

The Lord's Promise When You Pray

Matthew 7:7-11

Introduction

In this 7th chapter Jesus has given us a series of exhortations; our responsibilities to the saved (don't judge harshly); to ourselves (by all means judge); and to the ungodly (don't give holy things to depraved people). Now the Lord's attention turns to God. A command is given in verse 7; diligently seek God's will; we are given confidence in verse 8; Jesus promises to reveal His will if we ask; and then Jesus offers a comparison in verses 9-11; If we, being sinful, can give good gifts to our children, how much more will our sinless Heavenly Father impart good gifts to His children!

There are very few real atheists. Most are armchair atheists, willing to debate the issues in the safe halls of government schools and universities. I heard the story of a young scholar at a Russian University. The question on a test was asked; "What sentence of Marx is written on Lenin's Wall? The student was almost certain it was; "Religion is the opiate of the masses." Bothered by the question, the student walked the five miles to Lenin's Wall. When he got there and saw the words; "religion is the opiate of the masses," he dropped to his knees threw his hands in the air and shouted, "thank God".

In the crucible of real life, people believe in God and pray to God. Many years ago Frances Schaeffer wrote a book entitled; *He is There And He Is Not Silent*. The book prompts the reader to consider the reality of the God of the Bible; and that God has spoken. God has not only spoken in the past through the prophets but also through the Lord Jesus. God continues to speak through His Word and answered prayer. God's promise when you pray— He will answer you!

Jesus has already talked about essentials in prayer in chapter 6 (vv.5-15) and elements in prayer (vv.9-15). The teaching was brief, private and full of faith (see Bruner p. 277). Why does Jesus bring up the subject of prayer right after his discussion on judgment? **Judgment requires wisdom and discernment. Wisdom means we need fresh and constant counsel from God. Prayer gives us the opportunity to trust God's judgment for ourselves and others.**

When you ask something from someone, don't you want to know what kind of a person they are? Are they greedy? Stingy? Generous? Do you feel comfortable asking? What kind of a God are you praying to? Jesus assures us that He is a wise, loving, Heavenly Father. One who not only hears, but answers prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said; forgive so you will be forgiven (6:14-15); fast and God will give you spiritual substance (6:16-18). Jesus said the disciples' goal is not to lay up treasure on earth but in heaven (6:19-21). The disciples' integrity, purity, trust, and respect are all linked **not to outward religious activity, but internal transformation as we trust our Heavenly Father**. If you trust your Heavenly Father, you will have faith to believe He hears and responds. **The fact of God's goodness is not wishful thinking on our part, but we have concrete evidence of God's goodness. Jesus said so.**

God's Promise As You Pray (vv.7-8)

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Matthew 7:7 (NKJV) "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

This is both a command and an invitation. Ask. Seek. Knock. Ask forms an acrostic.

This is an amazing promise Jesus makes. Like His teaching on judgment, we must remember this teaching in its immediate context and the context of the rest of the Bible. Does this mean ask "anything"? Jesus is encouraging us to ask for God's wisdom, and discernment in the context of judgment. What better way to get wisdom than to ask? "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). "Without reproach" means God will not hold out on you, but rather desires you both to ask for wisdom and receive wisdom.

Some have suggested that these verses mean "you can write your own ticket with God". Some false and misguided teachers believe this is a blank check—and all you have to do is fill in the blank. Does Jesus suggest that we have the right to ask for harmful things, wicked things, or evil things? Does it mean that the unbeliever or the make-believer can create their own reality or generate wealth through sheer will power? Does this mean you can ask God absent belief in God or obedience to God? **Is this a license for cars, rich, wealth, super-bowels, winning lotto tickets?** Jesus has already made it clear that external riches are no guarantee of inner spiritual success.

Does this promise relate to people who have no relationship with their heavenly Father or no intention to obey His Word or know His will? John wrote (I John 3:22) "Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight". We also need the proper motive. James said (4:3 NASB); "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures". "God does not obligate Himself to answer selfish, carnal, requests from His children (J. MacArthur p. 444). We must have the right motive—and submit to God's will. Some foolish so called faith teachers have made the statement; "thy will be done" as a prayer of unbelief! Nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus has already said, you can't pursue wealth and God. James said, "For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double minded man, unstable in all his ways" (1:7-8).

Sometimes children will pit one parent against another. Jesus said, "ask your Heavenly Father!" Jesus never said, "Ask my mother!"

The Greek tense of the verbs; ask, seek, knock are present imperative and continual; keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. An example of the present imperative in our language would be; "always turn off the lights when you leave". It is something you do now—and in the future. We are required to be persistent in prayer. Why must we be persistent (constant) in prayer? **Think about the context of Christ's sermon for a moment.**

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The theme of Jesus' sermon is true righteousness (chapters 5-7). Jesus contrasts outward acts and inward condition. Jesus has described true righteousness as practiced by believers; poverty of spirit; humility of heart; sorrow for sin; meek or teachable; hungering and thirsting for righteousness. But am I really humble before God or filled with pride? Do I sorrow over sin; wait for his mercy; hunger and thirst for righteousness. Am I merciful or condemning? Is my heart clean? Am I peacemaker or a trouble maker? In our own power and wisdom we won't we will forever fail! We need God's grace, strength and wisdom!

Can you hear the Sermon on the Mount or read the Sermon on the Mount and somehow conclude that you need to turn over a new leaf and be a better person and then fool yourself into thinking you are a better person? Or can you read the Sermon on the Mount and understand that there is something really wrong with me? No one by themselves—apart from Christ—apart from grace—apart from the gospel—apart from the Holy Spirit come close to achieving the heart condition that Jesus describes! Jesus says—God requires poverty of spirit and humility of heart! Spiritual progress is impossible apart from God's love and mercy and grace. Do you keep asking, seeking, knocking? Why not pray? Why do we see prayer as a last resort?

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

Jesus invites us to ask! Ask, seek, knock. We receive—find—open!

And what do we ask?

The text doesn't say. But can we ignore the Sermon itself? Doesn't the sermon invite us to desire true Godliness and righteousness? Will we pray for humility before God; mercy from God; purity in our hearts; will we desire to be peace-makers or peace-fakers or peace breakers? Will we pray for the persecuted? Will we pray for wisdom so that we will avoid hypocrisy and superficial judgments?

“The prayer power,” says J. Hudson Taylor “has never been tried to its full capacity. . . If we want to see mighty wonders of divine power and grace wrought in the place of weakness, failure and disappointment, let us answer God's standing challenge, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not!”

Jeremiah 29:13; “And you shall seek me, and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart.”

Frances Fenelon (1651-1715; French Roman Catholic Missionary to the Huegonots) wrote;

“Tell God all that is in your heart, as one uploads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you to conquer them, talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to

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good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself and to others. If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back, neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart, without consideration they say just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved speech with God.”

Have you prayed and sought God and wrestled for an answer? Sometimes God says yes. Sometimes no (or I have something better) or wait. If you pray and are filled with doubt or worry or fear, pray some more. The word supplication means beg! You may think—I don't like it when God makes me beg! What about pleading, crying, prolonged prayer, insistent prayer, demanding prayer; is that beneath your dignity?

The Bible is filled with people who begged, pleaded and wept. Jacob wrestled with an angel all night long (Genesis 32:6); the night before he had to face his brother Esau. Mordecai and Esther prayed and fasted, neither eating or drinking until God gave them a settled peace. The people of Nineveh mourned and wept over their sin; praying for God's mercy over judgment. Moses prayed that God would not destroy the children of Israel. Daniel prayed—until God revealed to him the meaning of the vision. The apostles prayed and waited in the upper room for the Holy Spirit.

And so we ask. We ask sincerely, in faith, and pursue God. We knock “Like a human father, the heavenly Father uses these means to his children courtesy, persistence and diligence.” (DA Carson p. 186). R.A. Torrey lamented the average believer's indifference to prayer by writing: “How little time the average Christian spends in prayer! We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little. . .the power of God is lacking in our lives and in our work. . .We have not because we ask not.”

Is your Heavenly Father reluctant to grant your request? Does God delight in watching you squirm?

God's Pattern When You Pray (vv.9-11)

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

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

11If 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!

The Lord Jesus employs a clever illustration. It is an illustration that employs logic. If human fathers who are by nature evil (fallen); not able to rise to God's perfect standards; are able to give

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good gifts to their children; *how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*”

Human parents by and large love their children. Are there exceptions? Of course.

The rabbi's would ask; “is there a man who hates his son?” D.A. Carson writes; “No parent would deceive a child asking for bread or fish by giving him a similar looking but inedible stone or a dangerous snake. The point at issue is not merely the parents' willingness to give but their willingness to give good gifts—even though they themselves are evil.” I have eaten alligator tail, frogs legs, turtle soup—and even rattlesnake. I believe Jesus is saying in part—no self respecting Jew in his right mind would kill a snake and pass it of as clean to his children. “A loving Jewish father would not deceive and defile his son into dishonoring the Word of God by tricking him into eating ceremonially unclean food” (MacArthur p. 445).

Jesus destroys the theory that human beings are for the most part good (they are not). Jesus does not say “we are evil”. Jesus was and is sinless. We are not. This does not mean that all people are as bad as they could be. Rodney Dangerfield tells the story of how as a young boy he was lost at the beach. He stopped and asked a police officer if he could help him find his parents. The cop replied; “I don't know kid. There's a lot of places they could hide.”

We may joke—but God isn't playing hide and seek with you. People are by nature self-centered; not God centered. Because we are evil, both in nature and choice—it clouds and corrupts all that we do to a certain extent.

What kind of a God is God?

Our Father is loving and good. The Lord isn't looking for a reason to mock you or refuse you. In the world of the ancient Greeks and Romans they had plenty of stories of the trickery of the gods. The gods of Greece and Rome were sometimes petty, and self-serving. Aurora (the goddess) fell in love with Tithonus, a mortal youth. Aurora was the goddess of the dawn. “Zeus, the king of the gods, offered her any gift that she might choose for her mortal lover. Aurora very naturally chose that Tithonus might live forever; but she forgot to ask that Tithonus might remain forever young; and so Tithonus grew older and older and older, and could never die, and the gift became a curse (William Barclay p. 272).

Jesus tells us that God not only hears our prayers; answers our prayers; but answers them with love, wisdom and in perfect understanding. Our imperfect understanding will sometimes butt heads with His perfect will. God will always answer our prayers His way; in wisdom and love; sometimes testing our sincerity; and always thinking about what is best for us.

Jesus invites us to consider that God is good and willing to *give good things to those who ask Him.*

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What kinds of good things?

John Newton writes;

Come, my soul, thy suit prepare;
Jesus loves to answer prayer;
He himself has bid thee pray,
Therefore will not say thee nay.

Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring;
For his grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

Some Thoughts On Prayer

There are lots of reasons to pray.

We are given repeated commands to pray; Jesus said ask, seek knock. James wrote; “you have not because you ask not” (James 4:2). How much do we miss because we simply refuse to ask? We have the examples of Christ and the Apostles in the New Testament. Paul wrote; “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ”. Prayer is always the right thing to do. God is good. How many reasons do you need? Prayer defeats the devil, saves the sinner, strengthens the saint, sends forth the laborers; heals the sick; glorifies God; gives good things; accomplishes the impossible; imparts wisdom; bestows peace; keeps us from sin; and reveals the heart of God and the will of God. Prayer should be both humble and bold; sincere, simple, persistent and spoken in faith. Do some things hinder prayer? Yes. Unconfessed sin (Psalm 66:18); insincerity (Matt. 6:5); carnal motives (James 1:5-6); unbelief (James 1:5-6); Satanic activity (Daniel 10:10-13); trouble in the home or marriage (I Peter 3:7); pride (Luke 18:10); robbing God (Mal. 3:8-10); refusing to submit to Biblical teaching (Prov.1:24-28).

Conclusion

Dr. Helen Roseveare—missionary to The Republic of Zaire (formerly Belgian Congo); told the following story: A mother at our mission station died after giving birth to a premature baby. We tried to improvise an incubator to keep the infant alive, but the only hot water bottle we had was beyond repair. So during devotions that morning we asked the children to pray for the baby and for her little sister who was now an orphan. One of the girls responded; “Dear God, please send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late because by then the baby will be dead. And dear Lord, send a doll for the sister so she won't feel so lonely.” That afternoon a large parcel arrived from England. Eagerly the children opened the package. Much to their surprise, under some clothing was a hot water bottle! Immediately the girl who had prayed so earnestly started

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to delve deeper, exclaiming, "If God sent that, I'm sure He also sent a doll." And she was right! The heavenly Father knew in advance of the child's sincere requests, and 5 months before, He had led a ladies group to include both of these specific articles."

Although many of our prayers are not answered so dramatically, God always sends what is best.

PRAYER—AN ACROSTIC

- P** Pleads the Name of Jesus (John 14:13-14)
- R** Regards the Work of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19-22)
- A** Abides in the Person of Jesus (John 15:7)
- Y** Yields To The Will of Jesus (1 John 5:14-15)
- E** Expects A Fulfillment Of the Promise of God in Christ (2 Cor.1:20)
- R** Remembers Christ's conditions keep asking, seeking knocking (Matt.7:7)