look down on others who don't behave in the same way that we do.

- Discuss: which individuals and people groups might we look down upon? And for what reasons? Can we do this with fellow Christians? ... Now we can see how relevant this parable is to us!

- v11-12 – what did the Pharisees prayer consist of? What does that tell us about him?
- v13 – what did the tax collector's prayer consist of? What does his prayer and body language tell us about him?
- What should our attitude be towards others who may not live up to our own righteous standard?

v15-17 – The Little Children and Jesus (**Dependence**)

Note: The previous parable (v9-14) is key to understanding this short section.

Background: While children were prized by parents – male children especially – in society they were largely ignored as unimportant. They weren't considered worthy of much adult attention outside their families.

- v14 – Why did the disciples rebuke the parents?
- v15 – What point is Jesus making in inviting the children to come to him freely?
- v16 – Children have some great qualities (and some not so great!), what characteristics of children do you think Jesus longs to see in his disciples when approaching him?
- In what way does Jesus' teaching here offer hope to those who read it?

Prayer Points

- Focus your prayers on the prayer life of the church.
- Weekly church activities and outreaches.