



Luke 18:1-14

TITLE

Early next year, we are going to have a visit from Rachel Hickson, who is an internationally known speaker and leader of an intercession ministry called *Heartcry for Change*. I hope that we will be encouraged and envisioned for prayer and this session this morning is to encourage us to prepare for her visit, that we may be expectant that the Lord will use her ministry to help us grow.

Imagine one morning you hear the clunk of your letterbox and a card in a high quality envelope is lying on your mat with the words Buckingham Palace embossed on it. Well, we all know who lives there so you open it with eager anticipation.

INVITATION

But to your astonishment, you find this invitation, not to a garden party or a royal banquet, but to have a private audience with the queen. Now one thing I can guarantee is that my name will not be on such a card as I can't imagine why the Queen would want to see me – not unless I get appointed as Prime Minister!

What would we do? Go I think, because so few get this kind of invitation from the queen. So you go and enjoy tea and cucumber sandwiches with the Queen in her private apartment at Buckingham Palace. You have a good time. As you leave, the Queen thrusts a card into your hand.

MOBILE NUMBER

It's her mobile number! She says "feel free to call me any time?" Amazing – the Queen has enjoyed your company so much that she wants you to phone up and have a chat.

WOULD WE SAY NO?

OK, it's pretty fictitious isn't it? We are all too insignificant to be of interest to Her Majesty. But if we got the invite would we say no? Probably not unless we are rabid republicans!

But, we're not too insignificant for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Here's His invitation – it's written to all of the human race - *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:12-13)*. Each man and woman is offered to come into the presence of God. In that offer God has promised forgiveness of sins, eternal life, His Holy Spirit in us day by day, power to change our lives, the right to become children of God.

VIDEO

WOULD WE SAY NO?

Better still when we accept God's free gift, we find that there is also the invitation – feel free to call me any time". We have the privilege of prayer – call God any time any place – no special equipment or anything else required – just the willingness to listen and talk. That's our privilege. It's our right.

We have the invitation. Would we say no? Probably not, but actually we so often make our excuses to ourselves – and by inference to God. I wonder what the Queen would think if we wrote back to her RSVP things like "I don't feel like it. It's too much effort to be bothered. I don't know what to say? I find it hard to concentrate speaking more than 5 minutes. I need to have what I want to say written down. I have a family event I must go to that day. I don't have time to spend more than 5 minutes with you." Giving any of those excuses would be an insult to the Queen – you just wouldn't do it.

So why do we do it on a regular basis to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He's the one that has called us – we didn't call Him. He's the one that desires our presence – and we all know there are those times when we can't be bothered to get around to it.

Yet God has made us for prayer. Here's a couple of verses:

1 COR 6:19-20

1 Cor 6:19 Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and who was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourselves but to God; 20 he bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God's glory.

We have the Holy Spirit in us. God is present. So use your bodies to God's glory. What's a temple for? Here's a familiar verse from Isaiah 56:

ISAIAH 56:7

Isaiah 56:7 "I will bring you to Zion, my sacred hill, give you joy in my house of prayer, and accept the sacrifices you offer on my altar. My Temple will be called a house of prayer for the people of all nations."

Temples are for prayer. When Jesus cleansed the Temple He used these words. The Temple was a house of prayer, not a market place, a den of robbers. It existed for communion with God. There is no longer a Temple. There's no need for one. People are God's temple. They exist so that they can commune with Him. We are built for prayer – all the other things make us a den of robbers if the prayer is lost or not prioritised.

HICKSON – JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

Here's what Rachel Hickson says: This is an exciting journey of discovery! But so often people shrink back, feeling that perhaps prayer is not "their thing". This is never true.

WOULD WE SAY NO?

So would we say no. We shouldn't. I remember a guy I once knew that got fed up with many Christians he came across who talked about their relationship with God. He's day "these arrogant people speak as if they have a hotline to God". They do – and he did to if he could have been bothered to do so. If you know Jesus this morning, you have a hotline to God – pick it up and speak – do it frequently – it's your privilege.

We've all heard this and all know in our heart of hearts that if we know Christ that we should pray, but so often we fall short of a consistent prayer life – and we feel failures for it. Here's again what Rachel Hickson says about this dilemma:

HICKSON – CONSISTENT PRAYER LIFE 1

HICKSON – CONSISTENT PRAYER LIFE 2

"All around the world God is stirring in His people the desire to have a consistent, satisfying prayer life. Most people sense that *now* is the time to pray. Many even have the desire and passion to pray, but somehow find their discipline still fails. They make their plans to pray with great regularity, but soon find they fail as their prayer life seems to be sterile and unproductive. They find that their prayer time is sleeping time, not speaking time!

It's honesty time – not to me or others, but to yourself and to God? Is that me? Is prayer difficult? Maybe a bit of a bore? Let's look at God's Word and see what God wants of us:

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Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to teach them that they should always pray and never become discouraged. (Luke 18:1) These passages we had this morning were written that we might pray and never give up – be discouraged.

GOD WANTS US TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM

God actually wants to hear our voice. He wants us to spend time with Him. That's a fact and we need to pray and never be discouraged. It's true, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. That's what He's made us. Grab that – hold on to it. What else did these scriptures tell us.

WE HAVE A FATHER WHO ALWAYS ACTS

It's a strange parable this one. How do you get what you want when you come across someone unjust – you plug at them until you get a just conclusion. There was a story this week of parents of two girls killed on a level crossing in Essex. They believed Network Rail had a responsibility to have made the crossing safer. The girls found it too easy to open the gate and cross the track in front of an express train. Network rail denied any responsibility and "lost" several reports which contained warnings about how dangerous it was. Now they have found justice as someone "found" the reports.

Is God really being compared to an unjust judge who denied someone justice until she nagged him into submission. Many find this confusing. It isn't. Jesus is *contrasting* our Father with the unjust judge. He is

just so is ready willing and able to listen and deal with our prayers? So pray and don't give up!

But why does God take so long to answer prayer? First of all, remember, what God regards a good answer may be different from what we want. But more importantly, God does things in His time as he knows the scheme of things. So we are to pray and not become discouraged – He does act.

The final words of the parable is quite appropriate for Advent; *I tell you, he will judge in their favour and do it quickly. But will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?"* Whatever happens, the Christ who came that first Christmas is the same one who is coming again. But why does God take his time about things? Here's a few verses from 2 Peter: *3:3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

I can't give you a reason why God isn't answering your prayers now. All I can say is that God doesn't have our time spans, but He always answers prayer in the best possible way to our blessing and His glory. In the meantime, let's take every opportunity to bring people to repentance, whatever our situation.

PRAYER IS ABOUT BEING HONEST WITH GOD

Finally, prayer is about being honest with God. The Pharisee was not short of praise for God for all the blessings he had received. But he thought he'd been blessed because of how good he was and how he had been blessed. But the one that went away justified was the one who could barely raise his eyes to God, such was his sin and he just blurted out: *"God, have pity on me, a sinner!"*

Prayer starts with where we are, not what we think we should say. All of us have been brought up to do respectful prayer. So was the Pharisee. God just wants our honesty. Our words can't fool Him. He knows our hearts – so just start where it's right, even when it's "I know Lord that I should be finding this easy and a pleasure, but I just don't know what to say. Help!". That is like the tax collector – being honest.

When we do that, we start doing things the right way. God wants prayer to become a pleasure rather than being difficult or a bore, or worse a chore. I like this quote from Rachel Hickson:

HICKSON – PLEASURE

There is a world of difference between the passion that has a desperate desire to pray, and the feeling of crushing duty that you ought to pray. Allow yourselves to be touched by God and make you into a vessel for prayer.

What I desire for us over the coming months is for us to allow God to kindle in us a desire to pray in a way that we have never done before. If you already feel you have a good prayer life, then good. Ask the Lord for even more of Him. Don't allow your glass to stay half-full when we have a God who wants to fill us with His spirit until overflowing.

In a seminary missions class, Herbert Jackson told how, as a new missionary, he was assigned a car that would not start without a push.

After pondering his problem, he devised a plan. He went to the school near his home, got permission to take some children out of class, and had them push his car off. As he made his rounds, he would either park on a hill or leave the engine running. He used this ingenious procedure for two years.

Ill health forced the Jackson family to leave, and a new missionary came to that station. When Jackson proudly began to explain his arrangement for getting the car started, the new man began looking under the hood. Before the explanation was complete, the new missionary interrupted, "Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable." He gave the cable a twist, stepped into the car, pushed the switch, and to Jackson's astonishment, the engine roared to life.

For two years needless trouble had come to become a routine. The power was there all the time. Only a loose

connection kept Jackson from putting the power to work.

God wants to do new things with our prayer lives. The solution is simple: ask. Seize the moment, take the opportunity!

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