

PP The King and His Kingdom-The Commands for a Disciple of Christ
Part 27-Matthew 7:7-12 **9/23-24/2017**

A couple weeks ago, my son Aaron and I went up to visit my family in NY
 When evening arrived, and it was dark, we hopped aboard a couple of Four Wheelers and
 headed up in the hills, way up, miles from home
 It was a beautiful night, the stars bright and filling the sky from one end to the other
 We rode through the mud bogs, a herd of cows, up steep mountain paths to get to a gas pipeline
 We headed along the pipeline for a couple miles looking for the trailhead to get back down
 But the grass was so high it prevented the ATV lights from shining our way
 Aaron had brought a high-powered flashlight and it's a good thing he did
 We rode, stopping every couple of minutes, shining that light and looking for the trail head

I want to do that for a minute and like it was for us, you'll find that for many, our way has been
 obscured, and many have missed their way
 The trailhead, the way to clearly start on the right path of interpreting this is actually verse 12,
 which for many of bibles has been lumped together with 13-14
 But look at it with me: ***"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for
 this is the Law and the Prophets."*** **Matthew 7:12**
 This is famously called the Golden Rule, and it provides the answer to the question in point #1

PP 1-Why is Jesus talking about prayer again?

Prosperity preachers love this passage: how to get your dreams fulfilled through prayer
 Less terribly perhaps are those who understand it to mean how we are to come to God for what
 we need in life, trusting that He is a good Father

Yet He has already taught His disciples how to pray in **Matthew 6:5-15**
 He already laid out the power and goodness of our Heavenly Father in **Matthew 6:25-34**
 But remember the theme in both of those passages: *the Kingdom of God*

PP *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* **Matthew 6:10**
**PP *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be
 added to you."*** **Matthew 6:33**

We are to pray for God's kingdom to come, where His will is done on earth as it is heaven
 His kingdom is where sin does not rule, evil does not have its way
 Where love and peace reigns, with no racism, no slavery, no violence, no fighting, no discord
 His kingdom lives in our hearts, His rule and reign making us increasingly like Jesus
 If God's kingdom reigns in us, then it will be evident in how we love and live
 Is His kingdom reigning in our families, our church, our neighborhoods, our schools?
 Where God's people are living as salt and light, God's kingdom reigns
 And the less we worry about the things we need, trusting our Heavenly Father to provide them,
 the more we will be free to seek and pursue His kingdom

So why does Jesus return to the subject of prayer again if not to teach us how to pray, or to trust
 that our Heavenly Father cares for us?
 The answer is seen in the 6 verses before this

Sometimes, when the Scriptures gives us a glimpse of our hearts, it isn't a pretty sight
 God snaps those x-Rays and puts them on that backlit display, it's sometimes cringeworthy
 Last week, you may have rediscovered that you are a pretty judgmental person
 You really do crave the throne, that judge's robe feels good on you
 That gavel seems to fit comfortably in your hand, and you pound it to deliver your critical verdict
 On the judge's seat, you have to look down to see the person you are hyper critical of
 There is an addictive, toxic power in playing God and judging others, exposing their faults and
 making them feel lower than yourself
 Now listen carefully, in that very moment, verse 12 is nowhere to be found in us
 Love which should be the badge of the God's disciple, is absolutely missing, and we have
 become tasteless salt and covered light and those around us are left in joyless darkness

Now what I just did was mash up verses 1-6 and verse 12
 But it is 7-11 that we find the solution, the rescue and the reason why Jesus returns to prayer
 It is how those in the kingdom of God can overcome a judgmental heart and discern rightly when
 to present the gospel and when to refrain

2-How can prayer set our hearts free to love instead of judge

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”
Matthew 7:7

For some, this seems like a blank check that God promises to sign
 Prosperity preachers love this verse...don't give up, pray harder
 There are 3 verbs here: ***“Ask...seek...knock”***
 They are each present tense commands, so keep asking, keep seeking and keep knocking
 Yet God is not someone you have to convince to act, or pester enough until He acts to shut us up
 He is not confused, trying to decide, and then you deliver Him a convincing enough argument
 Ask, seek, knock embodies movement and we need to look at each for a moment

PP i. Petition: *‘Ask, and it will be given to you’*

What an invitation to prayer...it couldn't be any more clear
 But there is an incredible world behind the word ***‘Ask’*** which we often ignore...humility
 To be in a position of asking is to be off the throne, and out of the seat of authority
 Judgmental, hyper critical people love the high position of the platform, the power that comes
 with looking at someone else and declaring, ‘You do not meet the standard...guilty!’
 But to ***‘Ask’*** God, often and repeatedly, is to admit and declare, there is only one Judge, and I am
 not Him
 It's a force for humility, a deep sense of being ***‘poor in spirit’*** (5:2)
 Think on this just a bit more with me if you would
 How often the antithesis of humility, pride, courses through our spiritual veins
 Pride makes an appearance in potentially every area of our lives
 There is a constant, unrelenting, ongoing war that the Christian must have with pride
 And the difficulty of pride is that it is
 There are people who declare, often unwittingly, that they know they are prideful

Any time someone says they know they are prideful, without deep sorrow and repentance, they have become prideful even of their pride

Jesus begins the war on a judgmental, hyper critical heart by putting us in the position of humility... 'Ask' God for wisdom and help, 'and it will be given to you'

This is one request that will always, in God's time and way, be granted!

PP *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind."* **James 1:5-6**

The context here is not praying for physical healing, a restored marriage, or a rebellious child. It is asking God to overcome judgmentalism, and to grant discernment in sharing the gospel.

PP ii. Pursue: 'seek, and you will find'

You may at this point be disappointed to learn that this prayer is not really about receiving from God the things you really long for.

Let me remind you Christian, *'your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all'* (6:32), so ask Him for them, but do not anxiously keep coming back, leave it with God so you can seek His kingdom... *'all these things will be added to you'* (6:33).

No, this teaching on prayer is about asking God to free our hearts to love and treat others as we want them to treat us.

Jesus begins with the posture of humility, and then moves to the posture of pursuing.

'Seek', pursue, it is to *'hunger and thirst for righteousness'* (5:6).

It necessarily follows humility, because we will not pursue and seek God's will and help in changing us to love and not judge if we believe we are just fine the way we are, or have our own ability to do better.

The pursuit of prayer is the overarching desire and need to know our Heavenly Father more.

It would be good to ask ourselves, do we pray in the posture of humility, and do we pray with the highest and greatest motive of simply, wonderfully, knowing God more?

Prayer is a declaration of dependence, so we ask.

It is a movement of pursuit, so we seek God.

As we will see in a moment, when we see the love, and mercy of God, it is at once disturbing to see its lack in us, and motivating to plead for God's help to display the same to others.

And this is what we see in the third imperative Jesus gives us.

PP iii. Persist: 'knock, and it will opened to you'

Do you recognize that you lack the wisdom to know how and when to share the good news of Christ, and to who?

Do you hate your lack of love, your lack of mercy with others?

To be honest, for me, and for most I know, there is not the evidence that we do!

If we do, we will plead, we will knock, we will implore our Heavenly Father, *'Change my heart, only You can, I cannot go on like this for it is not the way you display your love with me!'* *'Give me the wisdom to know when to give, and when to abstain from talking about the gospel.'*

This prayer is a prayer for transformation that only God's wisdom can bring!

It is the disciple often in prayer who is most made to be like Christ.

“For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” 7:8

Ask, knowing we have an open invitation to go to God in humility
 Seek, believing He alone has the power to change our hearts and pursuing Him in relationship
 Knock, imploring Him to do what only He can do...transform us to love in the way He loves us
 But asking, seeking and knocking can be really wonderful, or really awful, depending entirely on
 Who is on the other side of the door
 Jesus will not leave us wondering which one it will be, so He tells us what His Father is like
 What He will show us what our Heavenly Father's love looks like, and what ours should as well

PP 3-How should we be toward others?

When you ask, seek and knock in prayer, know that the answer God gives will be for your
 highest good

And this is how we are to love others...for their highest good

It may not be your highest good for a wealthy person to give you \$10,000 dollars to get out of
 debt, because unless your heart has changed, you may very well get right back in it

It may not be good to give your young child permission to go on vacation with a family, because
 perhaps that family has values in contradiction with Christ's

God will never give us anything except that which is for our highest good

PP “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” James 1:17

Jesus asked two rhetorical questions: ***“Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?” 7:9-10***

And then comes His point in those two examples: ***“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” 7:9-11***

Our Heavenly Father will never deceive us as the Greek gods were famous for doing

A serpent was considered unclean and Jews were banned from eating them, so again the point is
 our Heavenly Father's gifts will never lead us to temptation or defile us in any way

PP “The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.” Proverbs 10:22

In the way that God responds with good gifts for our highest good, **verse 12**, we should respond
 to others for their highest good Judgmental, hyper-critical attitudes are replaced with
 hearts that are for others

Gullibility is replaced with discernment, to know how to share, when to share, and with whom to
 share the pearl of the good news of Jesus Christ

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 7:12

This saying had been around in every major religion, but in every case, it was stated negatively

PP Rabbi Hillel, *‘What is hateful to yourself do not to someone else.’*

PP Confucius taught, *‘What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.’*

PP Greek philosopher Epictetus, *‘What you avoid suffering yourself, do not afflict on others.’*

It is often easier to stop wrong behavior than it is to start right behavior

But Jesus puts it in the positive, installing the gas pedal as well as the brake

I will tell you two things about this passage as we close, and they have the power to build faith
6 times Jesus uses the word 'Ask', telling us the invitation is always there for the Christian

Also, 6 times, He promises the petition will be answered: *'it will be given'; 'you will find'; 'the door will be opened'; 'receives'; 'finds'; 'opened'*

Are you joyless...ask, seek, knock!

Are you selfish...then petition, pursue, persist!

Are you hyper-critical and judgmental, or loveless, or lacking discernment, ...then pray!

God is ready and willing to pour out spiritual blessings, so we can love and do to others as He loves and does to us

PP *"One may be a truly industrious man, and yet poor in temporal things; but one cannot be a truly praying man, and yet poor in spiritual things."* John Broadus.

Amen?

Pray