

"HEY, IT'S FOR YOU!"
By Rom A. Pegram (4/9/17—Palm Sunday)

Why do people do what they do in this life? I mean, for instance, *why do people go to sporting events*? Any idea? I'm pretty sure it's because *you enjoy the excitement of the competition*. That's why most people attend sporting events...

Likewise, *most people attend the theater to be entertained*. They're not there to see a propaganda piece or to be tested on the content of what they see. Basically, they're looking to be entertained—a diversion from their everyday routine...

People enroll in higher education because they want to learn (or to earn a degree), don't they? If there's no improvement in their overall skills or knowledge in the area they're studying, they're probably a little disappointed because they know what they paid for the education! After all, they're there to learn...

Most people do things for specific reasons, don't they? So, *why do people go to church*? My conviction is that *they desire an encounter with the supernatural ... God*. They want to touch base with someone that is bigger than this world of human beings that they know so well. They want to sense God's presence personally. They want to experience the wonder of the living Christ...

We are now at about #7 of our eight-part series called *Seeing the Unseen Christ*. And I hope that being part of this season of Lent has opened your spiritual eyes to the reality of our Lord's presence among us. My prayer is that we're...

- ...*worshiping* him with a "first love" enthusiasm...
- ...now *lavishing his love* on others (anonymous gifts), as we sense his compassion for us...
- ...learning to walk in his Kingdom of Light and *crave righteousness*...
- ...excited about *serving* our King—using our God-given gifts with a new eagerness...
- ...ready to begin *surrendering to the Word* of God ... and the truth Jesus wants us to know...

But, it would be inconceivable to see the unseen Christ as here with us and not want to have a talk with him, wouldn't you say? I think all of us would covet the chance to speak to Jesus personally, ask him questions, give him thanks, and so forth. And, this is what can happen to us! ***When churches recognize Christ is present with them, believers experience the privilege of authentic prayer.*** What is that? It's communication with God that measures up to what *God* wants it to be ... and knows it can be for us. Kind of like ... if each of us could speak personally to Jesus today, one question all of us would want to know is this: "Jesus, what do you expect of *me*?" 'Guess what? Our scripture lesson for today speaks to just that! Listen (Matthew 6:5-18, NLT)...

"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. ⁶ But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door

behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. ⁷ “When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. ⁸ Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

⁹ Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. ¹⁰ May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today the food we need, ¹² and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. ¹³ And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴ “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

¹⁶ “And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. ¹⁷ But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. ¹⁸ Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

So, what is it Jesus expects of us? How would he answer that question if we were to ask him personally this morning? Here it is. First...

JESUS WANTS US TO BE A PEOPLE OF PRAYER! And he’s so wonderful to tell us *how* to do it; folks, we don’t have to guess! Here’s the DO NOT’S from V. 5a - “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites!” Who’s Jesus talking about here? His friends, the Pharisees; who else? Do we have Pharisees today; is this relevant today? My dear mother used to say that some preachers, when they prayed, had ‘diarrhea of the mouth’. She used to tell *me*—when I was first starting out—to ‘save some for next Sunday’; you don’t have to say it all in one ... and that goes for our prayer life, too!

So, if we’re *not* supposed to pray like the hypocrites, how *are* we supposed to do it? What would be acceptable to God? What would ‘authentic prayer’ look like at this point? Well, v. 6a tells us when it says, “But when you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen.” What Jesus is speaking of here is NOT so much a geographical or physical guideline for prayer, as it is *a certain attitude* that we’re to enter into prayer with ... wherever we are! Let me see if I can explain...

At one time, a guy by the name of Bill Moyers was a special assistant to President Lyndon B. Johnson. He was asked, by Johnson, to say grace before a meal in the family quarters of the White House. As Moyers began praying softly, the President interrupted him with “Speak up, Bill! Speak up!” Moyers stopped in mid-sentence and, without even looking up, he replied steadily, “I wasn’t addressing you, Mr. President.”

It's not necessarily a type of geographical location—*your room*—that Jesus is talking about here. He uses that illustration, as if to say, this is the *attitude* you should approach prayer with ... wherever you are. Isn't that what Moyers was telling LBJ and company that day? ... Then, Jesus continues talking about the correct attitude for *authentic prayer* in V. 7...

Jesus says (V.7), "When you pray, do not use a lot of meaningless words, as the pagans do..." So, the Pharisees 'loved to hear themselves talk,' but they were also a bit haughty; they loved to impress people with their vast theological vocabulary—to no one's benefit! Too many words (especially useless ones) are a waste of time! Folks, consider this:

- The Lord's Prayer contains 56 words...
- The Gettysburg Address, 266 words...
- The Ten Commandments, 297 words...
- The Declaration of Independence, 300 words...
- And a recent U.S. government order setting the price of cabbage, 26,911 words...

It's not how long we talk; it's what we say that's important! In other words, *it's better to get right to the point when we pray.* It's about what's going on between us and God, NOT us and others around us! That should be our attitude, wherever we pray. 'Make sense? What else does Jesus expect of us? He expects us to love others just as he has loved us ... and that includes this...

JESUS WANTS FORGIVENESS TO BE A PART OF OUR PRAYER LIFE. I am speaking about forgiveness, today, specifically as it's connected to prayer! Why would Jesus elaborate on the *forgiveness* here that he just mentioned in what has come to be known as The Lord's Prayer? Here's why: Jesus knows human nature like no one else! And here is the **NUMBER ONE ROADBLOCK TO EXPERIENCING AUTHENTIC PRAYER...**

Do you know what the most common form of 'not forgiving' someone is? It's called a 'grudge.' What a grudge says is that a person has chosen to *refuse* to forgive as Christ has commanded us! You have deliberately chosen to go against God's Word! Is it any wonder prayer won't work ... when you're in the middle of deliberately going against what God's has commanded?

I read a few weeks back about two unmarried sisters who lived together. Because of a slight disagreement over an insignificant issue, they stopped speaking to each other. Unable and unwilling to move out of their small house, they continued to use the same rooms, eat at the same table (separately), and sleep in the same bedroom ... all without one word. A chalk line divided the sleeping area into two halves, separating a doorway and fireplace. Each could come and go, cook and eat, sew and read without crossing

over into her sister's domain. Through the night each could hear the breathing of the foe, but because neither was willing to take the first step to reconciliation and forgiveness, they coexisted for years in grinding silence.

Could you imagine? *Grudges, folks, don't really hurt those whom the grudge is against; grudges hurt deeply those who are holding them.* They cut us off from communication with one another ... and from God! Hal Lindsay once said, "For me to fail to forgive myself or anyone else who's offended me is to imply I have a higher standard of forgiveness than God, because whatever it is that's hurt me so much I can't forgive it, God already has." ... What else do we need to know about *authentic prayer* and what Jesus expects of us? Well, finally...

JESUS WANTS OUR PRAYER LIFE TO BE SUPERCHARGED! Fasting is a spiritual discipline specifically associated with prayer ... and Jesus brings it up here. I'll keep this one simple, for now, but let me say a couple of positive words about this sometimes negative subject...

Folks, this is a spiritual discipline that Tim, the tool-man, Taylor would absolutely LOVE! What Jesus is really saying here is ... this is a way to 'super charge' your prayer life—to give it *more power*! An example comes from the Gospel of Mark (9:28-29 NKJV) where the disciples had tried to heal a boy with an evil spirit and the text says of their conversation with Jesus, "And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' So He said to them, 'This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.'"

If you want supercharge your prayer life, here's a spiritual discipline that you need to look into. If you've ever prayed about something very difficult and just couldn't seem to get a breakthrough on whatever it was you were praying about, consider this. Some healing can only come by *the combination of fasting and prayer*—a deliberate action taken in order to concentrate on God and God alone. I don't have the time to go into all of the details of fasting as a spiritual discipline today, but know that it is this discipline that *supercharges* this already awesome gift from God...

I intentionally titled the sermon, today, "Hey, it's for YOU!" I'm referring, of course, to times when the phone rings and someone else picks up the phone and the party on the other end asks specifically to speak with YOU ... and sometimes you'll hear this phrase yelled, "Hey, it's for YOU!"

Prayer, folks, like any form of communication, is a *two-way street*. Sometimes our prayer life is just about talking *at* God whenever we get the chance. But, God has so much more in mind for us—his idea of authentic prayer being so much richer than anything we could ever imagine! What am I telling you? *God wants to hear from us, yes, but God also wants us to hear from him.* And I know God wants to speak to your heart today—wants to let you in on the treasures he has in store for you. Have you

learned to hear that still small voice of God when you pray? Have you learned to listen to God with your heart? Do you yet know your Shepherd's voice?

I'll guarantee you that prayer had everything to do with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem ... when palm branches were used as a sign that royalty was amongst them. Prayer led Jesus to God's purpose for his life—his direction, his courage, etc.! And, the people waving the palm branches on that day knew *who* was with them. His presence changed their lives!

This is what'll happen to us, too, when we come to realize the presence of Christ in our lives... Do you hear him calling, today? Do you hear his voice in your life? One thing I know for sure is this: God has a special message he wants YOU to hear. Be listening carefully ... as we move into one of the holiest weeks of the year...