

## **PERSISTENCE; Luke 18:1-8; ICB; 31 January 2010**

Today we're wrapping up our series called *I Want Change*. [graphic] We've been talking about how to make changes in our lives and in our world that God would want us to make.

We started out by saying that if we want to change our behaviors – we have to change our thinking. It doesn't always work; but it's hard to change without it.

Next saw how change can happen in even the most unlikely circumstances. And we have to believe that it CAN. Change is possible.

Finally (last week) we talked about how in order to change – we have to take initiative. We have to be creative. Take some risks. We have to have an entrepreneurial spirit to our faith.

Today – I want to wrap up these thoughts by encouraging you to stick with change; even when it doesn't seem to be 'taking'. Keep trying. Don't give up.

**Something I've learned is: Change requires PERSISTENCE. [PERSISTENCE]**

My first year of college – I roomed with a guy who took his studies really seriously. So much so that other kids used to give him a hard time. “Come on out and have a pizza with us, Rob.” “Let's go to the concert, Rob.” “Come on Rob, we're all going to the movies.” And he would always say, “Sorry. I have a **date** with the library.”

**We used to joke, who is that? And does she have a sister? ☺**

I finally asked him why he studied so much. He explained that he came from a pretty poor family. His dad was a low skill auto mechanic's assistant. Sending Rob to a private university was a big sacrifice. Rob said that whenever he thought about taking a break he remembered his dad's sacrifice. As a result, *he was THE picture of persistence.*

*According to Scripture, in matters of faith – we should be too.* There are a variety of texts for this. One of the most interesting ones comes from Jesus himself. It's in Luke chapter 18. You might want to grab a bible and turn there.

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**Jesus has been teaching his disciples about the coming kingdom of God.**

Remember the kingdom of God is a time when all the injustices and pains of this life are taken away. No more oppression. No more disease. No more wars and fights. No massive earthquakes rendering 100s of 1000s homeless. A world at shalom.

When we talk about seeking change in our world – this is the change we are after.

Jesus has been teaching that this kingdom of God is nearby. AND it is coming. And it hasn't fully arrived yet. And, as disciples, we should be seeking it.

As part of this teaching, Jesus tells a fascinating parable meant to inspire persistence in prayer that seeks kingdom changes in our world. Listen to this. Luke 18:1-9.

**[read Luke 18:1]** Not give up on the coming kingdom.

**[read Luke 18:2-3]** Stop there for a minute.

The widow is pleading for justice. She's been wronged. So she goes to a judge. She wants a change. But she's not getting it.

Happens all the time. Whether we are seeking justice or just a little self improvement. You try. Perhaps you pray about it. You enlist friends and family to try to help...  
AND YOU JUST AREN'T GETTING ANYWHERE.

The "JUDGES" of the world don't care. Think about it metaphorically. Advertisers still bombard you images that tempt you. Our families often sabotage us – *have another piece of cake, you look too skinny*. Our friends often don't understand – *what are you better than us now?!* Can you relate?

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Shortly after the New Year and before this series started – I made some New Year's resolutions. I wasn't so much "seeking justice" as I was seeking to make some small improvements in my life.

I'm not going to bore you with the whole list. But one of my resolutions (and I've talked about this before) was (or IS) to **drink less Coke. I'm like Mark Twain. I find giving up Coke easy. I've done it dozens of times. ☺**

**I even gave my resolution a bible verse. (1 Cor 6:19) No soda during the work week. Weekends I'm free to drink as much as I want. ☺ Don't want to get too radical.**

I have to confess, it's been a mixed experience. I have cut back substantially. HOWEVER – I have also seen the depth of my sinfulness.

A couple of weekends ago, Laura and I went to a movie on Friday night. We were having dinner beforehand and I ordered a coke.... **Laura gave me that disapproving look that only spouses can give. So I explained, "The sun is down. It's the weekend already." ☺**

**The depth of my sinfulness. ☺ I've seen the depth of your sinfulness too. One of our very own church people asked me, "So you're giving up coke. But you can still drink Pepsi, right?" ☺**

I share this example to point out that seeking change...even when it's a personal change... is hard. It's often frustrating. A lot of times we feel like a widow bringing our case to an uncaring, ungodly judge. And much more so when we are really trying to change the world...and seek justice.

It can (and does) feel like the world is conspiring against you.

Change is hard. Justice is illusive. Jesus' parable about the widow acknowledges that.

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But listen to how the story ends. Really pay attention. **[read Luke 18:4-5] ☺ Not exactly what you'd expect. I'm expecting something like, "And the judge had a**

change of heart.” Or “And the judge finally saw the justice in her plea.” Or at least “And God smote the judge and there was a NEW judge.” ☺ But NO. The Bible says the judge just got tired of hear her sob story. Wow.

It’s important to remember that the judge in the story is NOT God. ☺

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 Look at verse 6... **[read Luke 18:6-8a]** The point is: persistence pays off. AND If an unjust judge will grant justice just to get the widow off his back, how much MORE reliably will God grant justice?

It’s a parable about prayer. But I think this applies to any God-honoring change we are after. Want change – be persistent.

This doesn’t mean that we will ALWAYS get it. Or at least that we won’t always get it when and how we expect it or want it. There are a million reasons why. And everyone of them is frustrating. And sometimes we just have to let it remain a mystery.

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 For me – the most interesting statement in the whole passage is the last one. Jesus takes the whole discussion to another level – He says, not only is persistence essential for change and for seeking the kingdom, but persistence is also evidence of and essential for faith.

**[read Luke 18:8b]** Will God’s people be persistent in seeking his kingdom? ‘cause this is evidence of genuine faith? *When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*

Karl Marx accused Christianity and all religions of using faith like a drug... an opiate to keep people from desiring change. And it can lull people into being satisfied with *the way things are*. This is EXACTLY what Jesus is warning about. Following Jesus doesn’t led to blind acceptance of how things are; it leads to passionate pursuit of the kingdom of God.

Sometimes I wonder how offended Jesus must be ... we settle for spare coins rather than kingdom-style change.

I think Jesus might say to us occasionally what my college roommate’s dad said to him, “*I’ve sacrificed SOOO much for you to have this opportunity. Now take it.*”

Be persistent. Take your opportunities for change. Be tenacious. Seek God’s kingdom. Seek justice. Seek to be and become the person God created you to be. And may you NEVER be satisfied with anything less. Amen.