**Already Accomplished!**

Based on [Luke 18:1-8](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk18.1-8)

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Pentecost 22

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In the Gospel lesson, we hear a parable from Jesus. And Luke for once, Luke is kind enough to tell us what the parable is about before the parable is told. He says this parable is about how Jesus' disciples are to always pray and not lose heart. Literally, he tells them to always make requests and petitions to God and never grow weary of it.

"**To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing**." Martin Luther said that. If he's right--if prayer is so natural to the Christian, instinctual even--then why does Jesus have to remind his disciples to do it? Answer: because in praying, without getting immediate answers, they might grow weary, "lose heart", and begin to believe that God does not hear them or care.

The Christian can lose heart in prayer in one of two ways. One way is if he prays and prays and prays, expecting a direct answer from God and doesn't get it. If you pray for rain and get nothing but drought, after a while you lose heart.

But that's when the Christian remembers, what Jesus says: **that "God causes the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous alike."** And that, "**God knows what you need even before you ask for it."** So why should you expect your prayers to get results? Do your prayers tell God what to do? Are you going to give God new information in ruling the world? Is God democratic? Does your prayer count as a vote for this or that particular course of action? Of course not. And so in thinking this way, the Christian falls off the other side of the prayer horse.

One person loses heart because God doesn't appear to be listening to him; the other loses heart because he knows God is too great to listen to him. So tell me...why pray at all?

Christians always fall into this conundrum. It's like we're bipolar. **One day we think that prayer accomplishes all things; the next that it accomplishes nothing.** Can't we realize that the problem is that we are too focused on what we can accomplish?

One of the most controversial teachings in the Lutheran church is the doctrine of election. Tomorrow is election day, and because we live in a democracy, it is a day where you will choose your leaders. God is not democratic. You don't cast your ballot for him. You don't say, "**I have decided, Jesus, that you are my God.**" In fact, it's the opposite. Jesus says, "**You have not elected me, but I have elected you**." Jesus says, "**My sheep hear my voice, and I give them eternal life. My Father gave them to me and He is greater than all, and no man will pluck my sheep from my Father's hand."**

Ladies and gentlemen, what this ***doctrine of election*** comes down to is that God has complete control over those who will end up in heaven. There will be no one missing from heaven. **On the Last Day when the dead are raised, and Jesus starts doing a *roll call* from the Book of Life, everyone on the list will be there to respond.** There will be those who end up in eternal hellfire, but it's not like Jesus will be calling their name from within the pearly gates and they're absent. "**Bueller, Bueller, Bueller,**" NO! When it comes to everything, even salvation, **God's got everything under control.** There won't be people *missing in heaven* because you failed to preach to them or neglected to pray for them. With your words and your prayers you might cause some to have faith; with your failures you might cause others to stumble. But the doctrine of election is our comfort, because it teaches that God sees to it that in the end, all ***his sheep*** will return the fold, and the goats will be cast out.

And so it is that people lose heart, and grow weary with God. "**So then Pastor...what's the point in spreading the Gospel, or Receiving the Sacrament, or praying?**  If John Doe's going to heaven or hell whether I preach to him or not, why preach, why pray?"

There are a number of answers. The Law answer is that you are to pray and preach because God commands it. "God said it; that settles it", right? On the other hand, the Gospel answer is that, yes God elects people to heaven, but he does so in and through Jesus Christ preached and Jesus Christ administered in with and under the Sacraments. God elects us, in time, yesterday, today, tomorrow, when we hear the word and believe and confess. And how are we to hear if there is no one preaching?

But more than all that, I think it's better to do what Jesus does and answer a question with a question. You wonder, "What's the point in praying and preaching if the end is predetermined anyway?"...I ask you this: **Parents, if you already knew that your children's future was predetermined, if you knew that no matter what you did in raising your kids, it would not change in the least what they were to become in adulthood, an astronaut, a pilot, an honorable man or a scoundrel-**-if you knew that you're child was going to be what he was going to be no matter if you were a good parent or not, *would it change the way you parent*? **How**?

If you knew that going to Joey's baseball games, or playing with Suzie at the park wouldn't change a thing, if you knew that--in spite of all the longitudinal studies available that say the contrary--that spending time with your kids would not influence who they become...would you still spend time with your kids? **Of course you would? Why**? Not because you have a "responsibility as a parent to make sure"...blah, blah, blah. You don't make time for your kids because it's your "duty" as a parent. You don't spend time with your kids because they are part of an "agenda" to make them responsible adults. You spend time with your kids because ***you love them***.

So too, it's not that Christian's pray because if they don't, God won't give them Justice. **Christians pray because they love and trust God**. Christians evangelize, not because, "If we don't get out there with a bullhorn, there's gonna be lots of empty seats in heaven." We evangelize because we ***love*** to spread the Good News about Jesus Christ...this strange man who 2000 years ago walked the earth claiming to be God, teaching that ***he*** would accomplish salvation because God's people didn't. **And he suffered and died on the cross to deliver our sins to hell, and three days later, God raised him from the dead, and his disciples saw the marks in his hands and his side and they knew that it was finished**. And yet they had such joy in what they had seen with their eyes and heard with their ears that they couldn't help but confess it with their mouths. And they continued to pray to a God who had already answered their prayers.

So Christians have no reason to lose heart or grow weary in prayer. We don't pray to "accomplish" anything. We pray because that's what faith does, it prays. Lungs breath, fish swim, faith preaches and it prays. People are going to talk about tomorrow election even after it's over. Why? Because they are interested in it, even if ballots are already in. Because it's worth talking about. So it is with Christians and prayer.

But the truth is, your prayers do have an effect, and so does your evangelism. If you stop these things, it won't hinder God's plan one jot or tittle. But when you continue in them, you play an instrumental part in that plan. **And so the persistent widow in Jesus parable pesters the *reluctant* Judge who finally gives her justice.** And so Christians pray to a *willing* God, who has already accomplished Justice for his elect who cry to him day and night, and continue to do so in prayer. And when the Son of Man comes again, he will find faith on earth, **because when he descends in clouds of Glory, he will find his saints in prayer.**