

## Faith as a child (Luke 18:1-17)

We have been studying the gospel of Luke together. Today, we will study from the first half of Cp 18. The theme is “Faith as a child”.

### 1. Will Jesus find faith on the earth?

#### 1-8

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. <sup>2</sup> He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' <sup>4</sup> "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!" <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

In August, we heard the message from here. It's about “prayer”. Let's remember what we learned.

- We ought to pray and not lose heart.
- God is a just judge.
- Persistence in prayer prevails upon God for an answer.
- Five elements of prayer: worship, repentance, intercession, supplication, and thanksgiving

That was the first message I heard after I came back from Japan this time. I received this message as the message God had spoken to this church and to myself as we enter into this new season.

I want to share something from my personal experience. Daily I've been reading the Bible, meditating on it and praying. But when it comes to church, and ministry, I was filled with the thoughts that “I” need to do this and that. Especially when I think about this new season of this church, often action and plan went before my prayer.

In the message, I felt the Lord was speaking to me from Acts 6:4, a pastor should “give his attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” When I heard that, I felt that was the signal from the Lord. Of course, I am not saying from now on I will withdraw into the cave and just read the Bible and pray. That’s not what I am saying. But I need to make the priority clear so that the prayer and the ministry of the word will not be neglected. I want to do everything by prayer. I would also like to pray for you. If you have your personal prayer request, please let me know.

One day, I was talking to someone and he shared about his experience of prayer. I was very much encouraged, for I learned how powerful the intercessory prayer can be. I want to share what it was.

It was when he was still a student. He was in a very difficult situation regarding taking exam at college. He talked to school, but they wouldn’t listen. He couldn’t do anything by himself. But if he left the situation as it was, he would have to waste one year of his study. He grew more and more nervous and the anxiety was about to rule his heart. Suddenly he remembered that his mother had been fervently praying for his study. And while he was waiting for the response of the school, his heart was filled with peace which words cannot explain. And the school accepted his plea in the end.

Since then, each time he thinks of the fact somebody is praying for him, peace and hope spring in his heart, he says. Not just that. As he started to know the power of the intercessory prayer, he also started to pray for others with confidence.

We ought to pray and not lose heart. Amen?!

In our church, we have Life Net groups. And there is a prayer time in each group. There, we share each other’s burden and pray for one another. And we also give thanks and praise in the prayer time. "Experiencing the Life and changing lives."

There is a group focusing on prayer. They are meeting on Sunday morning from 9:30 at the back room. The group is named Morning Glory. This group worship God in his glory, spend time together in his glory, pray and expect that God’s glory will be shown through us in our family, in local community and in this country, and to all over the world. 30 minutes passes very quickly there.

This year, I am thrilled to think that each Life Net group will draw closer

to God through prayer and fellowship, each member will be even more connected, "Experiencing the Life and Changing lives," and the great works of the Lord will be shown and His name be glorified. "Experiencing the Life and changing lives" will be real in our church.

Everybody expect the Lord to do something great in this church this year, let's say "Amen".

Now let's continue to look at this passage from broader context.

In v.1, Jesus says to his disciples they should always pray and not give up. What were the things Jesus' disciples might possibly give up praying for? What were they encouraged to keep praying for?

In Cp 17, the previous chapter, Jesus was asked, "When will the kingdom of God come?" The kingdom of God had not come as the people had expected. Injustice was still prevalent in the society. Those who do evil were making a profit, and the weak and the poor were tormented. Although they had been praying, seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness, it seemed nothing had changed. "Will the kingdom of God really come? It won't actually come, will it?" Jesus' disciples might likely be disheartened.

Jesus said to them, "God will bring about justice for his chosen ones. So don't be discouraged. But seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

The kingdom of God is coming. The days of the Son of Man is drawing near. God will bring about justice quickly. So Jesus challenges people, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find on this earth anyone with faith?" (v.8, CEV)

"Faith is the one essential that Christ will look for, since God's reign is his sovereign act in the world and therefore we must continually put our trust in him, and in him alone, if his kingdom is to come."<sup>1</sup>

The days of the Son of Man will be like the days of Noah. Or it will be just the same in the days of Lot. While people are doing their daily activities as usual, suddenly the judgment of God will come. It may come while we are fast asleep at night. One will be welcomed into the kingdom of God and the other will be left. It may happen while working. One will be welcomed into the kingdom of God and the other will be left. On that day, wherever there are people, God's judgment will be done to everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> David Watson, *I believe in the church*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1978, p.53

The kingdom of God is coming. The day of the Son of Man is drawing near. God will bring about justice quickly. This is our challenge, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find on this earth anyone with faith?" (v.8, CEV)

## 2. Faith that seeks Savior

Then following Luke gives a story which Jesus speaks to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.

### 9-14

<sup>9</sup> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' <sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' <sup>14</sup> "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

In this parable, the Pharisee was confident of his own righteousness. He thought he was okay, because he was not doing anything wrong, and he was performing all his religious duty. Moreover, he was also looking down on those who couldn't do like he did.

He was standing before God, thinking he had nothing to repent of. In other words, it was as if he was saying he doesn't need God's forgiveness, salvation, mercy, grace and Christ himself. That is "Self-righteousness".

I heard a story like this. A Sunday school teacher talked about this story, the Pharisee and the tax corrector. The end of the class she asked one of kids to pray. A boy prayed. "Dear Lord, I thank you that I am not like this Pharisee. I never fast and won't give tithe."

Now we will look at the tax collector. He prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." This prayer shows his faith.

First of all, he came before God as he was. He knew he was a sinner, and knew he had done wrong. Perhaps, he also had some good merits. He may also have done some good deeds, religious deeds. However, he didn't cover himself with his good deeds and pretend as if he was okay. He came before God as he was, for he had faith that God would accept him as he was. He would not judge him straightaway.

Secondly, he shared his heart honestly. He didn't cover up his sin and wrong deeds, nor say he couldn't help them. He sought after God's mercy. He wanted to receive God's mercy and didn't want his relationship with God to be broken. And he had faith that God will listen to his deep desire.

And he had faith that God would have mercy on him and answer his prayer.

Coming before God as we are, and sharing our heart honestly, trusting God is listening to our prayer. Having this kind of faith may look easy, but actually not easy.

"Prayer is another area that many struggle with because they aren't aware that in the freedom of the Spirit there are as many ways of praying as there are individual believers. ... Let us suppose you give your three-year-old daughter a coloring book and a box of crayons for her birthday. The following day, with the proud smile only a little one can *gather up*, she presents her first pictures for *exhibition*. In the lower right-hand corner, she has added woozy wonders of floating *bubbles* and hovering rings; on the left, a *series* of colorful, carefree *spirals*. *You are amazed* at her bold strokes and *you are sure* that her *imagination* is railing against its own cosmic *delicacy* in the face of a big, ugly world. Later at the office, you share with your staff your daughter's first artistic effort and you make veiled references to the early work of *Picasso*. A little child cannot do a bad coloring; nor can a child of God do bad prayer."<sup>2</sup>

A church is a fellowship of people who have humbly acknowledged their need of a Savior, and come before the Lord with open-honest heart.

### 3. Receive the kingdom of God like a little child

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<sup>2</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Multnomah Books, 1990, p155 (Italics are modified for speaking)

15-17

<sup>15</sup> People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>17</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

People brought babies to Jesus. Jesus' disciples tried to stop them. Jesus called the children to him and said, "Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

"Receive the kingdom of God like a little child" what does it mean?

Let's think about the relationship between parents and children among human beings. A child doesn't have to acquire the position as the child of the particular parents. Regardless of the state of the child's health, appearance, temperament, ability or sex, the child is their child because he was born to the parents. And a child doesn't need to prove that he is his parent's child. By birth, he became their child. So the parents know it very well that he is their child.

However, a child doesn't know at all about the time when he was born to his parents. Nobody remembers what it was like when he or she was born, right? For a child, his relationship with his parents is not based on his understanding about his birth. It is partly because a small child cannot understand his own birth like that. But a child simply receives his relationship with his parents.

A child naturally perceives that those who receive him as their child are his parents. He perceives people who protect, care, love and be with him as their child are his parents.

When we were still powerless, we were loved by God. While we were still sinners, and didn't know God, and even turned against Him, we were already loved by God so dearly that He gave his own life for us. Knowing that, experiencing that, we won't be afraid of God, nor avoid nor hate him, but through our new birth and by receiving the Holy Spirit we come to God and call him "Abba, Father." (Rom 5:6-10, 8:15) That is the faith as a child. Without this faith, we cannot accept that we are the people of God in his kingdom.

"It is to recognize one's own nothingness, to expect everything from God as a child expects everything from its father. It is to be concerned about nothing, not even making one's fortune ... Thus I remain a child with no other occupation than gathering flowers, the flowers of love and sacrifice, and offering them to the good God for His pleasure. Being a child means not attributing to yourself the virtues you practice or believing yourself capable of anything at all; it means recognizing that the good God places the treasure of virtue in the hands of His child to be used when there is need of it – but it is still God's treasure. Finally, it means never being discouraged by your faults, because children fall frequently but are too small to hurt themselves much."<sup>3</sup>

The faith as a child knows that we are God's pleasure, not because of our good works, good appearance or good character, but because who we are, and because he is our Father.

I remember there was an incident during worship service. Through that incident, I learned what it means to have faith as a child.

During praise and worship, a boy about 3 years old quietly walked up on the stage and came to one of singers. She was his mother. He didn't say anything, but he just pointed a small sticker on his shirt.

She left the microphone there quietly, came down from the stage and took him to a side.

The boy pointed the sticker on his shirt many times and showed it to his mother. Probably he liked it so much. He might be so happy to receive it from the teacher in Sunday school class. He really wanted to share his joy with his mother.

Then he showed the picture he drew in the class, and the marks he put one by one. She smiled and nodded at everything he did.

At the age of three, he has already learned very important thing in life. That is, a faith as a child. He never hesitates to come close to his parent. He doesn't doubt that his parents will always accept him, listen to him no matter what they are doing, and respond to him. He knows that for his parents nothing is most precious than he. Of course, he needs to learn a lot more things later. But at the age of three, he learned very well what is essential, as he goes on a voyage into the great ocean of life.

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<sup>3</sup> Therese de Lisiex, quoted by James M. Houston, *The Heart's Desire*, Regent College Publishing, 2001, p.241

I'm very glad that people in our church are doing great in not judging what children and parents do, but accepting them warmly, helping and supporting each other for building strong Christ-centered families. "Experiencing the Life, changing lives."

Faith as a child. We won't be afraid of God, nor avoid nor hate Him. But we have the Holy Spirit and by him we call God, "Abba, Father." And we know that we are being carried in the arms of the Father as we are his pleasure.<sup>4</sup>

God receives us as his children and is relating to us as our Father. We know God as our father. So we can come before Him as we are, without keeping up appearances. And we can share our heart honestly, trusting God is listening to our prayer. Let's go advance together with faith as a community of his children, looking forward to the day we will see Him face to face.

If you haven't known God as your father yet, why don't you make this day the beginning of your relationship with Him? It's not just about the Bible knowledge, but an actual relationship with him in his family, a concrete experience of him within his community. God knows you. He accepts you. He loves you. He is waiting for you to come to Him and call him "Abba, Father".

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<sup>4</sup> James M. Houston, *The Heart's Desire*, Regent College Publishing, 2001, p.242