
ASK, SEEK AND KNOCK

George Battey | 3/9/14

QUESTIONS:

- 1) What did the disciples never ask Jesus to teach them?
- 2) Why did Jesus talk about "*asking, seeking and knocking*" at this point in His sermon?
- 3) When do people "*keep on knocking*" on a door?
- 4) What should we remember about the word "*no*"?
- 5) What does "asking according to God's will" presuppose?
- 6) What is the difference between God's gifts as a Creator and His gifts as a Father?
- 7) What does an "*evil eye*" mean in the scriptures?
- 8) What is the "*golden rule*"?

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 7:7-12

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

⁹ Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?

¹¹ If you then, being 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!

¹² Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The last several sections of this sermon began with negative statements:

- 6:1 – Don't **give** alms like hypocrites
- 6:5 – Don't **pray** like hypocrites
- 6:16 – Don't **fast** like hypocrites
- 6:19 – Don't **lay up treasures on earth**
- 6:25 – Don't **worry** about food & raiment
- 7:1 – Don't **judge**
- 7:6 – Don't **give holy things to dogs**

But now Jesus begins with a positive statement: "*Ask and it shall be given to you.*"

IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

The importance of prayer is seen in this sermon. Jesus has already spent 11 verses on this subject and now He returns to it again.

The disciples of Jesus soon recognized the importance of prayer. Never did the disciples ask:

- "Lord, teach us how to **preach**."
- "... how to work **miracles**."
- "... how to **sing**."

But when they observed Jesus' prayer life they did ask, "*Lord, teach us how to pray*" (Lk 11:1).

THE CONTEXT

Q: Why did Jesus mention "asking, seeking and knocking"?

A: It was because from the very beginning of His sermon Jesus has been asking men to do things which are completely contrary to human nature:

- Rejoice when you are persecuted
- Pray for your enemies
- Assist your enemies
- Don't be hypocrites
- Don't judge hypocritically
- Don't give holy things to dogs

It would be easy to feel overwhelmed by these teachings.

Jesus anticipates this and He tells us how we will be able to live out these words. Things that are impossible with men are possible with God's help.

TEXT (1)

Matthew 7:7

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Literally: "**Keep on** asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking."

These three verbs, "*ask, seek and knock*" point to the nature of the item we are requesting:

Ask – suggests something we need, but are **UNABLE** to provide for ourselves.

EXAMPLE: Paul prayed that his "*thorn in the flesh*" might be removed (2 Cor 12). He just simply asked, because there was nothing else he could do. It was all up to God. Paul himself was powerless.

Seek – something we need, but we **ARE** able to help provide this ourselves.

EXAMPLE: Jesus said we should pray for "*daily bread*" (Mt 6:11), but then we must go out and "*seek*" it. We must labor for it. If we do not work for it and seek for it "*neither should we eat*" (2 Th 3:10).

Knock – **persistence** in "asking and seeking."

EXAMPLE: We keep knocking only when we know there is someone behind the door. Thus, we persist in "*asking and seeking*" because we know God has a solution to our needs and we will persist until we receive an answer.

PRAYER IS WORK

Jesus is warning us that prayer is not an instant, miraculous "*fix all.*" There will be obstacles to overcome and it will be work. Prayer is not something easy to do!

When Jesus prayed:

- He would sweat
- It would consume an entire night

In the Bible prayer is called:

- *striving* (Rom 15:30)
- *laboring fervently* (Col 4:12)
- *wrestling* (Eph 6:12,18)

"*Asking, seeking and knocking*" implies **persistence**. We must be like Jacob who wrestled with the angel of God and said:

Genesis 32:26

²⁶ ... "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

Jeremiah 29:13

¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Sometimes God delays answering our prayers to test our faith. An unbeliever may pray once, but when nothing happens he quits. A true believer persists in prayer.

TEXT (2)

Matthew 7:8

⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

This verse is so similar to v7 that it seems redundant. However, in this verse comes a new thought.

- v7 stresses ***man's part*** in prayer,
- v8 stresses ***God's part***.

Literally: *"The one who keeps asking keeps receiving; the one who keeps seeking, keeps finding."*

The emphasis is on God's continued blessings upon those who continue to ask.

Jesus is stressing the generous nature of God. This is important to know, because our concept of God will affect our prayers.

ILL: The heathens believed in selfish and brutal gods.

They walked on *"egg shells"* so as not to anger their unpredictable gods. They were reluctant to ask anything from their gods lest they provoke them to wrath.

Jesus is saying, *"God isn't like that! If you keep asking, He will keep giving."*

James 1:5

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all **liberally** and **without reproach**, and it will be given to him.

God will not deal unkindly, or scold us for asking things from Him.

HOW DOES GOD GIVE?

How, then, will God give to us if we ask?

1) Sometimes God says, "No."

Matthew 26:39

³⁹ ...[Jesus prayed] "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; ...

But God said, "No," and Jesus had to drink a bitter cup of suffering.

"No" is as much of an answer as "yes."

God is sovereign and He retains the right to grant, or withhold things as He sees fit – and He does not owe us an explanation!

1 John 5:14

¹⁴ Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything **according to His will**, He hears us.

Implied in Jesus' statement is that if we "*ask, seek & knock*" for things that are God's will, we will certainly receive them. Jesus Himself recognized this fact:

Matthew 26:39

³⁹ ... "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, **not as I will, but as You will.**"

To ask according to God's will presupposes that we will take the time to learn God's will.

2) Sometimes God says, "Wait awhile."

Jeremiah prayed to God:

Jeremiah 42:7

⁷ And it happened **after ten days** that the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah.

3) Sometimes God gives us something completely different.

Paul prayed that God might remove his "*thorn in the flesh*," but instead, God gave him strength to endure it.

4) Sometimes God gives us exactly what we ask for.

James 5:17

¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

5) Sometimes God gives us more than we ask.

Ephesians 3:20

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly **above all that we ask or think**, according to the power that works in us,

PRAYER UNNECESSARY?

Q: If prayer is so necessary, why do we see people getting things without praying for them?

- health
- babies

- food
- crops
- clothes
- money

A: There is a difference between *God's gifts as a Creator*, and His gifts as a Father; between creation gifts and redemption gifts.

As a Creator – God gives crops, babies and money to people whether they pray or not.

Matthew 5:45

⁴⁵ ... He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

As a Father – God gives special gifts which are not equally bestowed upon all. What are some of these special gifts He bestows?

- forgiveness of sins
- paths of escape from temptation
- peace of mind
- wisdom, etc.

None of these spiritual blessings may be obtained apart from prayer.

Q: Should we, then, pray only for those spiritual gifts and not for creation gifts? NO!

We must pray and thank God for creation gifts **in order to qualify for those redemption gifts** available only to God's people.

Notice the order of requests in the model prayer:

Matthew 6:11-12

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.

That's odd! Why pray for bread before forgiveness?

The order of occurrence was:

- Acknowledge the source of **physical blessings**
- To qualify to ask for the **spiritual blessings**

One who will not thank God and acknowledge His physical blessings has no right to ask God for spiritual blessings.

TEXT (3)

Matthew 7:9-10

⁹ Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?

These questions anticipate a negative answer. Is there a father who would:

- Give a rock to a son wanting bread? – NO!
- Give a snake to a son wanting a fish? – NO!

Luke adds:

Luke 11:12

¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

Now the son in Jesus' illustration is not asking for anything unreasonable, or extravagant. He's only asking for some food. His father won't offer a:

stone ⇒ *useless*

scorpion ⇒ *dangerous*

serpent ⇒ *deadly*

Now, if we have faith in our earthly fathers not to mock us, or harm us, do we not have that same kind of faith in our heavenly Father?!

This is the next point Jesus makes in verse 11:

TEXT (4)

Matthew 7:11

¹¹ If you then, being 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!

"If you then, being evil" – What did Jesus mean here?

The Calvinist says these words teach the "*total depravity*" of mankind. But I think a closer examination will reveal a different interpretation.

evil – a Hebrew idiom for "*stingy*," or "*grudging*"

Deuteronomy 15:9

⁹ Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and **your eye be evil against your poor brother** and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you.

evil – grudging, or stingy

Jesus told a parable of laborers who became angry when the landowner paid part-time employees as much as they received. The landowner replied:

Matthew 20:15

¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or **is your eye evil** because I am good?'

evil – grudging, or stingy

In Mt 7:11, when Jesus tells these people they are "evil," He was not referring to some inherent depravity. The argument is this:

"If those who were grudging and stingy people in the audience would care for their children, how much more will God care for His children?"

"GOOD THINGS"

Matthew 7:11

¹¹ If you then, being 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!

In Luke's account the wording is different:

Luke 11:13

¹³ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give **the Holy Spirit** to those who ask Him!"

Jesus named **the Spirit (cause)** to suggest **the good things that come from the Spirit (the effect)**. Again ... we see Jesus has reference to "redemptive gifts."

GOD WITHHOLDS "BAD" GIFTS

We must learn to trust that the gifts God gives to us will be "good" gifts. This implies that sometimes God does not answer our prayers, because what we request may not actually be good for us.

ILL: Suppose a child asks for a stone, or a snake, or a scorpion? Most parents would not grant the request because it would be harmful to the child.

Sometimes we can look back and see that we have been asking God for snakes and scorpions, but in His goodness He refused to give it to us.

Martin Lloyd-Jones:

"I thank God that He is not prepared to do anything that I may chance to ask Him ... I am profoundly grateful to God that He did not grant me certain things for which I asked, and that He shut certain doors in my face."

TEXT (5)

Matthew 7:12

¹² Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

This is called "**the golden rule.**"

(For most people "the golden rule" means: **The one with the gold makes the rules.**)

therefore – connects this with the context of the preceding verses.

v7-11 – We "*ask and seek*" for good things from God. Therefore, we should be willing to do good things for others.

NOT: WHAT OTHERS DO TO US

Notice we are to do "what we want men to do to us."

We do not do what they do to us!

NOT: WHAT OTHERS WANT

This "golden rule" does not mean: "Do to others exactly what they ask."

(Some people want things that are bad for them.)

We must look to the ultimate end of our actions and determine if we are actually doing good to someone by giving them what they want.

ILL: When a child wants candy ... do you just give them candy all the time? Some parents do. This is irresponsible.

This command of Jesus presupposes that on occasions we would want "*bad tasting*" medicine if it was for our own good.

- I don't like being rebuked, but if it's for my own good, rebuke me.
- I don't like being denied money, but if it will teach me responsibility, deny me money.

With this in mind, I would treat others in this same way I would want to be treated.

- *If this irresponsible son asks for money, I will not give it to him.* I will teach him a lesson about working and saving money and how to be responsible – because, really, that's how I would want to be treated in the long run.

Chinese proverb:

"If you give a man a fish, he can eat for a day. If you teach him how to fish, he can eat for a lifetime."

THE LAW AND PROPHETS

"for this is the law and the prophets" – the goal of the OT writings was for men to treat one another as they would wish to be treated.

Romans 13:8-10

⁸ Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

⁹ For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law.**

APPLICATION

How different things would be if we could keep this verse in mind. It would affect:

- **Our topics of conversation.** We would not be so prone to gossip.
- **Our thinking.** We would not be so quick to surmise and suspect.
- **Our actions.** We would be fair in buying, selling, trading and working.
- **Our prejudices toward other races of people.** We would not simply treat our own race as we would have them treat us.

Arthur Pink:

"It is utterly vain to speak like angels when on our knees before God, if we act like devils in our transactions with men."

CONCLUSION

So it was that Jesus taught men:

FIRST: To look to God for the strength and wisdom to live the kind of life He has been teaching.

SECOND: As we would hope to receive good treatment from God, we must first show good treatment toward others.

With this, Jesus ended a thought which began in ch 5:

Matthew 5:20

²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus never said it would be easy to obtain this righteousness, but He does assure the disciples that if they would "ask, seek and knock" for strength and help they would certainly obtain it.