

Bible Readings

Jeremiah 29:10-14

¹⁰ This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Matthew 7:7-12

Ask, Seek, Knock

⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Context

- We've been looking at the **Sermon on the Mount** for **several weeks** now
- **Jesus** has spent a great deal of time teaching **how** to get our hearts right towards God
- And **He knows** there is a **problem** with a **group** of people in His day who are **self-righteous** - they've **decided** themselves they are right with God and approved by God - and they **look down** on **everyone** else as **inferior**
- And **He's made it plain** in His teaching so far - that **self-righteousness** is not what is required
- In fact, He's told His listeners - their **righteousness must be greater than** this group of **self-righteous people**
- **Jesus so far has taught us in the Sermon on the Mount**
 - Our **attitude has to be right** - He says we have to ***hunger and thirst for righteousness, be merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers*** - and we ***may have to be persecuted*** for righteousness' sake
 - He's taught that we ***need to be salt and light*** in people's lives
 - He's taught that we ***can murder people in our hearts***
 - We can ***commit adultery in our hearts***
 - We have to ***have a heart for marriage - not divorce***
 - That we have to ***have a character that is honest - our yes/no must mean something***

- That *we don't retaliate* - we *turn the other cheek* - we even *pray for our enemies* and *love our enemies*
- He's taught we ought to be *generous in our giving to the needy* - our *left hand shouldn't know what our right hand is doing*
- That we are to be *sincere in our prayer life*
- That we should *focus on heavenly treasure* *not stuff on earth*
- And we are to *trust God instead of worrying*
- And then last week - *to judge ourselves and our own behaviour* *before* we start *evaluating other people's behaviour*
- To be honest this is a tall order - isn't it?
- It seems like Jesus has raised the bar too high!
- If you're like me - you might be saying - this is all too hard?
- If we're honest with ourselves - we might not feel like *being salt and light in some people's lives* - some people are just too difficult
- We might not feel like *turning the other cheek* and *loving and praying for our enemy* - and *we'd rather retaliate* - we're sick of being hurt
- We might not feel like *being merciful, or peaceful* - the people we're dealing with don't deserve it
- And we might not want to *go through any more trials and persecutions?*
- Well, that's where this morning's passage from **Matthew 7:7-12** comes in

- Jesus is saying if we want to be righteous and have a heart for God and a heart for others - then our attitude towards our Heavenly Father needs to be right - *so we must approach God for help*
- [Please turn to Matthew 7:7-12]

Our Attitude to our Heavenly Father (Matt 7:7-11)

Ask, Seek, Knock

[PowerPoint 1-Heading]

- Jesus says in v7 - "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you"
- Let's be clear from the offset this verse is not saying we have an open cheque book - or endless credit card - from God - and we can ask God for any material thing we like - and we will get it!
- Sorry folks!
- Other parts of the Bible talk about taking our requests to God for material things - like in Philippians 4
- But here in these verses - Jesus is **NOT** saying ask for material stuff
- He's saying in the context of the Sermon on the Mount -
- If there's something we lack in our hunger and thirst for righteousness - if there is something we lack to have a Christian character fit for the kingdom - then we can ask God for it - and we will receive it

- And He's saying in the **immediate context** of what we looked at last week - **when judging others behaviour to help them - we can ask God for spiritual discernment and wisdom - to judge ourselves properly and help others**
- Back in the OT - when **King Solomon** was first anointed King and very young - in 1 Kings 3:9 - He **spoke to God and said** - **Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil.** For who is able to judge this great people of Yours
- That's what Jesus is talking about here - if there's something we lack in our character as a Christian - then ask for it - just like Solomon did - Solomon knew he needed wisdom from God to discern between good and evil - and so he could judge and rule correctly - and God gave it to Him
- So, let's dig a little deeper into how we approach God for spiritual help
[PowerPoint 1a-Ask, seek, knock]
- In v7 - when Jesus commands "ask", "seek" and "knock"
- In the **Greek** - they are commands that we do continually
- Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking
- And notice the **promise behind each command** - see v8
- When we keep on asking - it will be **given to us**
- When we keep on seeking - we **will find it**

- When we keep on knocking - the **door** will be **opened**

[PowerPoint 1b-intensity]

- And notice there's a built in - **intensity**
- First, we ask, then we seek - and then we knock the door down!
- **John Stott** gives a great **illustration**
- If a boy can see his mum or she is nearby - the **boy** will **ask** her
- If his mum is somewhere else in the house - the **boy** will **seek** - and go looking for her
- If his mum is in her bedroom trying to have some time alone - the **boy** will **knock** on the door
- When we have a spiritual need - **Jesus says** - we show God, we really want it - by continually asking, seeking and knocking - with intensity
- Now with this asking, seeking and knocking
- **Jesus is saying** we CAN expect God to give us what we need

[PowerPoint 1c-expectation and confidence]

- He uses the **illustration** in **vv9-11**
- He says - as **earthly parents** (even though we are all sinful - evil He says) - we still know how to give our kids good stuff - if they ask for a vegemite sandwich - we don't give them a stone sandwich - and if they ask for fish fingers - we don't give them snake on toast

- **Jesus' argument is if sinful parents know how to give a child what they need - HOW MUCH MORE - INFINITELY MORE - can God supply us with "good gifts"**
- **In our OT reading from Jeremiah 29:10-14**
 - **God's people were in exile in Babylon - a punishment for their sin and rebellion**
 - **But God still loves them and wants what's good for them**
 - **He promises to bring them back**
 - **He promises restoration**
 - **He says He has plans for them - plans to prosper them - plans not to harm them but plans to give them a hope and a future**
 - **All they have to do is what Jesus is saying here - call God, pray to God, seek Him with all their heart - HE will be found**
- **If God cares for His people as He surely does - we can then ask, seek and knock - with expectation and confidence - that God will supply**

Objections to ask, seek and knock

[PowerPoint 2-Heading]

- This is a simple process Jesus gives for us to pray for our spiritual needs
- But people can raise a few objections with this simple method:

[PowerPoint 2a]

- Objection #1 - this *ask, seek and knock* prayer method **seems a bit improper**. It implies that God needs to be told what we lack or that God needs to be bullied into giving what we ask.

And besides Jesus has said earlier in the **Sermon on the Mount** - God knows what we need. And besides that, **earthly parents don't always wait to supply their children's needs until they ask for them?**

The reason God waits for us to ask - is **He wants us to recognize our spiritual need (like Solomon did) and turn to Him in humility and ask Him**. The Apostle James - in the context of relationship problems - says "**you do not have because you do not ask**" (James 4:2)

[PowerPoint 2b]

- Objection #2 - **Prayer seems unnecessary**. Christian's look around and see people getting on fine without prayer. **The farmer gets a good crop by labour, not by prayer; the mother gets her new baby by medical skill, not by prayer; the family balances its budget by hard-work and earning a good wage, not by prayer. What's the point in praying, it makes no difference - some people argue?**

To answer this objection, we need to distinguish between the gifts we receive from God - as the Creator - and the gifts we receive from God as our Heavenly Father.

It's true, God gives certain gifts (harvest, babies, food, life) whether people pray or not, whether they believe in Him or not. He **sends rain**

from Heaven and **fruitful seasons** to all. He **makes the sun rise** on evil and the good alike (Matt 5:45)

But God's redemption gifts to those who believe are different. These are the good gifts that Jesus refers to in v11. These good gifts are not material blessings but spiritual blessings - like forgiveness, deliverance from evil, peace, the increase of faith, hope and love - the understanding of God's Word through the HS - and so on...

[PowerPoint 2c]

- Objection #3 - Prayer doesn't work.

People might say - I prayed for wisdom to pass an exam and I failed it; I prayed to be healed of an illness and it got worse. I prayed for peace in the world and there's more conflict than ever!

To answer that we mustn't see this ask, seek and knock prayer method - as though God is Aladdin - we rub Aladdin's lamp and up pops God like a genie to fulfil our next prayer wish.

Being perfectly good, our Heavenly Father knows what gifts are good for us, His children - and being perfectly wise, our Heavenly Father knows what gifts are wisest for us.

Jesus has said in His illustration - human parents would never give a stone or a snake to their children who ask for bread and fish. But what if the children - through ignorance or foolishness - actually ask for a stone or snake for food? A human parent wouldn't grant that request, unless they were irresponsible.

In the same way, Our Heavenly Father, wouldn't give us something harmful for us, even if we out of ignorance or foolishness ask for it. V11 says He gives only good gifts!

So then if we ask for good things, he grants them;

If we ask for things which are not good (either not good in themselves or not good for us or for others); **he denies them.**

We could summarise all this by saying God gives us good gifts according to His will and purpose for us.

Going back to the unanswered prayers - I raised earlier. Perhaps God wants us to repeat the failed exam to learn more on the subject or to learn perseverance. Perhaps God didn't heal the person because He wants them to trust Him more and rely on Him more or He wants them in Heaven now; perhaps peace for the world is not happening - because through conflict in the world, God wants more people to turn to Him.

Lessons of ask, seek and knock

[PowerPoint 3a]

- What lessons do we learn from this "ask, seek, knock" prayer method?
- Well - **First** - if God gives gifts only according to His will, we have to take pains to discover His will - by reading and meditating on His Word - and learning more about Him

[PowerPoint 3b]

- **Second** - it requires us to have faith. It is one thing to know God's will; it is another to humble ourselves before Him and express our confidence that He is able to cause His will to be done

[PowerPoint 3c]

- **Third** - it requires us to have desire. We may know God's will and believe He can perform it, and still not desire it.
- **Prayer is the chief means God has ordained** by which we can express our deepest desires. This is the reason why "ask, seek, knock" commands are in this ascending scale to challenge our perseverance
- Therefore, before we ask, we must know what to ask for and whether it is according to God's will, we must believe God can grant it and we must genuinely want to receive it.

Application of ask, seek and knock

[PowerPoint 4a]

- Applying this to our lives this morning:
- Do an assessment of ourselves on the spiritual gifts we lack - write them down - Gal 5:22-23 is helpful - love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - which ones do we lack?
- Or perhaps we have a problem with: sexual purity or pornography, hatred towards someone, jealousy, anger, selfishness, pride (Gal 5:19-20) or telling lies - write them down

- Then ask, seek and knock - with **intensity**, with **confidence** that God will supply

[PowerPoint 4b]

- In terms of helping people - do an assessment on people we know that don't know Jesus - **what do they need to come to the Lord** [they don't need a sportscar - a boat - a mansion -) - **pray that God will change their heart of stone to a heart of flesh** - **soften their hearts** - **open their hearts for the Gospel**
- Then **ask, seek and knock** - with **intensity**, with **confidence** that God will supply

Our Attitude to Others (Matt 7:12)

[PowerPoint 5-Golden Rule]

- Having got our attitude right with our Heavenly Father and received the spiritual discernment through asking, seeking and knocking- we can then have the right attitude towards others - by practicing the **Golden Rule of v12** -
- **So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.**
- Notice in this rule - **we are the ones acting first** - we do to others - so we go looking for a friend first, we go and show kindness first - we're not passive - waiting for others to come to us
- Charles Spurgeon puts it this way: *Oh, that all people acted on it, and there would be no slavery, no war, no swearing, no striking, no lying,*

no robbing; but all would be justice and love! What a kingdom is this which has such a law!

- But remember the Golden Rule means paying a price
- If we want God's best for ourselves and others - but others resist God's will - they will oppose us. We are to be salt in people's lives - but our salt might sting another person's open wound - and they don't like it. We are to be light in people's lives - but our light might expose their dirt - and they don't like it!
- But we must still practice the Golden Rule - Jesus commands it
- Because it summarises The Law and the Prophets
- What does He mean by that?
- Well Jesus summed up the Law and the Prophets - as loving God and loving our neighbour as ourselves.
- Showing the Golden Rule amounts to one word - LOVE!
- The Golden Rule is about showing the love of Jesus - to everyone

Conclusion

[PowerPoint 6]

- To finish up then...
- If we were to **summarize what Jesus** is saying in **Matthew 7:7-12**
- It will amount to **what Jesus** has already said back in Matt 6:33
- We are to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Let's pray...