

Ask. Seek. Knock.

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[0 : 0 0] Let's read Scripture together. This is the text from which the sermon will be based tonight. Matthew 7-12. We're working our way through the Sermon on the Mount.

! Just a few weeks left. And Jesus says this in Matthew 7-12. 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. 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 gifts, good things to those who ask him? So, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. For this is the law and the prophets. This is God's Word to us tonight.

[1 : 0 6] My name is Chris. It's my privilege to open God's Word for us tonight. Before I do that, let's pray together that God would enlighten our minds, open up to us, open our minds, open our ears, open our hearts to receive the truth of his Word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity we have to come before you. We ask, Lord, that you would open our eyes as we read your Scripture, that you'd open our ears so we can hear.

Lord, open our hearts so that these words will penetrate deep into us, change us, so that we can live lives worthy of kingdom citizens. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. So, we've been working through the Sermon on the Mount, and the Sermon on the Mount is a teaching from Jesus that tells us what it means to live like citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

The section that we're in, I think we've just finished the section with the reading that Corey read for us today, is all about the law and the prophets, the Old Testament, the Bible as it was in Jesus' day.

[2 : 1 9] And it shaped the religious, moral, civil lives of all the people who were listening to him. In the section that we're in, I think it begins in chapter 5, verse 17, because in chapter 5, verse 17, Jesus says, Do not think that I've come to abolish the law and the prophets.

I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. So, Jesus is telling the people who are listening that he's not come to do away with the laws that they had learned until this point, but he's coming to complete them.

He's coming to bring them to fulfillment. And from that point, until where we read to today, Jesus has been explaining to us what it means not just to obey laws, like we might tick boxes on a form, but what it means for them to enter into our hearts, for them to penetrate us, really change us.

And not just a list of rules, but a way of living, a way of being before God. Because the way that we live really matters.

It matters to us. It matters to the people we live with, the people we live around. And it matters to God. We stop reading at verse 12.

[3 : 4 1] And Jesus has again come round to the law and the prophets. And this time, he gives us a summary of what it all means. This is it.

According to Jesus, the law and the prophets, all the Old Testament writings boil down to this. Do to other people what you would have them do to you.

We don't think that this teaching's entirely unique to Jesus. So, scholars think that maybe 3,000 years before Jesus came into the world, people were living by a maxim that was something like this. Very similar. We call it the golden rule now. That's what it might be titled in your Bible. And before Jesus came, it existed as something like, don't do to other people what you wouldn't want them to do to you.

But rather than telling us what not to do, Jesus is telling us what to do. He says, so whatever you wish that others would do to you, do to them, for this is the law and the prophets.

[4 : 51] And so why is that significant? Why does that matter? Well, I think it's significant because it moves our mindset from just avoiding harm to actively looking to do good to people.

But to be able to do that, to be able to live like kingdom citizens, we need to be transformed into kingdom people. people. Because we can't do that by ourselves.

And so the rest of the passage that we read, verses 7 to 11, offer us a way of becoming kingdom people. If you want to live like a person of the kingdom of God, you have to come to God and you have to ask Him to change you.

You have to come to God and say to Him, God, I want to be different. I read Your Word. I see the truth. This is the kind of person that I want to be.

This is how I want to live. And I can't do it by myself. Lord, don't leave me the way that I am. So verses 7 to 11 are about prayer.

[6 : 06] And Jesus has already spoken quite a bit about prayer. in the Sermon on the Mount. He's warned us against hypocritical prayer. So standing in the spotlight, making sure everyone sees us so that everyone can see how prayerful, how holy we are.

He's warned us against long prayers or repetitious prayers that think that we'll be heard because we say lots of words. And then in chapter 6, as we went through, I say we, I wasn't here, but you guys did, went through as a congregation the Lord's Prayer, where he teaches us.

He gives us a template for how to approach God in our prayer life. So, tonight, this is what Jesus tells us to do with kingdom prayer.

There's three things. things. And the first is this. Jesus is calling you, even tonight, to pray like your life depends on it.

In English, if we take the words ask, seek, not, it makes this lovely little three-letter acronym, ask, which is really easy to remember and quite handy to keep in your pocket.

[7 : 21] But I think the truth is that a simple ask doesn't do justice to the emphasis that Jesus places on the words that he uses here. Matthew records for us here words that Jesus uses and he uses a rhetorical device.

We call it the power of three. So, friends, Romans, countrymen, I came, we came, we saw, we conquered. And he's repeating it three times to emphasize just how important it is to us.

This isn't a nonchalant ask, like asking somebody to pass you the salt at the dinner table. This is something much more intentional, much more deliberate, much more intense.

Even the words that Jesus uses increase in intensity if you think about them. Because first of all, he says ask, which is opening your mouth to the person before you.

Very simple. But the next step is to seek, which at the very least involves lifting your head and scanning about. And thirdly, he says to knock, which adds a physical element.

[8 : 30] You can't knock without moving your body. So, Jesus is increasing the emphasis, the intensity of the words as he speaks. And to add to that as well, in the original language, ask, seek, knock carries the sense of ongoing action.

So, it's not a one-time thing. We could take ask, seek, knock to mean something like knock and keep on knocking. Ask and keep on asking.

Seek and keep on seeking. Isn't that a one-and-done, one-time word with the Lord for something? And it isn't a I know he's there when I need him approach to prayer.

What we're told here is to come to God with a burning desire to be heard. And to come again and again and again over and over and over.

Like a five-year-old might come to you because they want a bunny. Maybe that's a personal anecdote. But we're so bad at asking, at coming to God in this way.

[9 : 48] Because for us, I think, admitting that there's something that we need that we can't fix by ourselves takes, our pride takes a dent.

And more than that, I think for a lot of the time, we can question whether we think prayer works. Is prayer actually that important after all? Sometimes our pride makes us think we don't have weaknesses.

Sometimes our pride stops us from seeing those weaknesses. And sometimes our pride tells us that we don't think prayer means anything at all. when it comes to being citizens of God's kingdom, we need to recognize deep down that we're not enough.

We're not enough. And we can't do this on our own. We can't earn our way into this kingdom no matter how hard we work.

[11 : 00] Look at the things that Jesus said it takes to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Things that we've thought about already in the Sermon on the Mount. And then let's ask which of us would not want to be a citizen of that kingdom?

How many of us would not want to live in a place that's populated with people who are always good? Always in control of their anger? Are non-judgmental?

People always seeking peace? People who are committed, always loyal, who are always truthful, continually generous?

That's not a list of Christian desires. This is what everybody wants to see. This is the kind of Scotland, the Edinburgh that we all want to live in.

But if we're honest with ourselves, which one of us can manage to live out one of these attributes perfectly on our own, let alone all of them? If we hang around, sometimes when you apply for citizenship of a country or you have to pass a language test, so I think that if we all hung around for church long enough, we could learn the language of this kingdom.

[12 : 22] We could put phrases together that make it sound like we belong here. But to be a citizen of God's kingdom, learning the language, saying the words, paying lip service is not enough.

It has to be who we are. It has to be pressed down inside of us, imprinted onto our hearts. So which one of us thinks that we can measure up on our own?

Which one of us even thinks, well, I could give it a go? because right back at the start of Jesus' sermon on the mount, he says that the people who will inherit the kingdom are the poor in spirit. Poor in spirit has got nothing to do with your bank balance, but it's about your posture towards God. It's about understanding that there's nothing you have that you can offer to God in exchange for your passport into his kingdom.

Not your time, not your savings, not your talents, not your best effort. It's recognizing that whatever you have materially, whatever gifts God has given to you as a person, you're spiritually destitute.

[13 : 42] There's nothing you can do to lift yourself up from your spiritual poverty community. If you think that you could work your way into the kingdom, have a go at being good enough to get in, you've already fallen at the first hurdle.

This is why Jesus is so insistent that his followers pray. That's why he repeats it, increases in intensity, and insists on constantly coming to God in prayer again and again and again, asking, seeking, knock, knock, knocking on heaven's door.

Passionate, consistent, utter reliance on God to shape us into the kind of people who can live in his kingdom. Prayer, as Jesus outlines it for us here, is less a thing we do and more the way that we live.

Jesus is teaching that we're to pray as though our life depends on it because our life does depend on God entirely.

We're creatures of absolute dependence on our absolute God. Prayer is acting like it. There's a theologian, a Puritan theologian called Richard Baxter and he said that prayer is the breath of the new creature.

[15 : 15] A new creature, somebody changed by Jesus. Prayer isn't a tool that you keep up your sleeve for when you need it. It's what sustains a Christian moment to moment.

It's vital, so vital for Christians, Baxter says, that to be without prayer is to be without breath. Do you pray to God like your life depends on it?

Take a moment to think about the state of your prayer life today, right now. Is prayer the thing that you first think of when you open your eyes?

Is prayer the thing that you're most committed to as you go about your day? Or has your prayer life become like it's automated? What do you need to change?

What are the things when you go home tonight that you can change to make your prayer life more fruitful? How can you pray like your life depends on it?

[16 : 28] Okay, secondly, pray to the life of Christ pulsates in your heart. We've spoken about the context of this passage being really important, and context is really important for every passage, because the danger is if we take a statement like ask and it will be given you, and we copy and paste it and stick it on a t-shirt or stick it on a mug, when we look at it by itself, we can think, well, God says that all I have to do is ask for something, and then he'll give me anything that I want.

Some people do think like this, we know that they do, people call it power prayers, or name it and claim it praying, you say what you want, God will provide it, but it's dangerous, because it reduces

the gospel down to being about our health and our wealth, we think, God, I'm going to need a pay rise, God, I'm going to need a guarantee that I'm not going to get lower than a C in my Hebrew exam, God, I want at least two grandchildren by the time I'm 60, God, I know you can do this, oh yeah, God is a giver of all good gifts, everything that we have is from God, and God can do these things, but the problem with name it and claim it power prayers is that they treat God like some sort of genie who's on hand to fulfill our desires, and what that reveals in the heart of a person is that they want the things that God can give them and not God himself.

I think it also assumes that we think that we know better what we need than God does, and a God who doesn't know more than you is not a God that you want to trust in.

The epistle of James is a letter that was written by one of Jesus' followers, probably Jesus' half-brother, so likelihood he heard Jesus saying, if not these exact words, things very like them, and near the beginning of his letter, he uses language really similar to our ask and it will be given you, and James says that the thing that we're to ask for is wisdom, and wisdom is required if we're going to follow the path of a citizen, a kingdom citizen.

We need to know how to discern between being judgmental and naive, and we know that wisdom is a good thing for us to pray for.

[19 : 17] King Solomon, hundreds of years before Jesus, he had a dream one night, and God came to him and said, ask me for whatever you want and I'll give it to you.

And the thing that Solomon asked for was an understanding mind to discern between good and evil. Solomon asked for wisdom, and God was pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom, and so he answered his prayer and he gave him wisdom.

He made him the wisest man that's ever lived. Even today, even people who don't think the Bible is true still use Solomon as a cultural reference for what it means to be really wise. But despite a promising start, despite all this wisdom, Solomon fell into sin, he turned to idols, and he looked to things that weren't God to satisfy him.

If the wisest man who's ever lived fell away from God, how much more clear can it be that we need to be constantly, persistently pursuing after God in prayer?

Solomon shows us that wisdom is good, to ask for wisdom is good, but discernment alone isn't enough. There's a parallel passage to this passage in Luke chapter 11.

[20 : 46] And there we can read the same passage, it's almost word for word. Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

But at the end of the Luke account, Luke tells us the what, the good thing that God will give to his children who ask.

He says, if you then, although you're evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Be asking, seeking, knocking, because God is ready and waiting to gift you the Holy Spirit. What does that mean?

Well, it's the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, who enters into believers' hearts when they put their trust in Jesus. And the Holy Spirit never leaves.

[21 : 53] It's a mark of your citizenship of the kingdom of heaven, irrevocable and secure. And he dwells in believers, working in them, changing their hearts, renewing them, shaping them more and more into the image of Jesus.

One theologian describes what the Holy Spirit does like this. The work of the Holy Spirit is to make the life of Christ pulsate in the life of the believer so that we live not, but Christ lives in us.

We're to pray so diligently for the Holy Spirit that he would increase in our lives, that he would fill us up with the good things of God so that we can be made to live more and more like Jesus did.

So that good things, love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control come pouring out of us.

I wonder if we are seeing evidence of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Is your heart pulsating with Christ likeness?

[23 : 15] Is it evident to the people around you? Do you get angry way less than you might once have? Do people see you becoming more and more humble?

Do you exude joy in your life, thankful for the things that God's given you rather than always being worried about the next thing that you want to get? Those are all signs that the Holy Spirit's working

in you.

This is what we are to pray for so unwaveringly and impassionately because the way to be shaped into a citizen of the kingdom of heaven is by imitating the life of the king.

And to do that, we need help. And if you are producing this kind of fruit in your life, if you are noticing that you have changed, if people around you are, what a witness that is to the power of God and what a witness to the power of prayer.

We so often look for miraculous cures to terminal illnesses or for survivors of horrific accidents as evidence that God's working in the world.

[24 : 32] But the slow, steady shaping of his people to be more like his son is clear evidence of the power God offers to those who ask for it.

Thirdly, and lastly, pray because God guarantees the best answer. So we said this passage is about prayer, and I think we can be even more specific than that.

I think we can say that this passage is about the God-given guarantee that your praying life will be rewarded. This whole passage is filled with the assurance that we will receive.

Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

These are statements of certainty. And to emphasize the point, in verses 9 and 10, Jesus uses these rhetorical questions that I think are deliberately a bit ridiculous.

[25 : 45] He asks parents, if your son asks for bread, would you give him a stone? Or if he asks for fish, would you give him a serpent? We know that not all parents are good parents.

Some children suffer terribly, and we pray against that evil. But generally speaking, parents intuitively know how to give good things to their children.

The unspoken answer to these rhetorical questions is, none of us, Jesus, we all know how to give good things to our children. Jesus says, if you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who's in heaven give good things to those who ask him? Driving home the point, Jesus compares God the father with an earthly parent. He says, if you who struggle to be filled with love the way that you should be, can still give good things to your children, how much more likely is it that your perfectly good, perfectly merciful, perfectly holy father will give good things to his children when they ask?

Giving them exactly what they need. The answer is infinitely more likely. certainty. God doing what he says he's going to do is not even a likelihood, it's a certainty.

[27 : 26] Just like a good father always answers, just like a good father, God answers our prayers by giving us exactly what we need, not always what we want.

earlier in the series, Ryan quoted Tim Keller and Tim Keller said, God will give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows.

God does answer, he does give exactly what you need. So if you're sitting in your seat tonight and you're holding back from pouring yourself out to God in prayer like this because you're afraid that you'll put yourself out there and your prayer will go unanswered, well you can lay that concern aside completely because right now God is asking you to come to him.

When you beg and search and hammer on the door of heaven to be made more like Jesus, it's more certain God will answer your prayers than you'll answer your next phone call.

God gives you his word. Maybe you're not ready for constant unwavering passionate pursuit of God because it sounds like a lot to commit to.

[29 : 03] And if that's the case, then I'd invite you to think about just for a moment how committed Jesus is to guaranteeing that your prayers will be answered.

Jesus is so committed to making sure your prayers are answered that he died on the cross for you to guarantee it. Before Jesus went to the cross, he was in a garden with some friends.

And three times he went to pray to his father asking, seeking, knocking. Jesus was in agony. He was praying so fervently and his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood.

And Jesus prayed to God, his good, merciful father, and he said, is it possible for me not to have to do this?

Father, is there any other way? But you know what's right. There was no other way.

[30 : 13] God is a God of justice. When Jesus died on the cross, he didn't die for his sin. He didn't have any. He died to pay the justice for your sins.

So what you have now is access and answers. You can come into the presence of almighty God, not as a guilty prisoner before a judge given a stay of execution, but as a child comes before a loving father who longs to be pestered by you, asking, seeking, knocking, to be made more and more like Jesus, your older brother who sacrificed himself to save you.

When you pray to God for God, your prayer is guaranteed to be answered, because that prayer of Jesus that he prayed in the garden went unanswered.

God, let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for the opportunity we have to pray to you.

We thank you for the gift of prayer. Teach us, Lord, to pray to you as we should, fervently, diligently, consistently. Lord, make us people who breathe in and pray out.

[31 : 53] we thank you for the assurance we have that you will hear us because of what Jesus has done. And we pray in his name. Amen.

Amen. Amen.