

Text: Matthew 7:7-11

Title: Ask!

Truth: The Lord exhorts us to ask for our needs.

Date/Location: July 25, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

This is another well-known part of the Sermon on the Mount. It is so comforting to know that God cares about what we need, and invites us to ask Him for those things.

I. Instruction: Ask and Receive, v. 7-8

A. Our Lord's teaching here offers an easy verse to memorize because it is short, and it has three parallel phrases that are basically synonymous:

1. **Ask** → and it will be **given** to you;
2. **Seek** → and you will **find**;
3. **Knock** → and it will be **opened** to you.

Asking means you need something. **Seeking** means you lost something or do not have something that you are looking for or hoping for. **Knocking** means that there is some door that is closed to you but which you want to access. The things you are asking/seeking/knocking for are almost as variable and numerous as you can imagine.

If your life really lacks something of importance; if you are missing something you need; if you cannot get through to someone or something; then it may simply be a case of "you do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). It is like sowing seed or seeking the lost to be saved. If you do not sow a lot of seed, or work with a lot of lost people, or in this case, ask God for what you need, you can expect very little in return.

B. Reason for such requests: God will respond.

1. For everyone who **asks** → **receives**;
2. And he who **seeks** → **finds**;

3. And to him who **knocks** → it will be **opened**.

James 1:17 tells us that every good gift is from heaven and comes from God. See Luke 18:7-8.

There are certain caveats that we must observe about this teaching, because it is not a blanket promise that we can ask for our Christmas wish list and get everything we want!

C. We must understand this teaching considering the instruction in the rest of Scripture that we must ask **in agreement with the will of God**.

1. This means we ask in the name of Jesus, i.e. requests worthy of Jesus's name being attached: John 14:13-14, 26; 15:16, 16:23, 26.

2. And it means we ask according to His will: 1 John 5:14-16.

D. We must also ask for that which is **pleasing** to God.

E. We must also ask with the **right motivation**. James 4:3 concedes that the readers were asking. But they were asking with a mind toward spending what they received on their own pleasures. It was a selfish asking, not a selfless asking.

F. We must ask with a **clean heart**. 1 John 3:22 and Psalm 66:18 indicate that if we harbor sin in our hearts, God will not hear. Another example is that our prayers will be hindered if we are out of sorts with our spouses, 1 Peter 3:7.

G. We must ask **persistently**. Luke 11:5-13 illustrates with the friend who comes late at night wanting to borrow some food. Verse 9 is a parallel to Matthew 7:7. But it can be translated as “keep asking/seeking/knocking” because the verbs are present tense. They have an ongoing idea to them—and those are the very same words we find in Matthew 7. “Be about asking. Keep seeking. Continue knocking.” Without giving in to vain repetition, or just giving out altogether (Luke 18:1), we are to ask persistently for those things that we know meet the criteria we gave above. We likely do not know what the outcome will be, but we know that if it turns out as we ask then it seems that it will please God, as best we can understand.

II. Illustration: Evil People Often Respond Well to Asking, v. 9-

11a

- A. The Lord poses a hypothetical situation. Suppose a man's son asks for a bread or fish. The nature of the things asked for indicates that we should not impute a negative motivation to the boy. He is simply hungry, and he is asking for things that are completely legitimate! He is not asking for a toy or a luxury to spend on his pleasures.
- B. The father will not (usually!) give the boy a stone or a snake. The stone is useless to satisfy the child's hunger, and the snake is dangerous and scary. Loving parents do not do that sort of thing to their children.

Caveat: there are some particularly evil people who abuse children. That will be more oft the case as society descends deeper and deeper into lawlessness.

- C. The first part of verse 11 expresses Jesus' belief that people are sinners. There is a mixed audience of disciples and the multitude here. We also face the fact that this Sermon is intended for a worldwide audience throughout the rest of history after the sermon was given. This evident intention of God means that Jesus is expressing a basic truth of all humanity. He is not being offensive here; He is being *truthful*. He is being frank. He is setting us over against the godness of His Father in Heaven, and saying that by direct comparison, we are evil. We may have some good streaks, so to speak, but we are not good.

Humans are depraved sinners. What does this mean? Not that all people behave as badly as possible at all times. It means that we are all infected by sin; that sin dominates our lives before we are saved; that we are dead in sins before salvation; that we are unable to save ourselves or lift ourselves out of the miry pit of sin and death. We need rescue.

Extent of Sin and Individual Depravity.¹ I believe that this spiritual death and the consequent moral and spiritual corruption of human nature has been transmitted to the entire human race,² the Man Christ Jesus alone being excepted; and hence that every child of Adam is born into the world with a nature which not only possesses no spark of divine life,³ but is essentially and unchangeably bad apart from divine grace, destitute of any moral good, and utterly unable to merit God's favor or contribute to his salvation.⁴ This is called depravity. It is total in the sense that it affects every aspect of man's being: mind,⁵ will,⁶ heart,⁷ body,⁸ mouth,⁹ affections,¹⁰ etc. Man is therefore a slave¹¹ to sin, is God's enemy¹² and is under God's wrath¹³ and condemnation because of His guilt.¹⁴ All men, including true Christians, have a sin nature and do commit sin,¹⁵ though the effects of total depravity are mitigated by the new birth.¹⁶

D. The first portion of verse 11 also expresses that people, as evil as they are, retain some goodness from their original constitution as God's image-bearers. Humans bear a personal, spiritual, moral likeness to God. Part of what is good in God was originally shared with humanity in the creation of Adam and Eve. This goodness was damaged, though something of it remains yet in the hearts of people that causes them to love and be sacrificial and sympathetic

¹ From my personal doctrinal statement.

² 1 Kings 8:46; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:9-18; 5:19; 1 Cor. 15:22

³ Psalm 51:5; 58:3

⁴ Isa. 64:6; Matt. 19:25-26; Rom. 4:5-6; 5:6; 8:7; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5

⁵ Eph. 4:17-19

⁶ John 5:40; 8:34; 1 Peter 4:3

⁷ Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21-23; Rom. 1:24; Eph. 4:18

⁸ Rom. 8:10

⁹ Rom. 3:14

¹⁰ John 3:19

¹¹ John 8:34; Rom. 6:6, 20; Titus 3:3

¹² Rom. 8:6-7; Col. 1:21

¹³ John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6

¹⁴ Rom. 3:19; 5:16, 18

¹⁵ 1 John 1:8, 10

¹⁶ 2 Cor. 5:17

and caring. It restrains the sin of human beings so that the most depraved forms of sin are not everywhere present all the time.

III. Theology: God is Far Better in Giving Than We Are, v. 11b

A. God's character is good. The theology of this idea is engaging to the mind. Psalm 73:1 says that God is good to Israel. The "Lord is good" is oft repeated in Scripture: Psalm 34:8, 100:5, 135:3, 145:9, 33:11, Lam. 3:25, Nah. 1:7. The value of going over these verses is to remind us of the truth and to combat the ever-present notion that God is bad. If you think that, you are in conflict with the Bible and guilty of slandering God. The problem—if you say God is bad—lies completely inside of you instead of in God. You demonstrate that you do not know God and that your authority in matters of religion is yourself. That is a poor substitute for the truth and authority of God and it is leading you astray.

Example: you are an atheist and think that God is evil—or you believe that "the idea of God" is evil. First of all, if atheism is true, God does not exist and so cannot be good or evil.

Second, if all that *exists* about God is some wayward soul's *idea* of God, then you need to prove that all such conceptions of God lead people to do evil and that the idea is inherently evil in itself. That is patently false and absurd, so you must abandon that. Obviously there are wayward souls who claim to be doing God a service by killing others, but these must be eliminated from consideration because they are obviously in the wrong—anyone who has read the Bible knows that in a half a second.

Third, you have to contend with the fact that it is *people* who are evil. God created humans to be good and commanded humans to be good. It is not sensible to blame God for people's wrong choices, at least if you want to preserve any modicum of moral agency in the human race.

Fourth, you have to deal with the impossibility of the contrary of God's existence. If God does not exist, you do not exist, because there is no realistic way you can really think that beings as complex as us, or even as complex as a fruitfly, came into existence by mere chance. You know that random chance is not how reality works. If

God does not exist, then there is no objective basis for morals, science, logic, the laws of nature, or any other constant that you assume to be true every day.

B. God's giving is in accordance with His good character. God gives us rain and food (Acts 14:17; see also Lev. 26:4 and a bevy of texts in which God promises rain and agricultural prosperity to His people if they are obedient to him). He gave us His word; He gives wisdom (Prov. 2:6); He gives understanding in spiritual things (1 John 5:20, 2 Tim. 2:7). He gives knowledge and joy (Eccl. 2:26). He gives every good gift (James 1:17); He gives us life and breath (Acts 17:25) and family and children and loved ones and friends and everything truly good in life. God gives the increase in church work (1 Cor. 3:6). God gives the Holy Spirit to believers (Acts 11:17).

If you do not see this, then you are blind and need to repent of your lack of gratitude to God (Rom. 1:21). Not being thankful to God is a serious sin.

Conclusion

The Christian can confidently ask God for whatever is needful. Not only is this an opportunity available, but Jesus commands it. Ask!

The believer can rely upon God's goodness to give what is best in response to that request. Even if you do not know how to ask, or what to ask for, you can be confident that God is good and He will respond in the best possible way to your request.

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