



## **Matthew: The King and His Kingdom**

*Series: The Manifesto of the King, Part 24: Ask, Seek, Knock...*

Matthew 7:7-12

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Introduction: We come this morning to the second time in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus is going to give us instructions regarding prayer. At first, you might wonder why this is here. After all, Jesus has already dealt with prayer and explained the differences between God-honoring prayer and its hypocritical counterfeit, but if we consider the context of His encouragement to prayer, it will become clear why Jesus says what He does this morning. Jesus is coming to the close of the teaching portion of the Sermon on the Mount – all that remains after today are warnings...

In this sermon, Jesus has bombarded his disciples with uncompromising descriptions of what a faithful disciple looks like. For instance, in this sermon Jesus has called us to humility and mourning over sin, to endure persecution with joy, to be salt and light in the world, to put anger to death and pursue reconciliation, to resist lust, to exalt marriage, to speak truthfully, to forgo retaliation, to love our enemies and seek their good, to be perfect as our Father in heaven in perfect, to give and pray and fast with proper motives, to lay up treasures in heaven, to resist anxiety, to judge ourselves and to judge others with righteous judgment, to refrain from casting the pearls of the gospel before pigs and dogs.

Wow. If you are like me you have come face to face with how far short you fall of this sermon. It all seems so completely overwhelming, impossible to attain, beyond our ability to obey and it is. That is the point. These words are not some new legalism for us to fall into. This is NOT simply a new standard of morality to pursue. If we were left to our own power, left to our own strength, overwhelming despair is the proper response to these words from Jesus because we cannot, in our own strength, live up to these descriptions. It is impossible in our own power. But, the key to living out the commands of the Sermon on the Mount is exactly to realize that we cannot do it on our own. It goes all the way back to the first beatitude: 3“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who know their spiritual

bankruptcy, those who realize they are utterly sinful and weak and who are desperate for God's grace, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. It is this Spirit wrought realization of personal, moral, and spiritual emptiness, brokenness and powerlessness, a realization of our depravity that drives us to the riches of God's grace in Christ, to the grace and forgiveness and redemption and salvation and peace and joy and the blessing of God through faith in the sinless crucified and resurrected Christ. That is the whole point.

Apart from poverty of spirit we will never see our need for Christ and respond to the gospel promises of salvation through our wrath bearing and righteousness providing substitute. And apart from ongoing poverty of spirit, we will never see our continuing dependence upon God in Christ and in His strength and mercy to live out the life of a disciple of Christ. The heart of this sermon has always been that this life that Jesus describes here is the fruit of joyful and personal submission to Christ as King and Lord.

Jesus' sermon describes the surpassing righteousness, humility, integrity, purity and love expected of those who are disciples of Christ and members of the Kingdom of God. These standards can be terrifying. Who is adequate for these things? How can we live up to such a high standard? We are sinners. What we realize immediately is that we need mercy. We are brought face to face with the clear reality that not only do we need God's grace to be raised from spiritual death, the grace of Christ's obedience to the law and death on the cross for our salvation, the grace to believe in his finished work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead to save repentant sinners from hell, but we also need continuing power and grace to live out the gospel, we need grace to walk and to live like this, grace and strength to walk in the newness of life, but where is it going to come from? How can we ever find the strength to live this sermon out? Jesus answers us today: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7, ESV) What great news this is. Standing face to face with this description of what true salvation looks like, worked out in the life of a believer, we all feel undone and unworthy. We realize our utter helplessness and our desperate need of God's might and power and grace working through us. Jesus gives us the answer for our fears and He promises us: "For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:8, ESV)

This is why it is so important that we keep the context of these verses before us. It is common to hear preachers treat these words from Jesus as if they are just a list of proverbs at the end of the Sermon on the Mount and they will then use them to make a up a theology of prayer and

miss the point of why they are there in the first place. It is also quite common to hear pastors rip these verses out of their context and will use them to justify greed in the name of Christ. God is just a great big slot machine in the sky, and all you have to do is pull the handle enough times and you'll get whatever you are hoping for. That is a horrible defiling of these verses. This is the very ploy of Satan, for you to take these words of God and never apply them in the way that they are truly intended, to get you to miss the power of these words, by ripping them out of context and drawing your attention away from their intended purpose to promote your growth in Christ, to clamor after the passing things of this world. Satan delights to do that, to twist these words and misapply them, to keep you from what you have been created and redeemed for – becoming like Christ. Rather than being *carte blanche* to get whatever it is that you desire from God, these verses encourage us to pray for the character of the kingdom to be manifested in our lives. Jesus is teaching us how to pray for our spiritual lives. He is teaching us to pray for the Kingdom life to be fully revealed, fully embraced, fully manifested in the life that we live. Here, in these words, is the secret to living the life of a true disciple. Let's see what He says. First he tells us to ask, to seek, and to knock:

1) Ask, Seek, Knock...(v. 7-8) Let's look again and understand what Jesus says in 7-8: "“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7–8, ESV)

These words – ask, seek, and knock – they are all present imperatives. In other words, Jesus is literally saying – keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. The secret to seeing the Sermon on the Mount become a reality in your life as a child of God is persistent and determined prayer. In fact, each one of these words is meant to illuminate a different aspect of persistent prayer.

The word “ask” means to plead, to request something with urgency. It is the word used to describe a beggar. It is a word that is meant to bring forth humility, to remind us of the deep desperation and need that we have for God's grace to meet our spiritual needs when we come to him in prayer. The word “seek” means to hunt for something, to search diligently and unceasingly for something. It speaks of the single-mindedness of the person who has lost something of great worth and value, who will turn their house or car upside-down until they find it. And then the word “knock”. The idea here is of pounding or banging on the door. The idea is persevering in boldness until we have the thing that we ask for.

With these words, Jesus is drawing a picture of persistent, purposeful, eager, earnest, dependant prayer. Not the kind of prayer that consists of an occasional request for some isolated blessing, but prayer that is the burning pursuit of God. This asking is an asking for virtues Jesus has just talked about; this seeking is a seeking for God; this knocking is a knocking at heaven's throne room. Jesus is telling us that the secret to seeing the characteristics of the true disciple in your life is the pursuit of God in prayer, earnest seeking of the Lord, abiding in God through His Son Jesus Christ.

In tying our spiritual growth and our spiritual vitality to the passionate pursuit of God in prayer, Jesus is coming against two of the great hindrances to our spiritual lives. The exhortation by Christ to pray is an attack on the arrogant self-confidence that says that I can keep these words from Christ on my own without any divine power and enablement, that arrogance that reduces these words to a new legalism, a new set of rules by which I can earn merit with God and thereby earn salvation. He wants us to know our dependence upon God. It is in essence the same message that Christ gave His disciples in John 15 when He said: "(John 15:4–5, ESV)

The second thing this dependence on prayer does is to combat lethargy and passivity in our spiritual lives. It is true that our salvation is a sovereign act of God and I believe fully in the sovereignty of God over all things. He will work out and accomplish His purposes in this earth and in our lives. He cannot be frustrated. But simply because God is sovereign, does not mean that we have no responsibility. God is a God of means. And one of the means by which He accomplishes His purposes is through human responsibility – human responsibility to hear and believe and respond to His truth. We have responsibility to hear the exhortations of the word of God and by God's power to perform them. In order to grow in the grace of God in Christ, in order to see the practical fruit of God's saving grace to us in Christ manifest in our lives, we must ask, seek, and knock. God demands that we pursue Him. We must pray importunately – that is, persistently, unrelentingly, and with determination. We have a responsibility to pray. It is part of what Peter is talking about when he tells us "to be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure..." (2 Peter 1:10, ESV)

Now, prayer like this presupposes some things. It presupposes true, saving faith. These words are not for everyone, but for those who have received the salvation by grace that is alone found in Jesus Christ "whom God put forward as a propitiation (the punishment taker for sinners) by

his blood, to be received by faith.” (Romans 3:25, ESV) Certainly this invitation to ask, seek and knock is given only to those who are the children of God by faith. But not only is saving faith in view here, but an active, growing faith as well – an active growing faith that believes not only that God hears but also that God answers the prayers of his children.

Prayer like this also presupposes knowledge of the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout the Word of God. It is impossible to form meaningful prayers, substantive prayers apart from any knowledge of what to ask for. Effective prayer as it regards our spiritual growth demands that we know what is the teaching of the Word of God regarding God’s desires for our spiritual growth. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification...”(1 Thessalonians 4:3a, ESV) In order to pray effectively, we need to know what that looks like.

Moreover, prayer like this presupposes true desire for God’s will, for His work in us to be accomplished. Prayer like this presupposes a desire that is more than the momentary, flash in the pan style of Christianity in our day that calls for only a profession of faith, maybe some version of “the sinner’s prayer”, even baptism, that has no staying power and lacks perseverance. True Christians, those who truly have been redeemed by the blood of Christ persist in desiring that the character, and behavior that Jesus called for in the Sermon on the Mount be shown consistently in our lives. One of the most deadly things in the Christian life is to be satisfied with fleeting, short-lived desires. If we really want to be men and women of God, if we really want to know Him, and walk with Him and have a life that looks like Jesus, we must persist in asking, seeking, and knocking every day.

Last, prayer like this presupposes humility, dependence, and weakness. We know our inclination toward sin; we know the weakness of our flesh; we know how inadequate we are. We are honest with the Lord and know that our only hope is found in Him. No spiritual progress is made apart from God’s grace.

When we pray, as the children of God for the realities of this sermon to be worked into our lives, we pray for humility and mourning over sin, joy-filled endurance, saltiness, peace, reconciliation, purity, truthfulness, a God-exalting marriage, right motives, right judgment – all of it. When we pray earnestly, asking and seeking and knocking for these things, Jesus promises: For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who

knocks it will be opened. Jesus is telling us in no uncertain terms, if we ask and seek and knock we will certainly have the answer to our prayers. If we ask and seek and knock in sincerity and in true faith, seeking the character and life that Jesus has described for us and called us to in these words, we will certainly have the answer to our prayers. Jesus can say this with absolute certainty and confidence, absolute assurance because He knows:

2) Your Father is For You (v. 9-11) Jesus speaks with such certainty here, because He knows the character and the heart of Father God for His children. So He says to us: “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? 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!” (Matthew 7:9–11, ESV)

Jesus could have used anything that He wanted to in order to explain His confidence that God will with certainty answer your prayers for the Sermon on the Mount to be worked out in your life. He could have appealed to God’s sovereignty. He could have spoken of His own knowledge of the Father’s will. He could have referenced God’s eternal plan of redemption -- (Romans 8:29, ESV) There are a million things that Jesus could have referred to but what is the fundamental thing that Jesus chooses to stress? Beloved, Jesus points to these twin truths: God is your Father and He is good.

That is why Jesus makes this comparison between earthly fathers, all of us fallen and sinners by nature, who still know how to give good things, needful things, to our children who ask of us. We are by nature evil and we still do our children good. By contrast, it is God’s nature to be good and show goodness to His children.

That is one of the greatest encouragements we could every have when it comes to praying. We know that God is good and God desires good for us. He desires to answer prayers for spiritual growth. God is for you in holiness. God is for you in growing in the image of Christ. He is for your spiritual maturity. God desires to give you the good things necessary to make the demands of the Sermon on the Mount a reality in your life. All you have to do is earnestly and sincerely pray with faith.

God is not like the father who makes unreasonable demands without any means to their accomplishment. Through Christ, He gives us these words of the Sermon on the Mount and He gives to us the very means – prayer -- by which they can come to fruition. He promises to give us good things and the good things that God gives His children are whatever we need to be faithful to Him -- whether strength, wisdom, power, energy, ability, encouragement, or a thousand more things, these He will give to us if we ask, seek and knock. It only makes sense. (Romans 8:32, ESV) God will give us good things as His children, precisely because He has already given us the greatest gift of becoming His children. The great question is this – do we believe Jesus? Do we really believe that God desires only good for us as His children?

So much of our failure to engage in persistent and believing prayer is found right there. We have a low view of God as our Father. What is your view of God? Do you see Him as a far-off God who is unconcerned for you and uncaring on a day-by-day basis? Do you see Him as an exacting judge who demands that you fulfill to the letter all of the commands of the Sermon on the Mount before He will hear you at all? Do you see God as having a clenched fist which you must pry open in order to receive any blessing from Him at all? The truth is that many of us, for lack of a better phrase, are practical atheists. How do I mean that? It's not that we do not believe in God, or even believe the eternal promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ – salvation from hell and a reception in heaven. The issue is that we either do not believe that God is able or that God is willing to make the gospel promises real in our lives right now. We come to church, we serve in church, but in the back of our minds, in those little places we don't talk about with other Christians, in that deep part of our heart that we hide, we do not really believe that the gospel is really sufficient to deal with our sinfulness fully or that God is really willing to change us right now. That little seed of unbelief always is seeking to raise its head – that little voice that says God is not able; He is not willing. I am too great a sinner.

But what Jesus is telling us here, as the children of God by faith, is the exact opposite. The Lord does not want you playing at church or playing at life. He wants you to know the present reality of your salvation. He has made you to be here, in this church today and over the last several weeks, to hear these words of this sermon from His holy Son Jesus Christ so that you would be changed – that your deceptiveness would end, that your pride would be killed, that you would learn to forego retaliation and extend grace and forgiveness, that you would reject worldliness and pursue treasures in heaven, that your marriage would be healed and holy. God is able. God is willing to do all these things in you and more. Christ has fulfilled the Law on your behalf, paid the penalty of God's wrath against your sin, in His flesh on the tree, bled and

died and rose again not only so that you would be saved in the future, but so that you would walk in the newness of life – this life that He has described right HERE, right NOW.

Ask, seek, knock, and when you do, remember that when you pray, you are speaking to the God, your Father, who loves you and truly desires to bless you. You are speaking to the God, your Father, who has demonstrated His gracious love toward you in a host of ways—not the least of which is in His provision for and accomplishment of your redemption. When you pray, you are speaking to the God, your Father, who sent His only begotten, sinless, holy Son to take your place on the cross, the God, your Father, who was satisfied the payment of Christ’s blood for your debt, the God, your Father, who ordained the means of your escape from His wrath while He exacted justice and upheld His holiness against your Substitute. You are speaking to the God, your Father, who has adopted you as His own son or daughter.

God’s covenant love for you, revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, is the ultimate motivation for asking, seeking, and knocking. You have no reason to question the heart of God for you. If you believe the gospel, you must know that He loves you and that He is willing and able to bless you exceedingly and abundantly above all you ask or think – Eph 3:20. As our Father, He is interested in you, He is concerned about you. He is watching over you. He has a plan and purpose with respect to you and He is always willing to hear and to answer your prayers. Lay hold of that. Take firm grasp of that truth.

Jesus means for us to see and to know that our relationship with Him is not cold and detached, it is warm and loving and intimate—it is like the wonderful, healthy relationship between a father and a child, only in this case, the Father is God and He is perfect! He is intimately involved in your life, determined to do you good if you will ask, seek, and knock. After calling us to pray and reminding us of God’s willingness to answer our prayers with good things, as He closes the teaching portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us

3) A Short and Sweet Summation (v. 12) In one condensed, to the point, boiled down statement, Jesus summarizes all that He has been teaching in the Sermon, sort of a shorthand reminder of all that He has taught. He says: ““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, ESV) This statement by Jesus, the one that has been called the “Golden Rule” is not some universally applicable religious statement that if everyone just lived by we would have some wonderful Utopia. That is not what this is at all. How can it be? Those who are outside of Christ have no power or

desire to follow the Golden Rule. They have darkened and hardened hearts. They do not know what is truly good and they cannot do what is truly good.

Instead, what this is, is a shorthand reminder for all of us who know Christ as Savior and Lord of how the application of the Sermon on the Mount works itself out practically in the life of a disciple of Christ as he or she lives in this world. Having a soul that has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and having a mind that has been renewed by the Word of God, and being indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and knowing what is right and good and pure and holy and just, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. This requires refining and sanctifying grace from God. That is why the command to pray persistently to the Father precedes the Golden Rule; for it is only as the Father enables us that we have the grace needed to treat others in the way that we desire to be treated.

Now listen, Jesus is not saying, “Do to others what we would like for them to do for us in order that they will do it to us.” It is not be nice to others and they will be nice to you. There is no guarantee how others will respond to us. None at all. Rather, the reason we are to do to others what we would like them to do to us is that that kind of behavior, from a redeemed soul and renewed mind, sums up the Law and the Prophets – it conforms to the Kingdom of God.

#### 4) Application

The first thing we must be certain of is that we are children of God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Are you? Do you know that you have sinned against God, that you deserve His wrath and His punishment? Do you know and believe that God has dealt with your sin and your guilt by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross of Calvary for you? Have you believed in Him and received eternal life, becoming the child of God through adoption? Do you know what it is to know God as Father and not as judge?

If you are a child of God, then the application of today’s message is short and sweet. Six words. Let’s take Jesus at His word. ““Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7–8, ESV) Let’s take Him at His word and let’s pray. This promise of God’s desire to do us good and to bless us should change the orientation of the whole of our lives. God has made an eternal and steadfast commitment to

hear our prayers and to answer them and to do good to us – to make us conform to these words of Christ. We will have failures; we will sin as we grow in grace, but God will remain utterly and completely faithful. Search out what is lacking in your life in light of the Sermon in the Mount. Pray passionately for them – keep asking, seeking, and knocking. And have faith that your Father will give them to you. How does your prayer life compare with the description Jesus gives? If we aren't praying as we should or as we could, given what the Savior tells us, we should find tremendous encouragement in the words of Jesus. He is not telling us to stay away from God until we fix ourselves, He is urging us to come to our Father and we will find God, as our loving heavenly Father, ready to welcome us.

There are certain times in every Christian's life when we really need to take stock of where we are with Christ, when we really need to examine ourselves. If you find yourself troubled today with a graceless heart, prayerless days, apathy in the heavenly race, convicted of wasted opportunities to glorify and speak of Christ and wasted moments and time poorly spent; if you find yourself lamenting a life that is far short of what it should be in Christ, then I encourage you today to repent and to pray. Take Jesus at His Word and pray and know that your Father in heaven delights to do you good and to answer your heart's desire to grow in Christ if you will only ask, seek, and knock.

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