

(For Monday, February 6, 2017) **Do you feel God answering your prayers?**

“Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.” (Is.58:4 – ESV)

One of Isaiah’s key complaints was his lament of Judah’s empty and superficial worship rituals. The Book opens with this warning that God is offended by those elaborate worship rituals which conceal an empty heart and a careless life ¹ This is the same warning that James gives to the early church, as to why God is not answering their insincere prayers. (See Jas.4:1-4) It’s the same for us. I assume most of us can recite The Lord’s Prayer by heart. But to how much of it do we really commit when we say it on Sunday mornings? Do we profess it as a promise to truly forgive as we would be forgiven? Or are these words the rote and empty recitation of a wandering mind that’s really just thinking about what’s for Sunday lunch?

If so, is it any wonder that we don’t find God responding to our prayer life?

¹See Is.1:10-17; ESV Introduction to Isaiah, p. 1236, “Key Themes” 1

(For Tuesday, February 7, 2017) **Do you understand what God’s grace gives you?**

“He [God] established a testimony in Jacob...so that they [the Children of Israel] should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.” (Ps.78:5a, 7)

The Israelites were taught to put their hope in The Lord as a central tenant of their religion. (See Ps.33:20-22, 39:7, 62:5,118:8) Yet perfect faithfulness to God’s commandments in the entire body of The Law was a superhuman feat nobody could accomplish. But with the coming of Our Lord, and with his parting gift of the Holy Spirit, not only are you and I free from condemnation. (See Rom.8:1) We are also filled with a delighting desire to be faithful to Love’s Lord because of His great love for us. When Paul cites the three attributes of the Good News in Jesus Christ as faith, hope, and love (See 1Cor.13), he is actually defining the working of God’s grace in us. For grace birth’s love, which produces faith, which culminates in the confident hope of our redemption in Jesus. Just one more face of the Holy Trinity united in the eternal dance of love.

(For Wednesday, February 8, 2017) **Have you considered the reasons for your adversities?**

“An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” (1Tim.2:5 – ESV)

Paul often uses the context of athletic events to make points about the Christian faith. Here he tells us that the truth of the Kingdom of Heaven in the next world can only be lived out through the realities and adversities in this present one. So, even for the redeemed, there is still the threat of cancer, job loss, betrayal, financial calamity and all the rest that flesh is heir to. So, you and I “compete according to the rules” of this world. In fact, it is in the midst of these challenges and adversities of life that the greatest and most powerful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ are displayed. When people observe the calm assurance of Christians in the very midst of pain – **that** is when they are most likely to be won over for Christ.

When Jesus promises that his burden on us is light (Mt.11:30), could part of his statement mean that the burdens Christian men and women bear are designed to bring light to a darkened world?

(For Thursday, February 9, 2017) **Are you open to hearing God's word to you, even when it's hard?**

"And Jesus, looking at him [the rich young man], loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (Mk.10:21 – ESV)

In *A Few Good Men*, Jack Nicholson famously tells Tom Cruise's character, "You can't handle the truth!" Jesus gave this rich young man some news that was very difficult for him to hear. In fact, in the next verse we find that the young man was distressed and "went away sorrowful." But Jesus gave the young person this bitter pill to swallow specifically because Our Lord loved him. At the beginning of Mark, immediately after God declared that this man Jesus standing in the River Jordan is, "my beloved son with whom I am well pleased," the Spirit of God drove Jesus into the desert to be tempted for 40 days. (See Mk.1:11-12) God's love, it would seem, is sometimes tough love.

The next time God gives you some sobering instruction, will you be ready to handle his truth?

(For Friday, February 10, 2017) **Are you taking full advantage of Jesus' promise?**

"And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him [Jesus] and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." (Mk.10:35 – ESV)

I would have been offended at such a request as that made by James and John. I bet you would be too. Jesus can't grant James and John the places of extreme honor in the Kingdom of Heaven, since that determination is only for The Father to make. (See vs. 40) Yet, a promise that Jesus makes repeatedly is that he will grant us whatever we ask. (See Mt.18:19; 21:22; Mk.11:24; Jn. 14:13; 15:7; 15:16; 16:23-24) But this promise is conditioned by our asking in his name, i.e. for the sake of God's Kingdom. No amount of pleading will convince God to grant our requests, if these petitions are made with some self-serving or vain goal in mind.

But, the flip side is that God promises to satisfy our every prayer request no matter how outlandish, if it is for the good of his Kingdom and the prosper of his glory. Talk about Good News!