

That Sermon's Too Short!

Luke 11:1-13

INTRO:

We must be persistent in prayer, *Jesus even says so!* We must keep at it, even when it seems like nothing ever happens. We can do it, we can continue to pray because our God keeps at it with us. Persistence describes the steadfast love of God in Jesus Christ. As we live our daily lives in God, as we live in responsiveness to God, we are being persistent in prayer. This is when God's word is being embodied in us through God's persevering presence with us. Because our dealings with God are not over until God says they're over. **And when is God over?** He is eternal, *so never!*

Today we will think about a time Jesus taught the disciples a model prayer and how he went on to teach them about the need for persistence in prayer in a ***really short sermon.***

ME:

Short sermons. At my first appointment there was this guy who always thought my sermons were too short. *And he was never shy in telling me so!* I told him I stopped preaching when I had nothing more to say.

How long should a sermon be? A pastor, known for his lengthy sermons, noticed a man get up and leave during the middle of his message. The man returned just before the conclusion of the service. Afterwards the pastor asked the man where he had gone.

"**I went to get a haircut,**" he replied.

"**But,**" said the pastor, "**why didn't you do that before the service?**"

"**Because,**" the gentleman said, "**I didn't need one then.**"

YOU:

Do you have an opinion about how long a sermon should be?

Let pray together and take a look at Jesus' short sermon...

GOD:

Luke 11:1 He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." 2 He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."

5 And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7 And he answers from within, 'Do not bother

me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. 9 “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

WE:

How long should a sermon be? How long is too long? I read about a bishop who said that was the most frequent criticism he heard of preachers over the years. *Usually complaining about them being too long!*

So how long should a sermon last? I bet you'll let me know when to stop, **right?**

Once a new preacher was greeting the congregation at the end of the service and one member saying, “**Good sermon. In fact, it was two, maybe three good sermons.**”

“**Did I preach too long?**” He asked her.

“Let’s just say you missed about two or three good stopping points”

She replied.

Once when filling in for a vacationing preacher in a chapel near where people travelled to for vacation, a preacher saw a well-printed, carefully framed sign:

“To the preacher: The Gettysburg Address is one of the greatest speeches ever given. It can be easily fit on one page. Jesus’s great stories of the good Samaritan or the prodigal son take only a few short paragraphs. If Abraham Lincoln or Jesus Christ can convey such depth and truth in so few words, surely you can too. For God’s sake and ours too, keep it short!”

Sometimes it can be tough to know when to end a sermon. Always leave a party when you're having a good time, **right? But when and how should a sermon end?** Some say that sometimes short sermons seem superficial and trite. Just a point or two, never really developed and then it’s over.

Sometimes, though, sermons are definitely too long. Some preachers try to do too much in one sermon. Too many subjects, too many ideas, too many illustrations, or more than are needed. The congregation is overwhelmed. There was a time when people listened to long speeches as a form of entertainment. That day has passed. Fifteen minutes is what we are conditioned to at the most. *Just until the next commercial!* Preach any more than that and people will start checking out mentally.

My sermons tend to be shorter than they are longer, but sometimes they are longer than they are shorter. It is hard to end a sermon. *Just look at Jesus!* He is known for his parables—**short, punchy stories that share a large truth**. We see it today as Jesus talks about the persistent widow and the unjust judge. The parables are known for their colorful, everyday detail. They are also noted for their lack of endings. **Did you notice that?** The prodigal son ends with the younger son back home, but we are not told whether they lived happily ever after. Maybe he left again later because he hadn't really learned anything.

Today we are not told for sure that the judge ruled in the poor woman's favor or if the judgement was even carried out. Why is it that when you are telling a story, you can set up the problem—some human dilemma, some crisis begging for resolution—but then you can't figure out how to end it. **Have you ever been to a movie that that was action packed, full of human interest, but when it came to the end of the movie it just sort dribbled off into nothing?** *It's like they couldn't think of a good ending!*

Is that the problem Jesus has with the endings to his parables? I doubt it, very seriously.

Sometimes it's hard to end a sermon because there is more to be said, so much more! We don't want to end too quickly cutting off thoughts on a subject. Because sermons are about God and the subject of sermon

doesn't want to stop talking. God goes on, in spite of our faithlessness and our unpredictability, God persists in loving us, in speaking to us, in reaching out to us.

And because God continues to be with us, we are enabled to stay with God. Our experience of God isn't over with the sermon. ***That is where it begins!*** When the sermon is over, it is time for you to begin. To begin: your questions, objections, thoughtful responses, service, and obedience. Sermons don't end until God says they end. A good sermon won't end until Wednesday or Thursday, late in the day. This is when, in your life, in your faithfulness you live the sermon, or God's message to you through the sermon.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

God continues to be with us, and so we are enabled to stay with God.

YOU:

Will you persist in prayer? Will you continue the sermon as God works in you and through you to Wednesday or Thursday or beyond then?

CLOSE:

In conclusion . . . Let me just say . . . **NO!** This isn't the conclusion of the sermon! This sermon, your sermon is not over until God says it's over. So, go out there and continue this sermon Neil God's done with it!

Let'd Pray first ...