



## Bread or Stones?

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<sup>7</sup> “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>9</sup> “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup> If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! <sup>12</sup> So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

*Matthew 7:7-12*



**T**his morning as we continue in our series, Sermon on the Mount, we only have a couple of weeks left. We have this Sunday, and we have two more Sundays.

We've talked before, that the Sermon On The Mount, while full of...this is Christ's teaching on the idea of who God is, but [also] how that actually [and] practically plays out in our lives. It's full of these wonderful examples of grace, and love, and compassion of Christ, but it is also full of hard teaching. It's full of difficult statements.

It's filled with things, that while we agree with [them] theologically, what we agree with from a Head-knowledge perspective, *putting them into action*, is far more difficult. And we've heard so many times throughout these couple of chapters (chapters five to seven in Matthew), how we look at the words and we agree, but when we truly ingest the words, they become far harder for

us to agree with. We want them to be wrong, except that it's Christ himself who is speaking these amazing words.

And so, while we have these hard statements, while we have these hard things, we don't want to lose sight of the fact that the reason Christ is giving these teachings, is because He knows who his Father is. It's because He intimately knows who God the Father is. He is teaching his disciples, so that they may teach the world, so that we may know the goodness of our God; knowing that yes, it is difficult, and yes, the way that God operates is different than the way we operate as people.

The godly nature, the divine nature, is far different than my human nature, the sinful nature. Those two are often at odds together. What Christ is teaching in these chapters, is for us to know why it's so important that we would stay committed to who God is, knowing that He is far greater than anything else that we have. And Christ Himself, being the one giving this message, [to know] that Christ is the way in which we are reconciled with the Father; Christ is the Way the Truth and the Life.

In this message this morning, in this text, He's talking about these amazing words! There is such joy, and blessing, and privilege in these words, and yet, there's also difficulty, because when we read the words, oh we want to say Yes! Yes! Yes! But when we truly dig into what Christ is teaching, it becomes far harder for us to do these things practically.

We begin in chapter 7 on verse 7. Jesus says "*ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks the door will be opened.*" Now I'm going to go briefly through the text this morning, and then I want to go through the practical application in a little more detail.

So, what we see in this text is this beautiful promise. But now He's talking about asking, seeking, and knocking, but what He's really talking about is praying continuously; that we would be in constant communication with our Father; that we would know where our hope comes from; that we would know who is our source of ; who is our source of all things; that we would desperately be seeking.

He says *if we ask...* who's the one that asks questions? It's the one who doesn't know; it's the one who doesn't understand. That's the person who asks. So when we don't understand, when we don't know, we should be asking who? I know, the internet seems like a great place for answers, but we should be asking our Father. We should be asking God. When we don't know, we should ask.

Look at the promise that's part of this – He says *ask*, and what? Maybe I'll get back to you in 24 to 48 hours? Maybe at some point I'll let you know? What does He say? *Ask and it will be given to you.* When we lack, when we don't know, when we're missing – and we're going to talk more specifically, about what those things are – He says that we ask for God. We ask of him and He provides.

He says *when we seek.* Who seeks? It's the ones who are lost. They seek. If I know where I'm

going, I don't seek. I seek because I'm lost. I seek because I'm confused. He says *when we seek*. He doesn't say that you'll continue to wander around clueless. He says *when you seek, you'll find*. When you seek, you'll find!

He says *when you knock*. Who knocks? We knock on the door when we're alone. We knock on the door when we're on the outside looking in. We knock on a door when we're separated from where we want to be. He says *you knock*. What happens when we knock, when we feel alone, when we feel separated? What happens when we knock? He doesn't say, I'll look through the through the security hole on my door, and I'll see if I like you. He says *when you knock the door will be opened to you*. He's talking about [that] it doesn't matter what situation we find ourselves in. If we don't know the answer, if we are confused and lost, if we are on the outside looking in, He says there's something better. There's something better!

He says for everyone. Every. One. We can debate later who sits outside of "everyone"; it's a pretty short debate, right? *Everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks the door will be opened.*

And why is this true? He says that which of you, "*which of you if your son asked for bread will give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish, we'll give him a snake. If you then though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?*" Why are these things true? Why is it true that if we ask we will receive, if we seek we will find, if we knock it will be open? Why is that true? Because God is good! Because He is always good! Because God...is...good!

And so, Jesus even says...now remember, this is Jesus who very much knows who God the Father is; in very nature God...Jesus Christ who came into this world incarnate, meaning God in flesh! There was no separation. It's not that Jesus knew who God was because He met Him once. Jesus knew who God is because He shares his very nature. This is God in flesh, God with us.

He says that *because you are evil...* We are evil! I mean that is a hard truth, right? Again, He doesn't [say] *because some of you are evil; because I know eight of you and you're pretty bad*. He says *you!* He's talking to His disciples, His closest followers. In turn, He's speaking to us as followers of Christ. He says *you are evil*.

We don't like to embrace that truth, and the fact is we often look at ourselves as pretty good. But if we look at ourselves as pretty good, we will never appreciate the goodness of the Father. We have to acknowledge who we are first. And I am a failed, flawed, sinful person. I am evil. Evil just merely means that my nature, in me, is opposed to God; by very nature opposed to God. That is who I am. How do I know that? Because [I know that] if left to my own devices, I know who I am.

If you are left to your own devices, you know who you are. That doesn't mean that we're going to do the most depraved acts that have ever been seen in the world. Often we think of evil as this qualifier that says well, I'm not quite evil. Evil just means that we're not pursuing after the very holiness of God. And I know that in my life, I often do not pursue after the very holiness of God.

Why? Because I'm evil.

But God, because of His love for me, has looked on me with compassion, and mercy. The point of this...we're going to talk about it practically to believers, but the point of this text begins with the idea that we stand opposed to who God is, that we stand outside of the gate. He says that when we live in this world, and we finally understand that we're not enough; when we finally understand that we're lacking, He says then we ask because we know we don't have. When we finally understand that we're confused by this world...often I'm confused by *me*...that I don't have all the answers. He says *then we'll seek*, because we're lost. He says that when we figure out that because of who we are we stand opposed to this amazing, Holy God, at that point, we will desperately stand on the porch, and we will knock on the door, because [we] know [we're] alone and separated.

And what does He say our good Father does? He says He answers so that we receive; He allows us to find what we're seeking; He opens the door so that we may enter; He's talking about salvation; He's talking about the idea that we are separated from God. But if you're a believer in Christ this morning, at some point your eyes were open, and you realized how lost you were. and you found yourself asking, and seeking, and knocking. Never has a person asked, sought, and knocked, and been rejected by God. We have a good Father who always answers the door, who always says *I am here for you*. We have a good, good Father. He says we as evil people...if our child asks us for bread, if our children are hungry do we hand them a stone and say you figure it out? We would never do that! We would never think of being that cruel, and yet our very Hearts are sinful by nature.

[We know] our hearts are sinful, and [yet] we know enough to be good. What about God's perfection? Does He not know how to be good? If I know what goodness looks like, does God – the bringer of good, the author of good – does He not know what good looks like? He says “How much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?”

Now this is where we get a little sideways on this text, because He says you ask, you get whatever you want. You seek, you find whatever it is you're looking for. You knock, any door you want is going to be open, because God is so good, He will give you whatever good gifts you want.

Yeah, not at all true. My definition of good gifts is not God's definition of good gifts. In fact, I want to look at the way that Luke portrayed this same sermon, this same verse in Luke chapter 11. Luke says this...and it's almost verbatim...he says which of you Fathers, if your son asked for a fish, would give him a snake instead? Or if he asked for an egg, we'll give him a scorpion. *If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*

Matthew says good gifts, but what is Matthew talking about? Is He talking about a Ferrari? Is Matthew talking about a better job? Is he talking about a way better spouse? What is he talking about when he says He'll give good gifts? He says the Holy Spirit. He's talking about the spiritual aspect. He's not saying this world will be easy. He's not saying life will be easy. He's not saying

when your bank account gets low, pray a little harder and He'll give you everything. That's not what He's talking about. He's saying *good gifts*, being what is the greatest gift that we could ever receive? It is of the very promise of our redemption given to us through the Holy Spirit. When we knock on that door, when God opens the door, when He calls us in, He trades us. He takes our sin and forgives us, and gives us the Holy Spirit.

What better gift! Matthew calls it *good gifts*, but he's really referring to the Holy Spirit. When we're talking about asking, seeking, and knocking, we're not talking about the things of this world that we think we need. We're talking about from a spiritual aspect.

Now here's where the practical application of this gets difficult, because that's not natural for us. That's not natural for us. I want to go through these verses from two different perspectives. The first one that I want to go through...is the Golden Rule. But I want to go through this idea of how we approach these things in prayer. And understand that there are two very divergent paths to this, and they lead us to vastly different outcomes.

The outcome that God is leading us to, that Christ is leading us to in this message, is what we know as the Golden Rule. Do to others what you would have them do to you. Do to others what you would have them do to you. And we know that whether you've been in church or not, that's just a good rule to live by. He says that's the natural outcome of our relationship with God. Our relationship in Christ, being empowered by the Holy Spirit, drives us to something else.

We've been talking a lot, through the Sermon on the Mount, about motivation. What's our motivation? And so, as a Christ is teaching us, He now says, what is our power in us? What is motivating us? What is driving us? And if we're not approaching it for the right reasons, if we're not looking through the right lens, our perspective is skewed. And if our perspective is wrong, then this Golden Rule takes on a different meaning. But if our perspective is that of God-facing, if our perspective is Christ-centered, if our perspective is Holy Spirit led, then this Golden Rule takes on what Christ says, that it sums up the law and the prophets.

So I want to start by looking at this from a me-centered view of prayer. Now none of us would say, oh we should have a me-centered view of prayer. We already know this side is wrong. We totally get it. But as we walk through it, how many of us do it?

So the first point in the me-centered view of prayer is that "I" determine what good gifts are, and I ask for them. "I" determine what the good gifts are. "I" say what I need. "I" tell God *this is what I need in my life*. [I] determine the good gifts. After [I] determine the good gifts, then I demand that my prayers are answered through my persistence. I continually ask, seek, knock.

Didn't Christ Himself promise that God would give me what I asked for? Didn't He promise that I would find what I'm seeking? Didn't He promise that He would open the doors to where I'm knocking? So I just need to keep asking. I just need to keep banging my head against the door, because you know what? I know who God is, and I know that He'll relent, and He can fulfill my request. I just need to wear Him down. I just need to push a little harder. I just need to keep going at it, so that eventually, He'll change His mind and He'll do what I'm asking him to do!

So if I ask for bread enough times, He'll give me bread; I keep asking for bread. He says He won't give me stones if I keep asking for bread. I'm going to keep asking for bread! But I'm not just asking for any bread. I'm asking for...well, I want the 12 grain whole wheat, hand ground... I want the good stuff God! And I'm not going to be satisfied until you give me what I ordered. We treat God like He's the pickup line at Pick N Save. I put it in the internet. I told you what I wanted, you should put in a bag and put it in my car. This is the way we approach our idea of who God is. And so we say *He promised me bread*, so I'm going to keep banging my head, because I know that He'll relent, and He'll fulfill my request.

The end result of that though, is that the Golden Rule is about me: *do unto others as I would have them do to me*, meaning that I am focused on what I want done to "me", so therefore, I'll inform how I treat other people. I want to be treated well, and I want people to like me, so I guess I need to act a certain way to make that happen.

So the Golden Rule takes on a very selfish perspective, that I desire...and even we teach it to our kids that way. I've taught it to my kids that way. [We say] "Why do you think that person was mean to you? Maybe you need to be nicer to them". What does that teach them? That how people treat me is how I'm treating them, so therefore, if I want to be treated better...is that really what our motivation is? Just that people treat me better? Shouldn't my motivation be that I care about how I'm treating people? Shouldn't my motivation be agnostic of how they treat me? Shouldn't my motivation be *what is the right way to treat other people*, not *what do I get out of this*, and now that's my motivation. But that's what the Golden Rule has become, because our prayers are me-centered; our view of God is me-centered; our view of what God is promising us is me-centered. And so the Golden Rule becomes me-centered.

But I want to look at this the other way. I want to look at this as a God-centered view of prayer. Remember just a few weeks ago, we talked about the Lord's prayer. He says that we need to be desiring for God's Kingdom to come, for His will to be done. What does that look like in practice? When we go back through this text, and from a God-centered perspective, we know that good gifts come from God, and refer to the spiritual aspects of life; that good gifts are what He refers to as the Holy Spirit being given to us; that when I'm asking, seeking, knocking, it's all about God. First save me, and then guide me, and teach me. Show me that this is a broken world and I don't understand it; show me that my perspective is wrong; show me that I'm seeing things through just my eyes, through my perspective, and I am flawed! I don't want my view of this world to be through "these" eyes.

Paul tells us we should take on the very mind of Christ, that we should view the very world differently. In fact, we're told in Romans, chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, that we're to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may know, we may discern the good perfect and pleasing will of God. "I" need to be changed! I don't need God to be changed. In fact, I don't want a God who changes. I desperately need to be changed.

And so, the good gifts that I'm asking for is the very Holy Spirit, the very joy from Heaven above. God knows and determines what is good for my spirit, even if I do not perceive it to be good.

See, here's the challenge: God knows what is good. God promises to do what is good. God is good, and yet I constantly challenge Him as though He's not. I constantly look at the situations and circumstances and say, "God you must not be very good. You promised me something else".

Look at the world around us. Let's try to find a lot of good things this morning, about what's going on in the world around us. It's going to be tough to do! Does that mean that God isn't good, or does it mean that God isn't in control? I would have to go back to this me-centered view of prayer, and say I'm defining what is good, and this is how you need to operate. But what we're saying is that God knows and determines what is good for my spirit, even if I don't see it as good.

I had the privilege yesterday morning, to visit with somebody in the hospital who...I mean a life or death situation. This person was talking to me about how privileged she was that some people from her small group came and prayed in the parking lot outside the hospital. She did not go "Woe is me, why is this happening to me?" She said "Can you imagine that people would do that for me? Can you imagine that people love me like that? Can you imagine that God blessed me in this way?"

Her situation is not good. In fact, a nurse came in, and I was in there, and two of her children were in the room. The nurse came in and said "I hate to be the bearer of bad news but I don't recognize any of your faces, and you can only have two visitors per stay. And the two people that were here yesterday are not any of you three, and you've got to figure out who goes". And I was like *I'm a pastor*, right? I get to stay. But the other two were her children, and they now needed to decide who was going to leave, because two other people were there. And if they both decided to leave, then the other people that were visiting, her husband and another child, were not able to come back. The nurse left. One of her children is crying. She said, "Can you imagine how awful it is to be in that nurse's shoes, to have to make that statement"? You know what my thought was when the nurse came in and said that? *Stupid coveted policies! Why are they doing this? This woman is in a tough spot. She needs her family! She needs to be loved! I can't believe that!*

This woman is in the hospital bed, and has to say goodbye to her kids, and doesn't know what the outcome of her stay is, says "Oh, that poor person has to deliver that news. That is horrible"! That is what it looks like when we say, "God I don't have to like my circumstances, but I know you're good. I know you're good. I know that I don't have to look through these flawed eyes at the world. I know that I get to look at this through a Christian perspective, because the truth is that I asked for bread. But what I receive is not the bread I desire, but the bread I need. The bread I need.

You see, this woman realized that God was revealing Himself to her in amazing ways, even from a hospital bed in times of uncertainty. And we ask for bread that we think we need. We have all the...ask me. I have all the answers, right? I can tell you exactly what God should be doing and

when and how. They are all wrong answers! You don't want God to act the way Adam Baker thinks He should act! You don't need it in your life. I don't need it in my life. I need God to be God. Why? Because He's good; because He is a good God and I trust Him. And I know that I ask for bread sometimes that I want, but He knows what I need. And He is such a good Father, He's willing to give me what I need over what I want.

God uses every situation for my good. I prayed for bread, I think He sent me a stone. I pray for bread, and I think "why did you give me a stone? You promised you'd be good!" I look at the world around me and all I see are stones, and I'm like, "What are you doing God? All there are, are stones"! He says "You're refusing to see the bread." He says "You don't understand what I'm doing. If I'm good, then I'm only giving you bread." And that may not mean that the situation is good. That doesn't mean that the circumstance is good. It means that God is still good! It means that we are being taught something. We are opening our eyes in a greater way to the wonder of who God is. We are seeing things from a different perspective.

If I begin with *I'm not sure if God is good*, then every circumstance in every situation is up for debate. But if I start with acknowledging that God is good, and I'm asking for bread, and I know He's giving me bread, I may not understand that it's bread. I may not want that bread. But I know that He is a good God in every situation no matter how bleak, no matter how dire, no matter how horrible. It may not be good for me physically, it may not be good for me emotionally, but it is good for me spiritually. He is moving me to a different place; He is calling me into something greater; He is preparing me for an eternity with Him because He is a good Father.

Then, if we look at things through that perspective, then the Golden Rule isn't about me at all. The Golden Rule is about expressing God to others. When I see bread where everybody else sees stones, where I see God's goodness where everybody else sees hurt, and depravity, and decay, then all of a sudden, I'm expressing the very goodness of God to other people. I'm not acting in a way so that they will treat me a certain way. I just desire they know my good, good Father. I desire that they would know the joy I have in me. I desire that they would know the goodness He placed in me! Because when I cried out for bread, when I cried out for good gifts, He sent them. But not the way I wanted. He sent them in His Holy Spirit. He sent them in a way that changed me from the inside out. He sent them in a way that changed my perspective, and renewed my mind.

The two questions that I want to leave us with this morning are first, who is in view when I pray, me or God? When I come into a conversation with God, when I ask, when I seek, when I knock, who's in view? Am I desiring to dictate to God what He should do? Or am I saying "God, let me see! God, I know you're good, that's what's not changing. Now God, help me understand all of this".

The Golden Rule [is] not *how do I treat somebody else so they treat me nice*. The Golden Rule becomes, *how do I treat somebody else in the manner in which God is changing me*. What would that look like if we approached God with a focus on whom He is, rather than a focus on whom I am.



And secondly, am I seeing the bread or just the stones? Do I only see the stones? Is everywhere I look just another pile of stones? Am I begging for God to act, and all I think He's providing is more stones? Do I think He's withholding bread? Do we think that He's not doing something the way He should do it, and He needs to act differently? Or do I understand what scripture says, that He's a good Father, and He only provides me bread. He only gives me what I need to grow and move in Him; what I need to be drawn to Him so that I'm asking, seeking, knocking; so that others are asking, seeking, knocking. Am I so focused on the stones that I'm missing the very goodness of God?

I pray that each and every one of us. If we're not a believer this morning, I pray that we would be led to ask, seek, and knock, because I know that our good Father will gladly open that door and respond, and allow us to find what we've been looking for.

I pray that for those of us who are believers in Christ this morning, that we would stop seeing the stones everywhere; that we would stop being so frustrated at the world and so frustrated at what's going on around us, and begin to understand that there is bread here! There is the very goodness of God laid out in front of us!

Often, we're like the Israelites in the wilderness, when God sent manna, they said "I don't want that, I want something else". Will we see the bread that He's given us, even in spite of our circumstances? Please join me in prayer.

Father, oh God we are so thankful. We don't have to guess at whether or not you're a good Father. We don't have to guess whether or not you're doing the right things. We don't have to guess at whether or not you're acting in our best interest. We know, through all truth in scripture, that you are God. Our problem is not you God, our problem is our perspective. I pray that you would open the eyes of our hearts, so that we may see your goodness in everything. And as we see more of your goodness that it would flow out of us to others, so that we may express the very goodness of God to this world. I pray that the Golden Rule would not be done for us, but will be done through us, to bring your name. I pray that you be with us. Continue to provide your bread. Continue to open our eyes to your goodness, and continue to allow us to enjoy what you've created us to be. I ask all these things in Jesus name. Amen.



### ME-CENTERED VIEW OF PRAYER

- I determine what "good gifts" are and I ask for them.
- I demand my prayers are answered through my persistence (continually asking, seeking, knocking).
- God relents and fulfills my requests.

- I ask for bread enough times and He gives me bread.
- The Golden Rule then is about me.

### *GOD-CENTERED VIEW OF PRAYER*

- “Good gifts” come from God and refer to the spiritual aspects of life.
- God knows and determines what is good for my spirit even if I do not perceive it to be “good”.
- I ask for bread, but what I receive is not the bread I desire, but the bread I need.
- God is using every situation for my good.

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### *QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT*

Who is in view when I pray, me or God?

Am I seeing the “bread” or just the “stones”?



### *WORSHIP SONGS:*

*Rising Sun | Good Good Father | From the Inside Out | Yes I Will*