

Pray Unceasingly

Text: Luke 18:35-43

At the age of 47, Nick Thomas found himself unemployed and under tremendous financial pressure. A series of financial reversals had set him back and the failure of his own consulting business had left him with no place to turn. He did not know what to do.

Discouraged and seeing no way out, Nick's wife, Liz turned to prayer. Every morning, she would be in church praying that something good would happen to change their fortune. She was praying one morning about her problems, when she thought she could almost hear a voice saying, "Make the mustard." Her family had a mustard recipe from Russia, and every Christmas she made this special mustard and gave it to her family and friends as a special gift. At first, she ignored the words but they kept coming to mind.

Reluctantly, she told Nick, who thought she was foolish. Liz did not know where or whom the voice came. But after considerable discussion and prayer, Nick and Liz decided to listen to the voice. She prepared a substantial amount of the mustard. They packaged it and then called on a local cheese shop. The manager tasted it and immediately bought out their entire inventory. Within three months, they enjoyed great success in the highly competitive New York major deli market.

Persistent prayer changes people's lives. What is it that makes people cry out to God in prayer?

A Believing Heart

In today's text in Luke 18:35-43, we come across Bartimaeus, a blind man begging for alms at the roadside in Jericho where Jesus had travelled to. He had not seen Jesus before; he had only heard of him. Yet he believed that Jesus could heal him and called out to Him, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

In another contrasting situation in John 10:32, Jesus said of the Jews: "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" The Jews had encountered Him but held unbelief in their hearts that He was their Saviour.

An Unwavering Heart

Bartimaeus faced a tough situation with an resolute spirit. Those who led the way for Jesus to pass through rebuked Bartimaeus to stop harassing Jesus and told him to be quiet. However, he refused to be discouraged. The more they stopped him, he cried out to the Lord a second time, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

After the Cold War, the Berlin Wall separated East and West Germany for years. However, there were so many escape attempts to cross the wall from a communist-backed East Germany to a more democratic West Germany; the estimated death toll was well above 200 people. Although there was so much risk and danger involved, it could not prevent these people from pursuing their political and social freedom with a sense of desperate zeal.

Likewise, when you are desperate, and God is your only hope, something changes within us regarding prayer. We long to draw near to God, our only comfort. We hunger for His touch and ministry; we do not treat Him like a vending machine, as some Christians do, uttering prayers only when they need something from God.

What is the State of Our Hearts?

What is preventing us from praying or coming to God in unceasing prayer today?

- Perhaps your answer may be: "I'm fine. I don't have needs like Bartimaeus." Jesus' answer in Revelation 3:17 is: "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."
- Perhaps your answer may be: "I need to see it for myself to believe." In the case of Bartimaeus, Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Bartimaeus did not test Jesus' prowess in order to believe in Him. He demonstrated a pure faith and belief in the Son of God. Hebrews 11:6 says: "...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

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- Perhaps your answer may be: “There are too many obstacles telling me not to call to Jesus.” In spite of Bartimaeus’ many obstacles - his blindness, isolation and poverty - we have learnt that his faith had gained him an audience with our Lord Jesus. Jesus actually delayed His travelling schedule for the sake of this blind man, a little unknown beggar. He got His disciples to cease everything and bring Bartimaeus to Him, eventually granting his request and healing him.

Even though we may be despised or deemed useless, God looks at the condition of our hearts. Faith presses in; it believes in the One who saves; it refuses to give up hope. Our persistent prayers will reach Him. You may not have witnessed the miracles of Jesus, or you may be going through circumstances that do not encourage prayer. Yet, Jesus is calling you today to draw near to Him, to pray, and to pray unceasingly.

To conclude, here is an apt story to illustrate persistent prayer. A young man once asked an elderly lady: “Should I give up on my struggles?” She told him: “Some discouraged fishermen had not been able to catch any fish the entire night. Yet, at the same fishless spot, the Lord Jesus told them: ‘Cast your nets *one more time*.’” When they did that, they were unable to haul the net in because of a miraculously large number of fish.

When situations press us down, let us press in with a posture of prayer *one more time*. Don’t give up.

- Rev Joel Yong