

TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF KENYA CHRISTIAN UNION

ANNUAL MISSION TO MARAGWA

REVIVAL MEETING ON 7TH APRIL, 2014

PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

Scripture Readings: 1 Chron. 4:9-10; Luke 18:1-8; 35-42; Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-25, 32-39.

The Problem of Status Quo

One of the greatest hindrances to personal or societal change is maintaining the status quo. More often than not, maintaining the status quo means accepting the unacceptable; resigning to circumstances, conditions, or experiences in our lives in which there are possibilities of change for better. Often times as Christians, we fail to experience the full realization of God's promises for our lives and live victoriously because we give up too/ quickly, and resign to a kind of life that is less than what God desires for us. It seems to me that for reasons that we may not immediately understand, the answers to some prayers will only come through long, persistent prayers that stretch us out of our comfort zones! The Bible has many such examples, e.g. the prayer of Hannah (1 Sam.1-2); the prayer of Daniel (Dan.10:12-14); many of David's prayers (e.g. Ps.22:1-2; 40:1-3 etc.). Although there are some instances where we need to accept answers different from what we expected, and for that God will purpose it for our greater good (e.g. Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane; Paul's troublesome thorn, 1 Cor.12:7-10; cf. Rom.8:28, 37-39), most of the time we fail to rise up to the challenge of persistent prayer, hence settling for a life that is less than what God intended for us.

Sometimes, we make the following mistakes:

- a. We become fatalistic- *that the course of our lives is already fixed, and there is nothing we can do about it! We must therefore accept whatever comes into our lives!*
- b. We become complacent- *we are unwilling to change or improve the condition of our lives; we settle for something less than our God-given potential, and fail to see the great possibilities and opportunities God has placed before us.*
- c. We lose confidence in God- *we fail to make sense of God's purpose, wisdom, love and power in those difficult and distressing circumstances or conditions of our lives.*

1. Persistent Prayer Refuses to Accept the Unacceptable

In the passages we have read, we come across three inspiring stories (one is actually a Parable), from which we find the first lesson about Persistence: *refusing to accept the unacceptable.*

1. Jabez: A life determined by unfortunate background

The short paragraph on **Jabez** (vv. 9, 10) reflects something of the Chronicler's theological interests and may well have been included for this reason. There is a play on words between Jabez and 'oseb (pain).

His name was liable to bring him unpleasant consequences and, in popular thought, the circumstances could only be changed by giving another name, but the Chronicler emphasized that direct prayer can alter the fortunes of life for God listens to the prayer of the trusting person.¹

- His name meant pain- *always a constant reminder of the misfortune of his painful birth*
- Predisposed to a limited life- *hence the cry for blessing and enlargement of territory*
- Experience of “absence” of God’s favor in his life- *hence his cry for God’s hand to “be with me”*
- Jabez had a compelling conviction that it was the **God of Israel**, rather than his **unfortunate background** that should govern his lot in life! He believed God was involved in his life (not a distant God), and had power to change the circumstances of his life!
- The circumstances of his life- the identification with the pain of his upbringing; the limitations of his life (lack of progress/ dominion); the lack of God’s favor- *this was not to be his destiny!*
- We are not told much about Jabez in history, but here is one person who refused to live as a prisoner of his past; he sought God and God granted his request for a victorious life lived to the full.
- Persistence in prayer must begin with the refusal to accept the unacceptable, and a firm conviction that God is the one who is in charge of the affairs of our lives, not our past or other people.

2. The Widow: A life of unjust oppression by the adversary

- The widow is in a situation of double-jeopardy (hopeless situation) because 1) she is a widow, one of the most vulnerable categories of people in the society of her time, and 2) the judge is unjust, he has no sense of reverence for God or respect for people! *Practically, she has no grounds for appeal*
- People cannot appeal to him, saying, “for the sake of God”, because he does not fear God. Nor can anyone plead, “for my sake,” because he does not care what anyone thinks about him. He possesses no inner sense of honor to which supplicants can appeal.²
- Kenneth Bailey describes her predicament, “In Middle Eastern society, women do not go to the courts; men go for them. When this woman appears, the reader knows that she is alone, with no father, uncle, brother, or nephew to speak for her. She must plead her case alone.”³
- Clearly, the Widow is up against an insurmountable challenge, and the option of giving up is very real. After all, she is a woman, she is a widow with no one to speak for her- and the Judge is unjust! Perhaps the Judge was also taking bribes from her adversary to drag his feet or keep her away??
- The Widow has only a two-pronged weapon against the Judge’s imperviousness, 1) she *kept coming to him*, 2) she kept *bothering [him] with the plea, “Grant me justice against my adversary” (vs.5,3).*

¹ Howard, J. K. “(d) Southern Tribal Lists (4:1-43)” In *New International Bible Commentary*. 445. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1979.

² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p.264.

³ Ibid

- Although she had many valid reasons to give up her quest for justice, the Widow refused to accept the unjust oppression of her adversary in quiet surrender and resignation!

3. **Blind Beggar (Bartimaeus): A life of wasted potential**

- Imagine a king/ president is passing by, and a beggar interrupts the entourage? *Recall the MIB!*
- Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus, *see Mark 10:46ff*) means “son of filth”⁴
- He is marginalized by the crowd, who “rebuked him and told him to be quiet” (v.39).
- His weapon against their rebukes and reprimands is, “he shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (v.39). He refused to be silenced or intimidated- *recall Hannah & Eli’s rebuke?*
- His life is limited by his blindness, but he refuses to resign to a “wasted life” when an opportunity for healing is available! His reply to Jesus shows that the “mercy” he wants is not a vague request, but a specific desire, “Lord, I want to see” (v.41).
- Bartimaeus seemed to understand well that Jesus had compassion on the needy, and that he had the power to heal him. As it turned out, those who rebuked him are the ones who ushered him to Jesus!
- His faith, and the miracle of his healing and resultant “praising God” became a testimony to all the people who when they saw it, “they also praised God” (v.43).
- This has something similar to what David says, “*I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry...He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD*” (*Psalm 40:1,3*).

2. **Persistent Prayer is Sustained by Unwavering Faith...**

The second lesson from these stories is that persistence in prayer entails taking a step of faith. It is not enough to just refuse to accept the unacceptable; we need to have a particular kind of faith. This is the faith that God hears the cry of his “chosen ones, who cry to him day and night” and “he will not keep putting them off” (Luke 18:7,8). Particularly, this faith is a confident belief that;

a. **God is the Source of all Blessings**

- Jabez believed that God could bless him, and so he sought His blessing
- That God’s blessing would totally change His life, and reverse the misfortunes of his past
- That God’s blessing, and his favour upon his life meant expanding the boundaries of his life.
- God the source of true blessing-Jacob realize this truth and it changed his life- *Gen.32:22ff*.

b. **God is the God of Justice**

- Unlike the unjust and impervious judge, our God is not only a just God (John 5:30; Heb.6:10), who will vindicate his people, but much more a compassionate Father who hears and answers our prayers when we call to him.

⁴ Ibid, p173.

- Our “continual coming” to God therefore ought to be even more because we know we are coming to the presence of our Father, who knows what we need before we ask him (Mt.6:32).
- Even though the enemy seems to be advancing his schemes unrestrained for a while, in the end God will vindicate his people against the oppressor, for “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8).
- He demonstrated this in the history of the Israelites (deliverance from Egypt; Babylon), and in Luke 4:18, Jesus declared he had come to “proclaim freedom for the prisoners...to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18, 19).

c. **God is the God of Mercy**

- Bartimaeus recognizes Jesus as a merciful messiah, and because of His mercy, even a lowly “son of filth” like himself can have his attention, and get audience with Him.
- He knows that by himself, he does not stand a chance to have audience with Jesus; he is not a socially important person; Jesus is under no obligation to stop and attend to him. Yet he refuses to let the rebukes of the people deny him access to the “Son of David” (Messiah)!
- Knowing that God is a merciful and compassionate God is important if we are to continue pressing in our prayers. Often times, God may appear aloof, deaf and untouched by the plight of his people, but as we see here, God is a God of mercy, whose compassions fail not, “they are new every morning” (Lam.3:22-23; cf. Psalm 103:8,13).

Persistent Prayer has Assurance of God’s Attention (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-25, 32-39; 12:6)

- In the parable we read that Jesus told his disciples, “And will not God bring justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly” (Luke 18:7, 8). In the story of the Bartimaeus, we see that Jesus “stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him” (v.40). In the story of Jabez, we read that after he “cried out to the God of Israel”, God “granted his request” (1 Chron.4:10). What does this tell us?
- Persistent prayer, made by unwavering faith captures the attention of God; it makes his turn to us...
- We can have the confidence to approach the throne of grace- *Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest*
- The promise and assurance- *we will receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.*
- Are there things that are unacceptable in your life? Are you a prisoner of your past? Are you living in oppression? Are you living a life of wasted potential?
- We have a Great High Priest, through whom we can approach the throne of grace today...
- This is our confidence tonight...