

The Needy Who Ask

Matthew 7:7-11

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny and I'm the senior pastor here and it is good to be with you. Being away last week, so, you know, pastors sometimes go out of town, like y'all go out of town. I went out of town last week, and being away one week, my family and I got to worship with another church, another part of our state - excuse me, our commonwealth - and it was wonderful. It was wonderful to be with other saints, to be able to sing, to be able to sit under the word. It's good for pastors sometimes to be like a congregant and to be fed, and not just to be feeding and it made me miss y'all all the more. I'm really glad to be back, glad to be with y'all, and glad to have that week, week off and week away, and, and also thankful that when I'm away I have great confidence in our associate pastor. I do not take that for granted, that the Lord has gifted and blessed us with a man who is going to open the word and be faithful, and share the gospel, and I'm just very thankful for Tobias, so, and thankful to be back with y'all.

We are in Matthew chapter 7 this morning, so if you have a Bible, you can turn to Matthew 7. There are also Bibles in the chairs, and we're coming to the end of our time in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, after this Sunday, we'll only have two more Sundays in the Sermon on the Mount, but we're gonna have to wait for those two sermons because as Susan mentioned, next week is the first Sunday of Advent, and so for the four Sundays in Advent, and the Sunday after Christmas, we're going to do a different series. We're going to pause from the Sermon on the Mount, and we're going to look at some various passages that talk about us being confronted by God, standing in God's presence, and how that should elicit a response from us, and those sorts of things. But, that means we're going to be waiting to deal with the Sermon on the Mount, to finish it in January so it is coming.

But this morning, we're in chapter 7, and before we look at our passage, I just want to remind us that the Sermon on the Mount is about the Kingdom of God. That's what we've said every single week. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus teaching us what the Kingdom of God is to be like, what is the ethic of the Kingdom, what is the virtue of the Kingdom, how it is that we are to live as His Kingdom people in the midst of His Kingdom. And that's an important thing for us to remember as we come to our passage, because the Kingdom of God, again, becomes front, becomes a part of what we are called to by Jesus.

So, with that in mind, let's go ahead and read Matthew 7, beginning in verse 7. Jesus says,

“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 things to those who ask him!” (ESV)

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray.

Father, we ask that you would meet with us now, that you would lead and guide us. God, that you would show us how good you are, and that that would prompt us to come, to ask, to seek,

to knock, and that we would meet you. And so, we pray, Father, be present amongst us. By your Spirit, open our eyes, unplug our ears, and soften our hearts. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

So, I've said this before, but I think it's worth repeating from time to time. I love that our congregation has so many little children in it, right? I love the vast ages that are in our church. We have people who have walked with the Lord longer than I have been alive, and who are aging, right? And then we have people who need to be carried into the building because they're so small. They're such newborns. And we have everything in between, right? The toddlers, and those who are learning to talk, and those who are running around, and children are a blessing to the congregation. We experience this, right? Now, it means we have to get used to some things, too. We have to get used to things like noise, right? Kids make noise. So do adults, by the way, but kids seem, you know, it's a little bit harder for them, and they squirm, and they get squirmy, and having many children means we need lots of volunteers, and it means we have to give funds, and those sorts of things. And so, they're needy, right? Our kids are needy. They need us.

But our kids also are a blessing to us. They teach us things. We don't just teach them, but they teach us, right? They teach us laughter, and joy, and celebration, and fun, right? They break us out of kind of our adult monotony, and kind of grumpiness from time to time, right? That's what they do. But the other thing that kids are good at doing is teaching us aspects of what it means to be human. So, what I mean by this is that there are qualities and ways of living that children seem to embody that adults seem to forget. One of these things is their neediness. You see, children are good at asking for help. They're good at asking for help. They're good at recognizing their need because of their size, because of their strength, their mental capacity, their inability to perform tasks. Kids are always asking for help. They're always asking for help. Help to get dressed, help to get food, help to eat the food that they have just been given, help getting in the car and out of the car. They are requiring parents, and adults, and older children to constantly help them. Kids are good at asking for help. They are good at recognizing their neediness.

But somewhere along the way, they stop asking for help, right? They grow, they mature, they start to develop, and they stop asking. And in some ways, this is good, right? Like, it would be really weird if my 15-year-old son needed help buckling into the car every Sunday, right? Like, it would be awkward for him, it would be awkward for me, it would be really strange for everybody else who's watching, right? Like, there's a certain level of maturation that should take place. And somewhere along the way, that normal maturation, that normal ability to start doing things for ourselves starts to infiltrate every aspect of our humanity, and every aspect of the way in which we live, so that we stop asking for help in every place, and in every way.

And we think that just because we're able in some places, we should be able in all places. You see, somewhere along the way, being needy became bad. Because we don't want to be needy, right? We don't want to ask for help. We think that we should be able to live and act on our own, with our own strength, our own ability, with our own autonomy. I mean, y'all feel this. I know you do, because y'all are capable people. And so then, to say that you're needy, you need help, means that in some part of your life, you are not capable. We don't have a problem helping others who are in need, in fact, we want to. But we, we don't want to be the needy. We'll help the needy, we just don't want to be the needy. We want to be able. We want to embody what I saw on a sign just the other day at Meade's soccer game.

So Meade was playing in a soccer tournament here in Virginia, and it was a tournament where there were teams from all over the country, and she was playing against this team from Fort Lauderdale. And it was a great game. It was super fun, like high quality soccer. It was wonderful. And I noticed, not just the soccer on the field, but I noticed the signs on the fences. You see, every field was contained with these fences, and they made sure to, you know, plaster these fences with signs. And on one of them, it said this. It said, “always be more.” That's what the players saw. That's what the coaches read. That's what the parents were observing. Always be more. Now, now in a highly competitive athletic event, I can understand why they would have that sign, “always be more,” right? Because these players, they're wanting to get better, they're wanting to develop, they're wanting to be as good as they can. They don't want to let their parents down. They don't want to let their coaches down. They don't want to let their teammates down. So they always need to be more.

And friends, you don't have to be a soccer player to feel that, because that's what the world tells us, that we need to always be more. We need to be more in our parenting. We need to be more in our child rearing. We need to be more in our profession. We need to be more in our education. We need to be more, because as we are more, that means we are not needy. This is what it's told to us. But what if we can't be more? What if we're not able to be more? You know, as we've been going through the Sermon on the Mount every week, when I've left here on a Sunday, there hasn't been a single week where I've thought, you know what? I think I got this. You know, I never walked away going, love of enemy, no problem. I'm going to love them like crazy. Or don't judge people, not a problem, because I'll go online and I'll think the best of those people on social media, I promise. Or put aside anxiety, what do we have to be anxious about, right? No. Every week, I don't walk out thinking, “I've got this. I can do this. I am able.” No, what I am struck by every week is my inadequacy, my inability, my neediness.

And y'all, that is a good thing. That is not something that we should grow out of. We should experience and feel and know that we are needy. Kelly Kapik wrote in his wonderful book, *You're Only Human*, “being dependent,” - we could substitute the word needy there – “being dependent creatures is a constructive gift, not a deficiency. There are no creatures who are not, by their very nature, dependent beings.” And he is right. So, if we're supposed to be needy, if we're supposed to be dependent, well, what do we do with that need? Well, Jesus tells us what we do. We ask, seek, and knock, right? That's what he said in our passage, ask, seek, and knock. Now, those three words, I take them as Jesus using these different words, but getting at the same idea.

What We Do in Our Need

And the same idea is pursuing God, of depending upon him in prayer. That's what I think Jesus is getting at. And when we know our need, we can't help but go to the Lord in prayer. It was Richard Baxter, the Puritan, who said, “it is man's ignorance of themselves that makes prayer little in request. Hunger best teaches men to beg. You would be oftener on your knees if you were oftener in your hearts. Prayer would not seem so needless if you knew your needs. Know yourselves and be prayerless if you can.” Man, he is right. When we know our needs, we're not going to look to ourselves, we're not going to think that we are able, but instead, we will turn to the Lord. We will ask, seek, and knock. We will run to him, knowing that as created beings, we need to depend upon him.

And so, Jesus says, “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 the one who knocks, it will be opened.” And so, we go to the Lord in prayer. We ask, seek, and knock. But what do we ask for? I mean, what are we seeking after? Now, this might be where we start thinking about all those things that we want, right? All those things that maybe are showing up on our Christmas list, right? Like, I want that new car. So, I'm going to ask God for a car. And not just any car, like a convertible, right? I drove a convertible a few years ago. It was really fun. I highly recommend it, right? So, maybe I'll ask for a convertible. And, you know, God said, ask, seek, and knock. It will be given to you. So, I'm going to ask.

Or maybe I'll ask for those boots that I've been looking at that I've been wanting, right? I mean, I need good shoes. Or maybe I'll ask for a better job or a new relationship or for my kids to behave or for my parents to understand me or whatever it might be, right? I'm going to ask for all these sorts of things. I'm going to seek them out. And I think there's nothing wrong with asking for these things, right? Some of these things are very good. Most of them are neutral at best, right? So, there's nothing wrong with asking for these things. But I don't think that's exactly what Jesus is getting at here. I don't think that's what he has in mind. Now, you see, what I think Jesus is inviting us to ask and seek after are the things that pertain to the kingdom of God. And there's a couple of reasons why.

The first is the context, right? Remember, this isn't coming out of nowhere. It's in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, and the Sermon on the Mount is about the Kingdom. And so, if Jesus is saying ask, seek, and knock, you would expect that the things that we should be asking, seeking, and knocking after would be the things of the kingdom. The other reason I think it's about the kingdom is because the other place in the sermon where Jesus uses this word seek is in Matthew chapter 6, where he says that the Gentiles seek after food, clothes, and drink, and they're anxious in their seeking. He says, “but you, my followers, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” It's that same word. And so, what we are to seek after, what we are to ask him for, are the things of his kingdom. We ask for our daily bread and for our physical needs, and we ask for the kingdom to come. We ask that he would equip us so that we would be confident in him and not seeking to please others, that we would depend upon him, that we would be marked by his love, that we would live to please him, that in our need we ask, seek, and knock. God, your kingdom come. Your will be done, not just in this earth, but in our lives.

The Father Who Meets Us in Our Need

And what's beautiful is that when we go to the Lord in our need, the Father meets us in our need. Jesus said, those who ask, seek, and knock, receive, find, and it's opened. And the evidence for this coming about is in verses 9 - 11. He says, “which 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?” So, you see what Jesus is doing. He's making an argument from lesser to greater, and he's making an assumption about human fathers. The assumption is that human fathers want what's best for their kids. So, if your child asks you for bread, you don't give him a stone, right? Like, I know when we think of a loaf of bread, we think of, like, you know, loaves of bread, right? Sandwich bread. Big, hunking pieces of bread. But in that culture, it was small. They were little loaves. And they actually looked like the stones that they would see on the ground. Like, they were kind of that size and

that color. And so, your son asks you for some bread, and, you know, you're going to play a little trick on him and give him a stone and watch him bite into it and break his teeth, right? No, that's not what dads do, right? Not good dads.

Or when your daughter asks for a fish, you don't give her a serpent and watch the snake bite her. No, that's not what you do. Earthly fathers want what's good for their children. Now, listen, I know that there are bad fathers out there as well, right? There are fathers who have abandoned their families and shirked their responsibilities. But we know that's not the way it's supposed to be. We know that fathers are supposed to want what's good for their children. And the argument that Jesus is making is that if fathers, we know, are supposed to give good things like bread and fish to their children, how much more are heavenly Father? How much more will our heavenly Father give us good things? Now, here's where you might be thinking, "well, Penny, that sounds all well and good. It sounds charming and heartwarming. But I've asked, and I've sought, and I've knocked, and I've never received."

Imagine some of us have felt that. Maybe we're feeling it today. Maybe there's been something that we've been going to the Lord about, we've been asking for, we've been praying, and we haven't heard. And so, we start to think about God. We maybe perceive of God as like the person on the other end of the helpline. You know, when something goes wrong with our internet, we have a problem with our credit card, or the power goes out, we call the helpline. And what do we hear? "Your call is very important to us. Please stay on the line, and one of our representatives will be happy to serve you." And an hour and a half later, we're still waiting. And then finally, someone comes on, right? And we think, wonderful, our need is finally going to be met, but they don't understand our need, and they can't help us with our problem. And so, they send us to someone else who will be able to help. And what we hear? "Your call is very important to us," and we're still waiting, and we still need.

Maybe that's how we think of the Lord. Maybe that's how we perceive of Him. We've asked, we've sought, we've knocked. Maybe there's something more important He's giving His attention to. Maybe He doesn't actually understand my need, or maybe He just doesn't care. I mean, y'all have wondered that. I have. "Where are you, God? Have you forgotten I'm on hold? Don't you see my need? Are you not giving what I've asked for? Why not?" We've wondered these things. We've wondered, is God really good? And what Jesus is telling us is that God is not just our Father. He's not just our heavenly Father. But He is our good heavenly Father. And so, what this means is that when we ask, and when we seek, and when we knock, we have to be open-handed with what we ask, and seek, and knock after. It means that we can trust Him because He's good, and He does give good things. And He will actually seek out our good.

And so, when we are not given what we ask for, maybe it's because it's not the right time. Or maybe it's because it's not actually for our good. Maybe God withholds because He knows more than we do. And y'all, we do this with our kids, don't we? We do this with our kids all the time. In fact, when my kids were younger, not just when they were younger, but still today, they want a dog. Okay? My kids want a dog. Well, I take that back. Lane wants cats. Meade and Cole want dogs. Okay? They want a dog. And just the other day in the car, Meade told me, dogs are awesome. That's why she wants a dog. Okay. Great. But there's a big problem. Meade is very allergic to dogs. In fact, when she was a little girl, okay, when she was a girl, our neighbors would be walking their dogs on the and Meade would go running out to the dog to pet it. And we would say, "Meade, you're allergic. Don't go near it." But she didn't care. She loved the dog. The dog is awesome. And the dog would lick her face, and she

would laugh, and then she'd get a rash. And her eyes would start to water, and her nose would start to run, and she would have trouble breathing. But she wanted a dog anyway. So, we got her a dog, right? No, of course not, right? That would be ridiculous.

That would be like giving her the serpent, right? Giving her a stone. Like, yeah, have the dog. Let us laugh at you every time your face blows up, right? No, we didn't get her a dog. Because that wouldn't be a good father. She asked for something, but she doesn't know what she really needed in that moment. But we did. We do this with our kids all the time. Because our children maybe don't understand. They don't know. And so, they ask for things, things that aren't bad, things that maybe are awesome, but are not good. So, if we know how to do that, well, maybe our Heavenly Father does too. If we know how to do that with our children, wouldn't we think that our Father would know how to do that with His children? With you and me? It was Tim Keller who said, "if we knew what God knew, we would always receive what we ask for. Because we'd always know what to ask for. And so, if you don't receive, it might be that it's just not now. Or it might be that God knows what is best." Well, not might. God always knows what is best. And so, we have to trust.

We have to trust that what He gives or what He withholds is actually for our good. Because He is our good Heavenly Father. You see, we don't know what God knows, but we do know that. That He is good. And so, when He doesn't give what we ask for or what we want, we trust Him. Knowing that what is ultimately good and what is ultimately what we need, He will give. And y'all, the reason we can be sure of this, the reason we can be sure that God is good and that He will give us good things is because He has given us the good thing that satisfies our greatest need. He's given His Son. His Son, when we were in need of grace and forgiveness and salvation, what did God give? He gave His Son, who lived and died and rose again. And if we were devising salvation, right? If we were putting together the plan of salvation, there is no way we would have come up with the plan of Jesus, right? We wouldn't have asked for a suffering Savior or a King on the cross or a God who dies. And yet, that is what we needed. In our sin, what we needed was a God who would give of Himself for sinful people. Who would give of Himself so that grace and forgiveness would come. That is what we needed, and that is what God gave. Because He's our good Heavenly Father, He gave His Son.

And so, friends, that means that we should come humbly before Him with open hands, asking and seeking and knocking. Come before, coming before our God, our Heavenly Father, the One who is good. The One who sees you and hears your prayers and knows your needs. And the One who meets us in the midst of it. Let's go to Him now. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You. Thank You that You do invite us to ask and seek and knock. And so, we come this morning, we come today, and we will come tomorrow, and in the days to come, humbly asking for Your will to be done, for Your kingdom to come, for Your ways to reign in our lives. And so, Father, I pray that You would give us the ability, give us the strength, give us the faith to trust You for whatever we ask. Give us the faith to trust You in whatever You give, knowing that You are our good Father, the One who has given us exactly what we need, for You gave us Jesus, the One who brings grace and forgiveness. Father, we thank You for Your grace, and we ask that You would help us, help us to come before You, help us to trust You, help us to meet, find You in the midst of our need. We pray all this in Christ's name, and God's people said together, Amen.