

fought cancer like so many before. They had kept their faith in the face of pain, disappointment and disease. As we talked and they described the decision to stop treatment, they made the comment, “pastor, I am not giving up, I am simply giving it over to God and there is a difference.” Giving up is about hopelessness, where giving over to God is about the restoration of hope. Giving up is about despair, but giving over to God is about the joy of the Lord. Giving up is a moment of isolation, but giving over is a moment of God’s presence. Giving up is a moment of defeat, but giving over to God is the moment that a true victory for the believer comes to fruition.

Kay Yow encouraged us with her life. Jim Valvono encouraged us with his words. They both cried to us, never give up. Jesus asked when it is all said and done will we have faith? How can we have a faith that perseveres? Decide today that God is good... all the time. Be convinced that what is impossible with man is possible with God. Know that with faith comes trust and there is a difference between giving over and giving up. Then never give up... never give up.



¹As quoted in David L. McKenna, *The Coming Great Awakening: New Hope for the Nineties* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 115-



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The Trinity Pulpit

Summer Short Stories

Never Give Up

Luke 18:1-8

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July 11, 2010

In the Triangle area of North Carolina, there are two people who have become the icons of individuals who have displayed the ability to persevere in the face of great hardship. One great example was North Carolina State Women’s Basketball coach, Kay Yow. Coach Yow’s brave fight with cancer over the past years inspired so many people, especially because of her faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Another coach who has been dead for near two decades continues to inspire others with his determination. The last pictures of Jim Valvono struggling to climb the steps to a podium, although very weak, he delivered a great speech where he continued to admonish those in the fight against cancer with his famous phrase, “Never Give Up, Never Give Up”, remains an image of perseverance.

We admire people who do not give up. We admire people who face hardship and difficulty with a sense of resolve. This summer we are continuing to hear the stories of people who faced some of life’s greatest challenges with faith and determination. There is something very inspiring about such individuals. Most of us would like to think that if we found ourselves in such situations we would not wither, but flourish as well. We all want to think that we too could stand tall and have faith no matter the circumstances of life. Yet, within us all there is a doubt. Would we be able to have faith in our moment of crisis? What if the unthinkable happened to us? Would we persevere? Would we respond with faith?

Our story today is story about a faith that perseveres. At first, it appears to be about the power and importance of prayer and to be sure prayer is a part of having a persevering faith, but when we look at Jesus’ final question we realize that this parable is about something

greater than a constant prayer life. This story is about a need for a faith that perseveres.

Jesus tells a story about a widow who would be seen as needy, poor and with little power and a judge, one who had the power. The judge is described as one who did not fear God or care about others. In other words, the judge did not live by a religious code that he should do what is right. Not only did he not have a code of what was right or wrong, he also lacked compassion for others. He was not moved by emotion or by the needs of others. We could say that the Judge was a man who lived unto himself without concern for others or a concern for any judgment that awaited him. The widow although poor, needy and without power, had one weapon and that was her persistence. She just kept coming to the Judge and making her request. Her request is justice against her adversary. The term means to render guilt against the guilty and innocence for the innocent. Although the woman kept coming, the Judge refused to make a decision and he kept putting her off. Yet, she kept making her plea and asking for justice. Finally, the Judge comes to a decision. He decides he will act. He does so not because all of a sudden he feared God, for he says to himself, I do not fear God. He makes a decision not because he all of a sudden was moved by the woman’s predicament. He again says to himself, I do not care about men. He makes his decision because the woman keeps bothering him. He concludes she will get justice because if she keeps bothering me she will finally wear me out! Interestingly the term “wear me out” literally means “me a black eye.” The term could mean that finally although the Judge did not care about others he did care enough about himself that he did not want his own reputation tarnished. Because of his own self interest, he grants the widow justice.

In contrast, Jesus reminds us that God will bring justice for his chosen ones who cry out day and night to him. He will not keep putting them off, but will see

that they get justice quickly. Jesus is telling us that our cries to God are not refused or ignored but heard. Because of this we can have a persistent and persevering faith. Jesus asks the question, will the Son of Man find faith when he returns?

We must remember that this parable is spoken in the context of the coming of the Kingdom of God. This parable is a continued teaching about Jesus' second coming. The parable is to be an encouragement to the disciples to remain faithful to the end.

How can we develop a faith that remains through all of life? How can we live a life where we never give up? Let's look for some clues from our story.

First, I think those who have a faith that never give up are those who have concluded that no matter what occurs God is good. It is like that little phrase God is good, all the time. Those who live a life of perseverance have concluded that God is good in all that God does toward us. Jesus tells the story not to show how God is similar to the unrighteous judge, but to make a stark comparison of how God is not like this judge. The judge was a man who did not care. He had no concern for anyone but himself. In fact, the only reason that he finally acts is because of his concern for himself. God is not like that judge. God does not have to be begged to do good. God does not have to be "worn out" to act. God is not like the judge who just ignores the request of those who come to him. He does not put off his actions. In fact he acts quickly. Now quickly does not mean suddenly, but soon. The point however is God does not ignore his chosen ones and is already in the process of bringing justice that is doing what is right.

If we are going to have faith that never gives up, we have to settle in our hearts once and for all what we believe about God. The Bible testifies that God is love and God is good and that God is always acting in a way for our good. How do we know this to be true?

First, we can experience it. Sometimes we know that God is good because we can look back on our lives and we can see God's goodness. We are told by Jesus that God acts quickly to bring justice for his chosen ones. The word again does not mean immediately, but soon. In other words Jesus is not saying that God is like a wishing well or a genie's bottle you rub where you say it and it happens. However, Jesus is saying that God is not ignoring us when we cry out to him. God is acting and bringing justice. Jesus is telling us that we will see God's goodness.

It is true we can look back in our lives and now see God's goodness when we could not see it when we were passing through that moment. We can look back and see that God was providing, God was present, God was active, God was developing our character, God was using others. We can sometimes know that God is good because we have seen it and experienced it.

However, we cannot always count on experience. Sometimes our experience lies to us about the nature of God. Sometimes when we are passing through difficult times we begin to confuse God's activity and the activity of sin, evil, and the consequence of free will. Sometimes we begin to blame God for circumstances that are not God's intent or plan. Sometimes we begin to go through difficult moments and we come to the wrong conclusion about God's character, because we rely solely on the situation we find ourselves in today.

In those moments we must have faith in God's goodness as the result from other sources. In those moments we must believe the testimony of scripture above the struggle of experience. The Bible is clear about the nature of God. God is love and God is good. Paul reminds us in Romans 8:28 that God is always working to bring good in all things for those who are called according to God's purpose. In the same way Paul reminds us that nothing can happen in our lives in this world, or the world to come can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. This is what Jesus is telling us in this parable. God is loving, good, caring, and attentive to his chosen ones.

It is that line, chosen ones, that also reminds us of God's goodness no matter the situation. We know that God is good by experience, by the testimony of scripture but also because we are in relationship with God. Jesus describes us in this parable as God's chosen ones. The term means those who are in relationship with God. The term means those who are loved by God. The term means those who are dear to God. In the explanation of the parable it is not our crying out day and night that moves God, it is in fact that we are his chosen ones that moves God.

I once heard a pastor say that John 3:16 settles once and for all God's love for you and me. Jesus' death on the cross for your sins and my sins is God's statement of love and goodness toward us. If God never acted again, that one act would settle God's character of love and goodness.

The Old Testament character that reminds us of the goodness of God despite circumstances is Joseph. Do you remember his story? He was despised by his brothers and some wanted to kill him. Yet, they did not kill him but rather sold him into slavery and then told his father that he was dead. Sold into slavery he becomes a servant in Po-

tiphar's house in Egypt. Although this was not how life was to be, Joseph lived with perseverance and faith and became the head of the household. Yet, there in Potiphar's house he would be falsely accused by Potiphar's wife after he scorned her advances toward him. It seemed that all his hard work was for nothing. He was thrown into prison. There in prison he too had the opportunity to succeed. While in prison he met the Pharaoh's baker and cup bearer. In prison he impressed them with the ability to interpret their dreams. All he asked was they would not forget him when they were released from prison. However, you remember that even after both the men's dreams came true, the cup bearer was saved and the baker was hanged, the cup bearer forgot Joseph. Joseph remained in prison another two years until Pharaoh had a dream that no one could interpret. Finally, the cup bearer remembered Joseph had interpreted his dreams while in prison. Joseph was brought to the Pharaoh and interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph was lifted up and became the man who was in charge of all of Egypt answering only to Pharaoh himself. When famine came, Joseph finally came face to face with his brothers who had sold him into slavery and given him up for dead. Instead of revenge, Joseph saved his brothers and father, Jacob from the famine and all of the family came to Egypt to be cared for. In the final scene of Joseph's story, Jacob died. With Jacob gone, the brothers were afraid Joseph's revenge would occur. However, in chapter 50 of Genesis we find these words of grace and we get insight into Joseph's ability to be faithful in the ups and downs of life. Joseph says "what you meant for harm, God meant for good and has used me to save the lives of many."

Although despised by family, sold into slavery, falsely accused, imprisoned and faced with the temptation of revenge, Joseph would conclude that God's part was always good.

This week Rick Warren tweeted this statement, "you can count on this, God will have the last word and the last word will be good." We can have a faith that never gives up when we decide once and for all, no matter what I pass through God is good.

We also need to conclude that God is able. If we look back at the parable we discover that the widow, although refused by the judge over and over again, was convinced that this judge was able to bring her justice. Although, he did not care about others or feared God, he was able to bring a resolution to her situation.

How much more is God able to bring justice to those who cry out to him day and night and those who are chosen by God? The word justice is the important word. It indicates on one hand a sense of revenge against an enemy or adversary, but it also can indicate vindication of the one who is innocent. Applied to the Christian disciple, it means God is able to bring about a final outcome that is right and good for the disciple.

So, it follows that the person who has a faith that is a persevering faith is one who not only believes God is good, but that God is able. God has the power and ability to make a difference in our lives. Here is what the Bible says about God's ability. There is nothing impossible with God.

Peter Kuzmic, President of Evangelical Theological College in Osijek, Yugoslavia, spoke at the World Congress on Evangelization in Manila in the summer of 1989. His theme was what could be done to educate religious leaders who would be ready to lead the church "if and when" the Iron Curtain crumbled in Eastern Europe? Within four months of his speech, the doors for the gospel were opened as the wall of Eastern bloc communist countries came tumbling down.

"In January 1990, Peter Kuzmic spoke again, this time to the Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents in the United States. When asked about the unpredictable, cataclysmic happenings in Eastern Europe, Peter answered, 'Never put a period where God puts a comma!'"¹

Never put a period where God puts a comma. That is the belief that God is able. God is able to deliver you, God is able to give you strength, God is able to bring you peace, and God is able to restore your hope. God is able.

Finally, those who have a persevering faith are those who know that giving over is not the same thing as giving up. The last line of our parable is Jesus question about faith. When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith? Jesus' desire is that we would be people of faith. To be a person of faith there must be a time when we really come to trust God. A God who is good and a God who is able. There is a difference between giving over and giving up.

This is what I mean. Those who face situations that seem to never change, or that go from bad to worse and yet keep their faith are those who know that giving it over to God is not the same thing as giving up. I sat with a church member one day as their time of living this life was coming to an end. They had bravely