

The Sermon on the Mount

Session 12 – “Living by Faith” – Matthew 7:7-14

Some say that science and Christianity are at odds with one another. (I don't believe that!) In a very real way, these verses are using an acknowledged principle of science: the basis of scientific procedure is that truth exists and can be found. And so here is a search for truth that progresses in its urgency and earnestness.

Verses 7 & 8...*Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*

1. What do you feel is the heart of what Jesus is saying here? When a person prays, they pray in harmony with their view of who God is. The ancient Greeks believed that the gods were capricious, so they came very warily. Some view their God as vengeful, and so they pray with fear. But, as we see in Jesus Christ, God is gracious, One to whom we are taught to come boldly and with assurance.

2. When you think of praying to God, how do you envision who God is? “You” in this text is second person plural. (In the south: “all y’all”!) But does this mean absolutely everyone? No, from the context of the whole Sermon on the Mount, this is directed to believers, those who have God as their Father.

It also best applies to those who are the Father's **obedient** children. 1 John 3:21b-22 says, *We have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him.*

Asking...Even though God is omniscient, as Christians we are told to ask for the things that God promises. We saw this in our study of James. In 1:5-6, he wrote, *If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. ⁶But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.* And then in James 4:2b, *You do not have, because you do not ask.* (See also Matthew 9:37-38)

Are you having difficulty living a Christian life? Ask!
Do you struggle to understand the Bible? Ask!
Is it difficult for you to articulate your faith to others? Ask!
Does your church have needs of any sort? Ask!

Remember that this comes after Jesus has just laid out quite a few things that should characterize our lives as Christians. So we should ask God for meekness, purity, a thirst for righteousness, the ability to love those who are hard to love, etc.

In the Greek of the New Testament, there are two kinds of imperatives. The aorist imperative is a command to do something at a specific point in time. The present imperative is to keep doing something. James Boice gives this illustration: “If we were to say to a person driving a car, ‘Stop at that light,’ *stop* would be an aorist imperative; it would refer to only one action. However, if one were then to say, ‘And don't forget always stop for the red lights,’ in this sentence *stop* would be a present imperative; for it would refer to something to be done repeatedly.” The verbs, “ask...seek...knock” in the original Greek used here are in the present imperative. “Keep on asking...”, etc.

Sermon on the Mount – 12, Matthew 7:7-14

Several of the parables of Jesus illustrate the concept of prevailing or persistent prayer. See Luke 11:5-10 and Luke 18:1-8. And the Apostle Paul wrote “Pray continually.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

3. How do you do in persisting in prayer? What things make it difficult?

Prayer is best described by the Latin phrase: “Coram Deo” which means, “living in the presence of God.”

God’s power is ready and waiting to flow through our faith.

Verses 9-11...*Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰ Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

A. W. Tozer once said, “The hard work of prayer is getting yourself into a state of mind in which you prefer the will of God over your own.” The prerequisite to that is realizing that God is our loving Father. That is what Jesus is talking about in these verses.

Prayer is very much like a conversation between a child and parent. Does this mean we will get everything we want? No. “God is not a heavenly vending machine set in motion by a 10-cent prayer.” God always answers prayer, but there are a number of answers to prayer, as there are a number of answers to the requests children might ask of their parents:

Yes – This is in accord with God’s will.

No – Your request would not be good for you, for others, or in accord with God’s plan.

To take verse 10 a step further, if your child asks for a rattlesnake, will you give that? No!

Not now – You’re not ready for this yet. There are other factors involved that aren’t right now – something else needs to happen first.

Here is something better – It may not always be exactly what we had in mind, just as Columbus didn’t expect to find the Americas, but discovered something more significant in the long run.

(That was my experience with my first ministry call as a senior in seminary. There were two possible calls that I knew of which seemed like a good fit – one in Seattle, the other in Colorado. God had something else in mind – Escondido!)

Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used the phrase **“how much more...”** just as he had earlier in chapter 6 about the birds and the flowers of the field. The concept is also found in several of the parables. If “x” is true, how much more is it true of God.

The Apostle Paul is affirming this same thing in Romans 8:31-32...*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all — how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?*

4. Some have said, “If God knows everything that I need, why should I pray?” Again think about a parent and child. What would you say to that person’s statement?

“The Golden Rule”

Verse 12...*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.*

Although something similar to the “Golden Rule” is found in other, non-biblical sources, this is the first example in positive form. This may seem like a small difference, but as is often the case, a small thing has a

Sermon on the Mount – 12, Matthew 7:7-14
great impact.

For example, the piano first evolved from the harpsichord around 1700 to 1720, by Italian inventor Bartolomeo Cristofori. The harpsichord is not really capable of much dynamic variation because the strings are plucked mechanically. Cristofori, the keeper of instruments in the court of Prince Ferdinand de Medici of Florence, was the first to solve the problem, by creating an instrument in which the strings were struck with a small hammer. The velocity with which the key is struck by the player translates into changes in how hard the hammer strikes the string, and hence changes in volume. The new instrument was first called the “pianoforte” (literally, soft – loud), and by the time of Beethoven, it had largely replaced the harpsichord as the standard keyboard instrument. This paved the way for much more dramatic and thrilling compositions.

In the same way, Jesus’ teaching brought a huge change to ethics, and the Golden Rule has sometimes been called “the Everest of all ethical teaching.” As mentioned, there are many examples of similar teaching, but they are all in the negative. Hillel, a renowned Jewish rabbi who lived just before Jesus, taught, “What is hateful to yourself, do to no other; that is the whole Law, and the rest is commentary.” This was probably based on what was written in Tobit (one of the inter-testamental apocrypha books from the 3rd century BC) “And what you yourself hate, do to no one.”

There are many other example in the teachings of Confucius, the Greek Stoic philosophers and in Buddhism...but all are negative.

William Barclay writes, “This is something which had never been said before. It is new teaching, and a new view of life and of life’s obligations.”

5. What do you see as the difference between the negative and positive form?

6. Can you think of any reasons a person would hesitate in following the Golden Rule?

One thing is that it is relatively easy not to hurt someone else – just avoid them! But to do something positive takes some effort.

The Golden Rule is really difficult follow. James Boice points out that a person “can do what Jesus says only if the mind is entirely off themselves and fixed at all moments on the needs, cares, loves, joys, hopes, and dreams of other people.”

As with the other requirements of the Sermon on the Mount, it is not on our own power that we are able to follow the Golden Rule, but through Christ who strengthens us. As Paul said in Philippians 1:6, *He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Verses 13 & 14...*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

7. How are the two gates described? In our day, the desire to be “inclusive” has spread to almost every area, including matters of belief. But think about it. Every great accomplishment requires “entering by the narrow gate.”

Sermon on the Mount – 12, Matthew 7:7-14

The first thing one learns in chemistry is that the chemical composition of water is H₂O. But add an extra atom of oxygen, changing that to H₂O₂ and you get hydrogen peroxide. Drink a glass of H₂O, and it will slake your thirst. Drink a glass of full strength H₂O₂, and it could kill you! You don't want to go through a wide gate in Chemistry, and many other disciplines as well. (You wouldn't want your doctor to say he believed in the wide gate and easy road when it came to your upcoming surgery!)

The same is true of the Christian life. Note the absolute nature of the choices. There is no room for neutrality. "If you are not on the way **to** Christ, you are on the way **from** Him. (J.M. Boice)

8. In what sense is the world's gate wide and its road broad?

9. In what sense is the gate of Christianity small and the road narrow? These verses are a reminder that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ only. Jesus said, *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.* (John 10:9)

Jesus also said, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* (John 14:6)

10. Why do you think many people dislike the notion that there is only one true gate? All of this is not a matter of personal opinion, it is God's revealed truth. Though many are touting the virtue of being "broad minded", remember that many things (e.g., a river, gasoline) are most powerful when confined or focused. If it "doesn't really matter what you believe," why did Christ die on the cross?

The matter of choosing between two options was not a new idea. Here are two places in the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 30:15-20 *See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*

Joshua 24:15 *But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*

John R.W. Stott, late pastor of the All Souls Church in London, wrote: "I remember how puzzled, even indignant, I was when it was first suggested to me that I needed to appropriate Christ and His salvation for myself. Thank God I came to see that, though an acknowledgment that I need **a** Savior was good, and a belief that Christ was **the** Savior of the world was better, best of all was a personal acceptance of Him as **my** Savior."

It is not enough to merely listen to preaching or teaching about the gate, or to study its "architecture." It must be entered. Enter the gate...then walk in the way!