



Sermon Transcription • Romans 12:12 (NIV)

Hope, Affliction and Prayer

Pastor Jeff Bucknam

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

A few years I...I started riding my bike. I was never really a bike rider before, I'm not built for it, clearly. But I decided that it would be something that I would really enjoy doing. And I have, I've enjoyed it a lot. I started riding kind of a mountain bike and then commuting to the church. And that was kind of fun. It was cool being on the trails when there's nobody else on them, and just rain coming down. I remember riding in snow a couple times thinking, "What am I doing?" I graduated to a road bike which has been even more fun, 'cos it's faster. I'm eventually going to get an e-bike because... <deep breath> because it's hard to ride the hills, right? Isn't that why you – that's why you don't ride a bike. Alright, most of you are like, "I would ride a bike if we lived in Saskatoon." But I'm not riding a bike here because I go – you know – come up Downes Road, and see the hill and I'm like, "There's just no way I'm gonna... I'm gonna do that." E-bikes apparently take that away. I don't know, I've not ridden them. But the difficulty of riding hills is a real thing. It's this thing that I struggle with the most because of gravity. And I don't know if you know anything about physics, but people like me, there's more gravity pulling me down. I'm great going down the hills. When I'm riding with friends, I pass everybody - you know - I'm like, "You guys all stink," - you know. But then we get to the hills where you go back up, what goes down has to come up and eventually I come back up the hill and they pass me easily. "What were you saying, down the hill?" You know? I looked on online, I eventually started asking friends, "How do you ride a hill, like what helps you?" And a lot of people gave me some really good advice, you know, you get these clips on your pedals and that helps, and the hand position, and then you need to make sure your diaphragm is – you put your hands in a particular position and try that. I've had lots of people give me advice. Some of it has helped, some of it has not... has not helped. I eventually went online. And I read this guy who describes himself very similar to me. And hates the hills, gravity is a problem for him as well, and he said, here's what I've learned, after cycling for twenty years, that there are three things that you need to do when you're riding hill. And you're a bigger guy. One, just don't look too far ahead. like don't look at the beyond, just kind of right in front of you. Because if you start looking at the challenge in front of you, you start freaking out, because you're like, "I've got that far to go! No way!" So, just look right in front of you. Second, just keep pedalling. Just keep pedaling. He gives some advice on how you should pedal; you know spinning as opposed to pushing down, stuff like that, just keep pedaling, and his third piece of advice was just try not to throw up. [laughter] Which I've found to be very helpful at points. You know when I read that, I actually remember thinking to myself that's actually pretty good advice for any moment in life that you're facing a difficult ... a difficult moment, isn't it? I mean – like - if I'm facing challenges with the death of a loved one, or if I'm facing challenges in my relationships, or whatever, it's not bad advice to follow



those three ideas. Don't look too far ahead; Right, you just deal with what's in front of you. Just keep pedalling. And just keep, you've got to keep moving, you've got to get up tomorrow. Just keep pedalling, keep doing the things that you know to be true, and try not to throw up. You probably have advice that you give to your loved ones, or friends or kids, whenever they're having a difficult time. You probably, you heard it from your mother, or maybe your father, or you have certain things that you tell your kids. Advice that you... that you give, especially for them in their difficult moments. <pause> I wonder if you went to Scripture, can you find a place where maybe in one verse you get a summary of how we're supposed to live while we climb the hills of our lives? Like, where... what are we supposed to do while we await the return of Jesus? We Christians, we believe that Jesus is going to come back, or that we are going to die and go be with him. So, as we wait for that to happen, between now and that day, is there a place in Scripture that summarizes those – advice on how we are supposed to live in the meantime? I think Romans 12:12 is a pretty good one. Like I said before, it's very short, it's only... it's only – what - eleven words, here's what it says.

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” It gives you three pieces of advice, and don't you love – preachers love this kind of – this is low-hanging fruit for us. We're like, “Three? That's a sermon.” So, I made it into a sermon. This passage, Romans 12:12.

“...[J]oyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

What I want to do is... I just want to take each of those phrases, and kind of just get you to understand what Paul means by the words he's using here. And then what they mean for us. So, let's deal with the first one.

[Be Joyful in Hope]

Romans 12:12,

“Be joyful in hope...”

So, the school year has just begun, my kids have gone back to school, like many of yours have gone back to school. This is one of the times - I always find the beginning of the school year very interesting, because it is one of those times of the year where you have to provide some level of encouragement to your kids. Not usually on the first day. First day they just go for a couple hours and come back. You know, to get them used to the idea, I guess. The first week, usually is shorter, so they can get in the class, and they play some games and they get used to the teacher, and they do the kind of ice-breaker stuff. And the weekends, so you say to your kids, “How was school?” They're like, “Pretty good, I like it, good to see my friends again.” But then that following Monday comes along and it strikes them that this is not just a temporary week-long camp, like summer. That this is actually going to be for the whole year, and the getting them up on that Monday morning is hard, 'cos they're like, “I don't want to do this. This is - Dad, I'm not doing this. Do you know how long the year is? It's



terrible. And I'm not sure I'm going to learn math this year, and I'm not sure..." they go through all of their lists of why it is that they don't want to go back to school. What do you say as a parent in those moments? When your kids are struggling to get across the threshold of the new thing that they're doing. You usually use lines like, "Let's think about what you have to look forward to." And in the fall, you always, "Christmas is just round the corner. Right? Just three months to Christmas! Let's make a chart and you can mark off the days until Christmas and you'll get two weeks off, and there'll be presents and lights and joy and skiing" - or whatever it is. "You have a lot to look forward to." And then when they go back to school in the winter, you, "Spring Break is just round the corner! You have a lot to look forward to!" When they go back after Spring Break, "Oh, it's never going to end!" "Summer's near!" This is how we usually encourage our friends and our loved ones when they are facing difficult times. There's something that you have that's just in the offing, that if you can strive through this moment, you can get to that thing. And it will be great! And it will be fantastic. You have a lot to look forward to. This is really what Paul is trying to say when he says, "Rejoice in hope." If I had to summarize it, I'd say use that line. "Christians, you do know you have a lot to look forward to, right?"

"Yeah, but things are hard right now."

"You have a lot to look forward to. "

"Specifically, what?"

"Well, hope."

"What is our hope?" So, Paul when he uses that phrase... that word in Romans, he's appealing to something specific that he taught - that he brought up a few chapters ago. So, if you go back in the book of Romans, to Romans 8:18, it gives you a summary of what the hope is for Christian people. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who follow him, have committed their lives to him. Romans 8:18-24, he says,

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation [By this he's referring to the created order, the stuff you see. You know you drove past trees today and you saw mountains in the distance. And you saw maybe the sun rise or the clouds with the wind coming... the creation] waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, [so in other words, God subjected the creation as a result of human sin. He subjected the creation to frustration, he says. So, the world that you see around you, as beautiful as it is, right? And on your Instagram, you look at the pictures from Earth Focus and the all other things. You're like. "Oh, my goodness, look how pretty that..." Paul would say that's all under a curse, that's all under frustration. And that's waiting, eagerly, for the children of God to be revealed, for Christian people to receive their ultimate glorification in the new heavens and new earth. This creation was subjected to frustration], in hope [verse 21] that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, [we] groan inwardly as we wait eagerly [just like the creation waits eagerly, we wait eagerly, for what?] for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. "



What hope? If you're doing Bible study here, in what hope were we saved? Specifically the redemption of our bodies. So the Christian hope, and the reason that you and I rejoice, is because of our heavenly future. But what freaks me out when I use that phrase, heavenly future, is that what goes on in your mind is not what the Bible means by heaven, but what you and I mean by heaven. What do you and I mean by heaven? You ever seen *Casper the Friendly Ghost*? No? Did – when I was a kid – some of you are like, “Who?” Fine, when I was a kid there was a cartoon on, *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, and he helped some friends out. He was a ghost and he was a buddy, and he came and helped. Don't be afraid of Casper, but he could go through walls. If you tried to grab Casper, it wouldn't work. You know, arms would go through him. You could play games with Casper. <eerie voice> Woooooah! Look I'm going to reach right through you, woooooah! </eerie voice> Some of us think- quite honestly most Christians these days - think that when we go to heaven, we're going to be, it's going to be whole bunch of Caspers. We are all going to become Caspers. Whooooah! Floating around, with the clouds, some of us will have harps, <makes harp sound> immaterial, mystical. So, this is not what the Bible talks about when it's talking about heaven. A little theology for you, okay? If you were to ask me the question, what happens to Christian people after they die, what is the afterlife like? I would... I would resort to my theology here, and I would say, “Well, if I were to summarize the way the Scripture talks about this, I would say that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, according to Paul.” So that means that if you die, you are in a sense disembodied and placed in the presence of the Lord. I don't know a lot about that state. We in theology call that the *intermediate state*. It's called the *intermediate* because it's not where you'll stay, disembodied, I mean. Because the Christian hope is not in some Casper-like heaven where we can reach our hands through each other. The Christian hope is for renewed and restored bodies at the great resurrection of the dead. Which is still to come. So, all of the loved ones, Christian brothers and sisters who've gone before us, they are in the intermediate state at the moment, and they are eagerly awaiting their adoption to sonship, the redemption of their bodies. They will be restored, in the language of the Bible, to the new heavens, and new earth. And that's what the Bible talks about when it talks about heaven. Which is really important, because what that means is that heaven is a decidedly physical place. You and I will have decidedly physical forms. We'll have bodies, just like the body you have now, but renewed and restored. You say, “Well, what kind of body is it?” Jesus when he was resurrected, that kind of body. He ate fish. I suppose we'll eat fish. When Thomas came and said, “Jesus, I won't believe unless I touch... touch the very spot where the nails went through.” Jesus shows up in the upper room and says, “Here you go, Thomas.” And Thomas did not reach his hand out and go “woooooah Casper,” right through his hand. He touched his hand, he touched his side, physical. You need to convince your kids, you need to convince yourself that you will be enjoying all of the great things on this earth in renewed sense without sin, or sorrow, or pain, or the thought that terror is just over the next hillside. You like soccer? You'll be playing soccer there. You like hockey? You'll be playing hockey there. The Canucks will win there. [laughter]. I'd say the Maple Leafs will win, but I don't think they'll be there. [louder laughter]. Sorry! That's pretty good. Some guy came up to me yesterday, and said, “I didn't like the joke about the Maple Leafs.”

“Huh? You won't be there either.” [laughter] Just kidding. Come on! Come on! Just kidding. It's a joke. Stop it. <pause> Randy Alcorn – I'm going to recommend a book to you it's called *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn. You should think more about heaven than you do, I promise you. Randy Alcorn wrote this



lovely book called *Heaven*. It's quite thick, it's lovely to read. At the end of it, he tries to explain in real terms what it looks like. I've shared this before. It's just such a lovely way of describing it. I can't get enough of reading it. So, here's what he said at the end of his book; he said,

"My wife and I have spent some wonderful moments with our family and friends—at Christmas or on vacation or at simple times in the family room after dinner—and we've said those enchanting words: 'It doesn't get any better than this.'

No matter how difficult your life has been, you've said the same thing about some magnificent moment, haven't you? Maybe it was recently. Maybe it was long ago. Maybe you can barely remember. 'It doesn't get any better than this.' Can you think of even once in your life when, even for a moment, that seemed to be true?

Well, it isn't true. The most ordinary moment on the New Earth will be greater than the most perfect moments in this life—those experiences you wanted to bottle or hang onto but couldn't. It can get better, far better, than this—and it will. Life on the New Earth will be like sitting in front of the fire with family and friends, basking in the warmth, laughing uproariously, dreaming of the adventures to come—and then going out and living those adventures together. With no fear that life will ever end or that tragedy will descend like a dark cloud. With no fear that dreams will be shattered or relationships broken... We were all made for a person and a place. Jesus is that person. [And] [h]eaven [the new heavens and new earth] is that place."

Maybe you like...maybe you like the way this Scripture itself describes it a little better. John in Revelation 21:1,3-4,

"Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea [sea was the place of chaos. Everything has meaning now, nothing lost in the abyss. Verse 3] ... I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"

Has it ever struck you - I mean in the sense that you felt it - that that's your hope? When I first came to faith in Christ, it was at a Christian camp. I remember reading about this. I had a little booklet that talked about some of the basics of the Christian faith. And I got to the point at the camp where I was reading about the heaven part. And I was like, "This is amazing!" I was reading some of the verses about it, I was kind of in Junior High School at the time, and I started to look - I remember where I was sitting - on the hillside, on the bench, trail in front of me, reading this little book, looking in the Bible at the same things, and I looked up and I was looking around, and I said, as some people were passing by, "Do you guys know that we're going to heaven?" The girls walking by were like "Eww! Yeah." You know, and they kept walking. And the counsellors came up and I said to this guy Dan, I said, "Dan, do you know we're going to heaven?" "Yes."



“Yeah, but do you know it? Like, have you read this stuff? Have you... do you know this, this is amazing! We’re going to heaven!” I remember standing up, walking up the hill triumphantly, “We’re going to heaven! We’re going to heaven!” People are like, “what in the world is going on with this guy?” You ever had it overwhelm you? That hope, the sense that this is not all that there is, that there is a hope for us, and a redemption of our bodies in the new heaven and new earth with no more crying and tears and pain. Now my fear is that when I talk about that, and give you even that story, you’re thinking, “Yes! That should be the way it is! We should always be walking around smiling! Excited.” Should we? Are you sinning if you’re not smiling about the hope? I want to point you back to that Romans passage that I read before, Romans 8:22 this time. Just listen again to the language,

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, [we] groan inwardly [presumably in the pains of childbirth] as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.”

Another interesting image. He’s saying, you want to know what life is like? In the present time? Just think about a woman in labour... pains of childbirth. Can you imagine? You know, my wife is there, and she’s about to bear our child, looking me in the eye, “This is your fault.” Holding her hand, “Give me the epidural,” she says. Yeah. Come on, toughen up. She gets the epidural; she’s in pain; sweating, everything’s difficult about it. Can you imagine if I lean over her, quietly say to her, in her ear, “You need to smile more.” <pause> “We’re having a baby. This is like one of the big moments of our lives, and here you are screaming about it. I mean, shame on you!” Right? Of course not! Listen guys, if your wife is going into labour, do not do this. This is not going to go well for you at all. Of course, you wouldn’t. Can you imagine somebody doing that? Of course, you wouldn’t, because... yet you know, the baby is on the way, and it’s going to be glorious and fantastic for a few days, and then... but it’s going to be fantastic. The baby is coming and we’re so excited, but in the meantime, we groan <pause> in the pains of childbirth. So no, you’re not sinning if you’re not smiling. You see, the joy that you and I have is not a plastic happiness. <forced smile> “Turn that smile upside down! Things are going great!” It’s not like that. It’s just the knowledge, the deep-seated knowledge that it’s not always going to be like this. Joyful in hope.

[Patient in Affliction]

Second, patient in affliction. Joyful in hope, patient in affliction. I broke my nose a number of years ago playing ultimate Frisbee, do you know this game? You throw the Frisbee, you catch – it’s like football with a Frisbee. It’s actually a really good time. I remember I went up to catch the Frisbee – we were playing as a co-ed team – this girl came behind me. I didn’t know, she was small, but she had come up behind me to try to disrupt my catching. I caught the Frisbee and as I came down, I landed with my nose directly on top of her head. Boom! And instantly blood whooshed. And I went to the ground. And I’m in a pool of my own blood - I’m nearly – probably had a concussion – and I was like woozy. And I started to shake, and go, “Ooohhhh” and I was making these horrible noises. Now, I need to pause for a moment and tell you a little bit about what New Zealanders are like – New Zealand men. New Zealand men love rugby. Rugby is like the thing. If you come across a New Zealand man



who doesn't have like cauliflower ears, that's a surprise. Their noses are always out of joint, or they've got fake teeth in the front because they've lost teeth and broken noses, and ears have been almost ripped off in rugby. It defines the whole country and the whole culture. And so, if you ever get tackled or get injured in some way, and you land on the ground, you have one job to do and that is to get back up and toughen up. Right. And if you go to the ground and you start whining about it, this is not a good thing. Now, I am not a New Zealander. Right? So, when I'm on the ground, I'm acting like the typical American, <whiny voice> "Ohh, I got hurt! You know down here! Ohhh!" ,</whiny voice> So all of these Kiwi guys come around me, and they shoo the women away, <low voice> "Go away, Go away,"</low voice> One of these guys, Mark, leans over to me – I'm on the ground in the pool of my own blood – and he goes, "Get up you sissy!" [laughter]. It's okay, I want you to hold that picture in your mind and compare it to this one. My son was playing baseball a few years ago – he must have been eleven years old, or something like that – and a guy hit the ball really hard to first base – he was playing first base. The ball actually bounced once and hit him dead in the face, right in the nose. This is the same kid who got hit with the cricket ball in his head. So, he's like a magnet, his head. Anyway, it hits his nose, and blood. So, he's on the ground, on the blood, and I'm like, "Oh my goodness!" And I'm against the fence, the coaches are going out all around him, he wasn't moving for a minute or so. But then he kind of started jostling himself, and he – blood on the ground, comes streaming down his face – and they're like, "No, come to the bench." And he's shooing them away, "No! I'm still playing!" And he gets back up and they put those – you know, the toilet paper in his nose, and it's sticking out, and his eye is bulging, but he's at first base still playing. And a guy standing next to me, he comes up beside me and he goes, "Now that's a boy!" [laughter] And you know, you compare those two stories, and instinctively in your mind, you're thinking to yourself, "Yes, yes, there's something magnificent about the first one and so shameful Jeff about the – or sorry, something magnificent about the second one and shameful about the first. Because instinctively in our hearts we love the idea of perseverance. We love the idea that you just get back up. Like, we're hockey people. You take the puck in the face, and you lose your teeth, "Here hold these for me!" And you keep going. We're not soccer people, where you fall over, and they start rolling around. Now come on, I hate this sport! We love the perseverance movies, you know, Rudy shows up and he fights through everything to be on Notre Dame's team. At the end, he sacks the quarterback, "Ru-dy! Ru-dy!" Louis Zamperini in the movie *Unbroken* is – goes through all of the difficulty. At the end, he's got this Japanese soldier trying to diminish him and finish him off. And he will not bow. And we're like, "Yeah! C'mon on!" We love the idea of perseverance. In principle. <pause> It's a lot easier to cheer about perseverance when you're sitting on your couch with the popcorn than it is in the moment that you need to demonstrate the perseverance you're cheering about. So how do you and I – that's the question – Paul - he's commanding us, he's... be patient in affliction. Persevere in the midst of affliction. John Piper a number of years ago wrote in his little book *Roots of Endurance*, he said,

"I know that I am, in great measure, a child of my times. And one of the pervasive marks of our times is emotional fragility. It hangs in the air we breathe. We are easily hurt. We pout and mope easily. We blame easily. We break easily. Our marriages break easily. Our faith breaks easily. Our happiness breaks easily. And our commitment to the church breaks easily. We are easily disheartened... When historians list the character traits of North America during our



times, commitment, constancy, tenacity, endurance, patience, resolve, and perseverance will [likely] not be on the list.”

So how do people like you and me who live in a world where we think highly about perseverance and don't practice it very well, how do we be patient in affliction? What is that... look like? What helps us? Be patient in affliction? You hear the answer to that question at every turn in the Bible. Is it you will be patient in the midst of difficult moments if you have joy at the end that your hope is fixed on. Focusing on the promise at the end helps you deal with the difficulty now. Victor Frankl is the name of a Jewish psychologist. He lived through the Nazi death camps. And afterwards he wrote a book. And his book was about why did some – or part of it was about - why did some people in the Nazi death camps make it? And others did not? Like, he was around all these people, and some would just give up. And others would not. And so, he tried to examine, scientifically, why that was the case. He came to a conclusion that is summarized quite honestly in a little story he tells. He talks about this... this prisoner who had a dream one night. And the dream that the prisoner had was that on March 30 of that year, the war would end, and they would all be freed. This prisoner, prior to that dream, was really down in the dumps, and was – his health was fading fast. But when he had the dream, he started sharing with everyone, and immediately his attitude picked right up. He would get whipped by the Nazis, get threatened by the Nazis, but it didn't matter, because he had this hope, this knowledge that, on that date, it's all going to be over. Well a number of weeks later - it was only a few weeks before March 30 - a number of weeks later, some new prisoners came into the camp. And of course, they asked the new prisoners, “How's the war going outside?” And expecting... this prisoner expecting to hear it's coming to a conclusion, maybe even soon, because he had this dream that March 30 was going to be the conclusion. The new prisoners came in and said, “No, it's not even close to being done. We're losing at every turn.” That prisoner, only days later on March 29, grew sick, March 30, went into a coma, and the next day he died. Frankl reflected on this, he said this... he said,

“Life in a concentration camp exposes your soul's foundation. Only a few of the prisoners were able to keep their full inner liberty and inner strength. [Now listen closely to what he says]. Life only has meaning in any circumstance if we have a hope that suffering, circumstances, or death itself cannot destroy.”

“Life only has meaning in any circumstance if we have a hope that suffering, circumstances, or death itself cannot destroy.” You will persevere in the meantime if you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that there is a hope that lays out there that's worth all of it. I don't consider the suffering of our present time worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us. You hikers know this. You're always telling me, “Come on a hike with me! We'll go to the top of the hill.” I'm like, “I hate hiking. It hurts!” And you say, “No, it will be fun!” Why? Because when you get to the top, the view is so magnificent. Admittedly, it's never that magnificent. Right? To put up with all of it. The principle applies though. Well, what are you appealing to? The joy at the end is so worth the pain in the middle! Right. The joy at the end is worth the pain in the middle. You'll endure in suffering now if you know the joy awaiting you then. If you have the big joy, you'll have a big endurance.



Joni Eareckson Tada, you might know her name, she – a quadriplegic, Christian woman, she dove into a – I think a lake or a swimming pool, I can't remember which one – and she broke her neck when she was 17 years old. She did a painting with her mouth because she couldn't move her body. She's in a wheelchair her whole life. She was speaking, in fact, at a conference a number of years ago and I heard her speak. And this is what she said. She was reflecting on her life in the wheelchair, and about what keeps her going. She said,

“Soon... [I mean, she's sitting there in the wheelchair – in the video – in the wheelchair, on the stage. Black stage, and microphone attached to her face, she can only move her neck. Soon, she said,] God will close the curtain on sin and suffering and disease and death... And one day I'm going to leave this wheelchair behind. I cannot wait. I may have suffered with Christ on earth, but one day in heaven I'm going to reign with him. I may have tasted the pains of living on this planet, but one day I'm going to eat from the tree of life in the pleasure of heaven, and it's all going to happen in the twinkling of an eye. The Lord's overcoming of this world will be the lifting of the curtain on our five senses, and we shall see him and we shall be like him, and we shall see the whole universe in plain sight.

... [But], I sure hope I can bring this wheelchair to heaven. Now, I know that's not theologically correct. But I hope to bring it and put it in a little corner of heaven, and then in my new, perfect, glorified body, standing on grateful glorified legs, I'll stand next to my Savior, holding his nail-pierced hands. I'll say, 'Thank you, Jesus,'... And I will say, 'Jesus, do you see that wheelchair? You were right when you said that in this world we would have trouble, because that thing was a lot of trouble.

But the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on you. And the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be. It never would have happened had you not given me the bruising of the blessing of that wheelchair.' Then the real ticker-tape parade of praise will begin. And all of earth will join in the party. And at that point, Christ will open up our eyes to the great fountain of joy in his heart for us beyond all that we ever experienced on earth. And when we're able to stop laughing and crying, the Lord Jesus really will wipe away our tears. I find it so poignant that finally at the point when I do have the use of my arms to wipe away my own tears, I won't have to, because God will [do it for me].”

Patient in affliction.

[Faithful in Prayer]

Joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and lastly, faithful in prayer. That word *faithful*. It actually means *persistent*, it's the... it's to continually do a thing, or persist in doing something. When your kids keep asking you why. “Why? Why? Why? Why?”

“If you ask me ‘Why?’ one more time, I'm going to get so mad at you!”

“When? When? When?”, you know they just keep... whatever the question, they keep after you... keep after you. That's what we mean by persistent. Be persistent in prayer. Would you describe your prayer life that way, Christians? <pause> Like, honestly, if we were sitting across the table from each other, over a cup of coffee, and nobody else is listening, right, just you, me and Jesus. And, I asked



you, “So what’s your prayer life like?” Is the first word that comes out of your mouth, “Persistent.” <pause> Probably not. But you know what, you stand... if your answer is like that, you stand in a long line of great Christians who struggled to pray. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, twentieth century... one of the best twentieth century English language preachers ever, he said, “Everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer.” Alexander Whyte, a nineteenth-century Scottish divine, said, “There is nothing that we are so bad at all our days as prayer.” Thomas Shepard, a seventeenth-century Puritan pastor - by the way, the Puritans, when it comes to theology, are like the Himalayas in the landscape of theology. Right, they just get it better than everybody else. And they think about it more deeply than everybody else. And this Puritan man, when asked about prayer, he said, “There are times in my life when I would rather die than pray.” So, look, if they can’t do it, and they’re better than us, what hope do we have? To remain persistent in prayer? How do we do this? Help us Lord! And Jesus does. He actually tells us a story. To help along those lines, Luke 18,1-7, he says,

“Then Jesus told his disciples [it says, Jesus told his disciples] a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. [That sounds like persistence]. He said: ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ “For some time he refused. [Get out of here, lady! Stop bothering me!] But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come [and don’t you love the language] and attack me!’ ‘ [She’s a stalker! Can you imagine outside the window, <knocks> <old lady voice> “Give me justice.” </old lady voice> You know, on the phone, <old lady voice> “Hello, this is Joy, is Joy there?” “No, Give me justice!” </old lady voice>] [laughter] And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 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?’ ”

Oh, so many things you can learn from this. Let me just give you two things that will help you in your prayer from that little passage. Number one, only those who know that they have a need will persist in prayer, right? So, here’s a woman, you need to understand, kind of a historical background here. To be a widow who has lost her husband in that world means that you have no safety net now. Most commonly when a woman would lose her husband, that husband had some debts, and that debts were paid for by the family home. And now she’s got no home, she’s got no husband, she’s got no hope. The only way is if she can go to this judge and have him step in and say, against her adversary, probably the bank or the people who are trying to take her home away, “No! You can’t take it!”. He’s her last hope. Her need leads to the plead. You do know how much you need, don’t you? Listen, I know we like to play good Christian when we come to church, but I don’t know if you’ve ever stopped and thought about the things that are facing you, in your life? It’s the stuff you put off in your mind, and say I don’t want to think about that, so you watch football instead. Let’s turn the game off for a second, and let’s just reflect about the difficulty of your life. If you have children, oh my! Right? So, they’re babies, you’re trying to figure out how to get them to sleep, you don’t know how to do it. You have no control over any of that. You want them to grow up to be responsible adults. You don’t know how to do that. What school should they go to? Are they going to survive there? Are they going to get



caught in with the wrong crowd when they get old enough? Are they going to start doing all the things that you fear that they're going to start doing? So, you try to protect them from all of those things. But you have no control over any of that. When they get old enough, in high school, and college, are they going to go in the right direction? When they go beyond that, are they going to end up choosing the right kind of spouse? You have no control over any of that. You think you do. You have none! When they get older, are they going to remain married? Are they going to continue to follow Jesus in all those days? Some of you have kids who don't follow Jesus in the moment. And you have no control over that. You have control over your work then? The economy and the way that economic systems of the world work and whether or not we're going to have a new business in our community, or the rain is going to fall for the crops. Are you control all that? And the human resources in your business? You can control all those people? Their attitudes? Those people that you don't like seeing when you get to work in the morning. You are totally out of control! If there's anybody in the world who has needs, it's you! Perhaps you should plead to somebody who can do something about it. Only those who know their need will plead about it.

You ever know that song, *Lord I Need You*? You know, the song, *Lord I Need You*? I always laugh. You know, we... we're in kind of conservative churches here. When we sing, we do the old 'hands in the pockets, yeah, I love Jesus, you know, hands in the pockets.' I've had some people say to me, "Why don't people in Northview move when the music's on?" I said, "It's because they're white and Mennonite." Right. So, but even... listen, even when the *Lord I Need You* song comes in, we might have our hands in a posture like - [lifts one arm up, with effort] - okay, yup, that's true, I need you Lord. Right, I need you. Absolutely need you. Right. You need him. For everything, you need him. So, I said there were two things you could learn from this. The second one is that persisting in prayer is made much easier if you know God wants to answer. You'll persist in prayer if you know you have a need, but you'll also persist in prayer if you know that the guy you're talking to wants to help you. 'Cos you and I have this attitude oftentimes of God like he's stingy. <haughty voice> "Mmm... I don't think I'll give that to you. I already gave you something today, so you don't get this thing. I don't want you fat." </haughty voice> Our attitude toward God is very much like a stingy grandfather who likes his house clean, basically. This widow, though, don't you love her attitude. She's like, <knocking> I can imagine her on the streets, following the guy around. <singsong voice> "Justice, Justice." </singsong voice> She probably had a song about him, she got her friends to bug him, everything. Finally, he gives in. And the point of the parable is; he's a jerk. He's a bad... he's a wicked judge, and even he'll give in if you plead long enough. Imagine what a righteous judge would do? And imagine if the judge was like, favourably inclined to you, maybe that judge had a relationship with you in some way, maybe he called you his son or daughter. Imagine what he'd do. Matthew 7:8-11,

"For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!' "



<stubborn voice> "Well, why does he make us ask so much then, Pastor?" </stubborn voice> I have a little girl, and sometimes she wants to go get something to eat in the kitchen or go to her friend's house. "Daddy, can I... Daddy, can I... Daddy, can I?", she'll say. And I'll say to her, "I mean... if you come over here and give me a kiss you can. If you come over here and give me a hug. If you sit on my lap for a minute and talk to me for a minute, I'll let you go."

"Ohh fine!" And she'll come over and she'll give me a kiss and a hug and then she goes off. I do this all the time. Am I a bad father? Because I want to have a relationship with her in the process of the asking? And neither is God a bad father for wanting you to plead. So why don't you climb up on his knee and ask for the moon. And come back in a few hours and ask for it again. You will know him better in the process, and you will find that he's not stingy. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Let me pray for us.

Father, I'm thankful for your grace, and for this Scripture passage, little text, Father, and we are thankful that you have given it to us and I pray, Father, that you'd take it, and you'd dig down deep in our hearts and by the power of the Spirit, make it a reality for us, Father. There's lots of things that were said here, lots of different pieces to a sermon like this, so, God, I pray that you would take each – whatever part is needed for the people who are listening, Father, you'd take that and your Spirit would use it to apply it to their lives, Father. Thank you so much for our Lord Jesus, and the hope that we have in him. We pray all these things in his name. Amen.