

Ask, Seek, & Knock
(Matthew 7:6-11)
By Randy Wages
10/15/06

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction

Today we will be continuing our study of the Sermon on the Mount and as such I will ask you to turn again to Matthew, chapter 7. Our text for today is Matthew 7, verses 6-11. The title for today's message is "Ask, Seek, & Knock." This of course is taken from verses 7 and 8 so, by way of introduction, look at these 2 verses with me. There our Lord asserts:

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: ⁸For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

Consider this declaration by our Lord! He asserts (seemingly without qualification if we consider these words in isolation) that everyone that asks receives, that seeks finds, and that knocks shall have it opened. But do you get everything you ask for or seek for? Does every door open up for you? Well, that's not been my experience either. So we must conclude that either Christ is misleading His hearers ó lying to them (which we know can't be true) ó or we must conclude that He is speaking of asking and seeking after something very specific ó not referring to just anything and everything that anyone might imagine to ask for and seek after.

So to understand these 2 verses it's necessary that we consider it in its context ó in the context of this sermon ó Christ's Sermon on the Mount. And as we do, we'll see that He is referring to something of eternal value. So, today as we examine these words in the context of this sermon and in the broader context of the message of Christ set forth in all the scriptures, we will consider: 1) to Whom and for What are we to ask? 2) For What are we to seek?, and 3) Where are we to knock?

I. Overview in Context (Verses 1-14):

As I've said, our primary focus today will be on verses 6-11; however, because I believe context is particularly important to a proper understanding of this passage, I want to begin by refreshing your memory concerning the verses leading into our text for today, verses 1-5.

1). You'll recall in this passage which begins, "***Judge not, that ye be not judged...***" that here Christ isn't dealing with whether we should make judgments or not (as this passage is so often misinterpreted), but rather He is addressing the standard by which we should judge. And we saw that He is referring to making judgments of eternal significance ó adopting God's standard of judgment as our own. As Christ commanded in John 7:24, we are not to judge by outward appearance but we are to "***...judge righteous judgment.***" As we saw in Acts 17, that standard is none other the righteousness that Christ Himself accomplished in His perfect satisfaction to God's justice (perfect obedience even unto death ó satisfying the law's precepts (sinless obedience) as well as paying the penalty for imputed sins ó the sins of all those for whom He died that were laid upon Him.

2). We examined these metaphors, the "***mote***" and the "***beam***" in the eye ó the eye representing our understanding, the mote being like a small splinter representing sins common to all which are a hindrance to our vision (the eye of our understanding), but the beam, being a large timber, represents something that would completely obstruct how we see things.

3). Then in verse 5 Christ labels those who remain so deceived as "***hypocrites***" and states that they are unqualified to be trying to get the motes out of the eyes of others ó i.e. ó trying to relate to others the remedy for their sin problem while totally oblivious of their own problem as measured against God's holy standard of judgment.

4). We discussed how this was characteristic of most religion ó as deceived preachers promote taking care of the sin problems of others with an imagined remedy that tells on them. It involves making judgments based on the outward appearance since their doctrine imagines that salvation is conditioned in some way, to some degree, on the sinner rather than on Christ alone.

So, Christ ends verse 5 saying this ðbeamö would need to be removed if you're to be qualified to address the sin problem of others. And then as Christ moves into verse 6, it's as if He's saying, ðBut you who are qualified, to whom God's remedy has been revealed, who can see clearly to speak to men about God's remedy for their sin problem, take cautionö as He tells them in verse 6: ***öGive not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.***"

Now this is the beginning of our text for today. We will come back and look at this verse in more detail in a moment, but for now I just want you to capture the general sense in its context and how Christ is relating, ðDon't take that most precious of gifts (likened here to pearls, that which has been revealed unto you), and push it upon those who are showing no interest whatsoever ó who want nothing to do with that which you are promoting ó who will take that which is most precious to you, (what the scripture calls ***"the savor of life unto life"*** for some ó and they'll trample upon it.

Now consider that Christ is speaking here not only to His disciples, but to a multitude. At the end of this sermon, we read how they were astonished at His doctrine. Don't you imagine as they heard these words of Christ that some wondered, ðIs there a beam in my eye that I'm not considering, that I don't perceive?ö And then they hear Him say unto those to whom Christ and His way of salvation has been revealed (for whom the beam has been cast out), don't take that valuable truth and cast it before the swine ó before those who want nothing to do with it. So some may have wondered, ðCould I be among those He's referring to as swine?ö (We all start out as enemies of God according to the scriptures ó as these dogs and swine ó so this would be an appropriate response).

Oh, but then as we move into verse 7, Christ graciously informs His hearers, including those who may have been thinking, ðBut I want these pearls of wisdom ó I want to be able to judge arightö. And in the context it is as if Christ is relating to them, ðWell, if you desire these pearls, then í .(verse 7): ***öAsk, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: ⁸For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.***"_And then He backs this up, as He goes forward in verse 9, saying:

“Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

Again, we’ll come back and look at this in more detail but notice how Christ supports His declaration (that if you seek you’ll find) in verses 9-11 by reasoning from the lesser to the greater. He’s putting God’s character as a loving Father on the line here in asserting that if you sinners (ōbeing evilö) know how to give good gifts to your children, öHow much more shall the heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him!ö He doesn’t waffle in His assertion; but, without ambiguity, He states that everyone who asks for that which He has been speaking of, will receive, who seeks will find, and who knocks shall have it opened. Now this explicit declaration from our Lord should grab our attention.

Although we will wait until next week to examine verses 12 - 14 in detail, let’s go ahead and read down through verse 14 so that we see not only the verses prior to our text but also those that immediately follow. He continues in verse 12 saying, ö***Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.***” Next week we’ll spend more time addressing how this verse, (often referred to as the Golden Rule), also fits in this context, but for our purposes today, let’s go on and look at verses 13 & 14 where Christ commands, ö***Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.***”

I think seeing these words that immediately follow our text for today makes it even clearer that Christ has stayed on subject all along. He’s sticking with the theme of His Sermon, the Gospel of the kingdom, that dominion, rule, or reign ó grace reigning through righteousness (Romans 5:21). He’s talking about the vital issues of the kingdom of heaven, of entrance into heaven, and I believe He was doing so when:

- 1) He spoke of the standard of judgment in verses 1-5 ó of our need to adopt the standard by which He makes judgments pertaining to our eternal destiny.
- 2) I believe He was on the subject when He spoke in verse 6 of not casting your pearls before swine ó of refraining from sharing the Gospel of the kingdom with those who want no part of that treasure of eternal value.
- 3) I believe this was still His subject when He spoke of those who could be assured of finding His way ó describing them as those who asked of Him, who seek His kingdom and His righteousness, and who knock at the door, the strait gate, and the narrow way ó Christ Himself.

I hope considering this passage as a whole is as helpful to you as it was to me in my study, seeing how all of this ties together. Now with that overview of the context in which Christ is speaking, let's now go back and look in more detail at our text for today, verses 6-11:

III. Exposition of Today's Text (Verses 6-11);

A. Valuing the Gospel / Wisdom in Witnessing ó Verse 6:

Starting back in verse 6, again we read, ***“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”***

He says don't give that which is "holy." Now His hearers would most likely have understood this as alluding to the meat from sacrificial offerings (that which is holy) for they were forbidden to feed that to the dogs. Under the Mosaic Law "dogs" and "swine" were unclean and unholy animals. The Israelites were prohibited from using them either for food or sacrifices unto God. They weren't permitted even to contribute the money received from the sale of a dog to the house of God.

But since His hearers had also heard the entire sermon up to this point, they also likely understood the analogy Christ was setting forth when He speaks of these pearls ó pearls of great value. It is clear that He is referring to the very word of God in the Gospel wherein the righteousness of the kingdom is revealed.

He was telling those who knew, or who would come to know and adopt His standard of judgment (those who would trust solely in the finished work of Christ ó His righteousness), to withhold delivering or communicating the precious truth of this Gospel to those who they knew would turn on them and treat their most prized possession with disdain, those who show no regard for or interest in the just satisfaction of God that is only found in the Person and work of Christ.

Proverbs 23:9 says ***“Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.”*** And consider what Christ said in Matt 15:14 of the Pharisees. He said, ***“Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”***

The picture here is that the unregenerate (those to whom God has not yet given spiritual life) have no more capacity to appreciate the Gospel message of His kingdom ó of salvation conditioned on Christ alone ó than swine have to rate pearls at their true value.

Consider the figure of the “pearls.” First it conveys that which we should regard as our true riches, namely the contents of God’s Word ó the Gospel itself, for it sets forth the true Christian’s precious treasure. I am reminded of the parable in Matthew 13:45-46 where Christ said, ***“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: ⁴⁶Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”***

The pearls here refer to the goods of this kingdom, that which is revealed in God’s Word concerning how sinners are saved ó the righteousness of this kingdom. And when that “beam” or blindness is lifted by the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit, we behold the riches that are in Christ. We are blessed to have been given eyes that look to Him alone, based upon that which He accomplished in His life and death. One with God-given faith rejoices in the truth, looking to Christ’s Person and work as their most precious treasure.

I can picture this: A little boy goes into his mother's jewelry box and takes her most valuable, treasured pearls. He then takes them outside and just for kicks throws them in the pig sty there on the family farm, fully aware that the hogs will drag them through the mud and ultimately tear them into pieces. And as his mom discovers this and punishes him, she teaches him that we don't intentionally subject valuables to that kind of treatment. She explains that these were expensive & they were acquired at a great cost. Back to the analogy, think of what it cost our Lord to acquire our salvation & no less than His own precious blood. And I think Christ is communicating here, "I came here to die for this & So, do not knowingly subject this precious Gospel wherein the righteousness of God in Christ is revealed to that kind of treatment."

And in this verse 6, we see that this command is also for our own good. You see, the eternally blessed will suffer persecution as we learned from the first part of His sermon in chapter 5. But we don't have to seek persecution. It will come over the Gospel & over what the Bible calls the "offense of the cross." So if and when we see there is no interest, but rather animosity & as Christ said of the Pharisees, leave them alone.

When I began my study of this particular verse, the passage in I Peter 3 immediately came to mind where in vs. 15 we're told to: "I ***be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:***" We are to stand ready always but it reads, "...to every man that asketh..." See, those whose asking is compatible with seeking God on His terms shall receive and find. What a privilege to play even some small role in communicating that message & but even then we're to share what God has revealed to us "...with ***meekness and fear,***" with reverential regard for the honor of God's character knowing who made us to differ & recognizing that salvation is truly of the Lord.

And if Christ and what He accomplished (His righteousness) is that valuable to you, if it's your only hope for eternal life & you shouldn't need any prodding to share this good news with anyone, and particularly if it's someone you care anything about at all. As Paul wrote in II Cor. 5:11, "***Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;...***"

But Christ is telling us that this desire to ***“Let your light shine before men...”*** (as He has already commanded in this same sermon) is to be tempered with wisdom. We’re not to take this valuable gospel and try to force it on those who want nothing to do with it.

Oh, but what about the poor sinner that is interested? Look at the next verse, verse 7. To him He says:

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: ⁸For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

As I’ve already pointed out, it is obvious that this can’t be referring to everything and anything that we may imagine to ask for, seek after, or any door we might decide to knock upon. As obvious as this should be, I make mention of it because so many in this religious world have treated these verses as a sort of blank check which anybody can fill in just as they please. And a multitude of preachers stand in pulpits feeding their imagination that God is pledging in these verses to honor that check.

Consider James 4: 3 where it is expressly stated, ***“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss..”*** That word *amissö* indicates something bad or evil so as to suggest they ask sinfully. To ask amiss would be acting in concert with laying up for yourself treasures upon earth rather than in heaven as Christ touched on earlier in His sermon back in chapter 6. That is, it is to seek the blessings of this world first, not seeking first ***“...the kingdom of God and His righteousness”*** (vs. 33 of chapter 6). To ask *amissö* (and receive not) describes those who seek salvation in a way of their own devising, conditioned on themselves ó i.e., based upon something other than or in addition to His righteousness.

In John 14:13-14, Christ told His disciples, ***“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”*** To ask in His name is to ask of Him as He is identified, the Lord our righteousness, asking for that which is consistent with His way of salvation ó the way of righteousness. It’s to submit to His perfect will ó which shall be done! God does not promise to give us all we ask for, but rather all we ask for in His name, in accordance with who He is, with His will and His way.

Why ó because we asked for it? No, but because His will shall be done in the earth! God's counsel shall stand ó He's God. That's why!

Be turning to Luke chapter 11 as I want to share a parallel passage with you that supports that this is the correct sense of these verses ó that Christ is continuing to speak of things of eternal significance in the text we're considering today. He's staying on subject here in His sermon ó speaking of the way into His kingdom and that's what He's referring to in verse 9 as being sure to be received, found, and opened. He's referring to the vital issues of heaven and hell ó eternal life itself. Look with me in Luke 11:9 where Christ repeats, *“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”* And in the following verse we read essentially the same words as we read back in Matthew 7. But skip with me down to verse 13 where we read, *“¹³If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give <what?> the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.”* This is why I'm convinced that this deliverance from our blindness, the beam in our eye, this coming to see our need for God's mercy in Christ ó is that which Christ is commanding us to ask and seek for because that's what the Holy Spirit reveals. Christ said ó when He comes, He'll speak of me. The Holy Spirit causes sinners to ask, seek, and knock at the door of Christ, based upon His righteousness alone.

Ask:

So, to whom do we ask? Back when we studied the manner of prayer, earlier in this sermon back in chapter 6, we saw that we're to pray to *“Our Father who art in heaven.”* We're asking God because He's the source and originator of our salvation. You'll recall from our study of that passage which many refer to as the Lord's prayer, ö that we covered how prayer is an acknowledgement that all comes from Him. Christ has already told us that He knows our needs before we ask. Prayer to the true and living God is a submission to the sovereignty of God in all things.

But this praying, this öaskingö in Matthew 7:8, is an acknowledgment and submission to a specific aspect of God's sovereignty ó to the sovereignty of God in salvation, an acknowledgment that salvation is of and from Him. He must give it.

As long as we continue to imagine that our salvation is conditioned (even in part) by something done by, in, or through us, the sinner, then we are not asking a sovereign God as He has revealed in the Bible. We are just trying to cut a deal with a god of our imagination or one that we imagine dispenses with His holy justice, overlooks our sins, and allows us to save ourselves if we will just do our part. Well, if that is the case, you don't need mercy. You can do your part whenever you are ready or so we imagine.

Recall in our study on the manner of prayer how Christ instructed them to pray with a desire that His “...**will be done in the earth**” or That is the specific subject that this asking pertains to or a recognition that I must have from God the imputation of that which He (Christ) accomplished as my Substitute in perfect compliance to the Father will “**in the earth**” or in the life and death of our Lord to establish righteousness. That is the “**good things**” which the Holy Spirit reveals to God's people in time, in each successive generation.

Seek:

And then we are to seek what? Well, essentially we are to seek that which we ask God to reveal unto us or that which is good for us as we ask that God would grant us spiritual life, based upon the righteousness of His Son or the righteousness of His kingdom. And God says He will grant the gift of the Holy Spirit to remove the beam from the eye of our understanding or which Christ said He would not withhold from His children who asked of Him.

Hasn't Christ already told us earlier in His sermon what to seek after? He has and without any ambiguity. Look back again in Chapter 6, verse 33 where He commanded us, “...**seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...**”

Proverbs 21:21 reads: **“He that followeth after righteousness and mercy (that would mean a righteousness I cannot produce) findeth life, righteousness, and honour.”** There is no ambiguity in that declaration either or is there?

That's what this is all about – to seek this, His righteousness. And since we can't isolate this act of seeking from that which is being sought, (His righteousness), then any who so seek realize that this search automatically excludes the asking, the seeking, and the knocking as having any causal role in the receiving or finding of His righteousness is the perfection before God merited by Christ alone and nothing can be added to contribute additional merit to that. His work at Calvary finished the job, meriting all of salvation, including the gift of faith and repentance. And that faith is given, not in order to acquire Christ and His righteousness, but simply to behold it. He's already shown in chapters 5 and 6 the futility of thinking we can contribute one iota toward that. Remember, He told us in Matthew 5 that He would do it all – every jot and tittle, – not one iota left to be done!

Knock:

Finally, we're to knock, but where? At the door and Christ is the door. In John 10:7 Christ said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.”* And then in verse 9 He continues saying, *“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, ...”* He is the door. In John 14:6 Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* There is no other way.

Back in the Sermon on the Mount, we just read down in verses 13-14 another description of this entry way upon which we are to knock. Christ describes it as the strait gate. He is that strait gate and there's no room in that passageway for anything other than that which he accomplished – His righteousness. To see the certainty of salvation conditioned on His Person and accomplished work alone in satisfaction to God's justice is to knock at this door, to enter at this gate. If you've been blessed with eyes to see and value that – no other door will do.

We will examine these verses some more again next week and at that time I plan to share some scriptural examples that cause me to believe this knocking is indicative of one who God has so irresistibly convinced of this one way of salvation that like a beggar knocking at the door, they will not be deterred. He has revealed this priceless treasure, and they have no where else to go – so they knock at this door.

IV. Summary:

As I say, I plan to address this same passage some more next week. But in closing today, I ask you to consider: How are these clear, explicit assertions by Christ to be taken and applied to sinners like you and me?

We know that none will of their own accord ask, seek, and knock God's way unless and until God does a work. But you and I aren't privy to the secret will and purpose of God. The Bible teaches that God the Father chose or elected a people for whom Christ (God the Son) came, lived, and died. And as Christ said in John 6:37, "***All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;...***" But God doesn't reveal to us ahead of time who this election of grace consists of or those which Christ says are given to Him by the Father. A sinner only learns of his own election by God in hindsight, by its evidence of God-given faith and repentance that has caused us to look to Christ alone for our salvation, to the exclusion of all else. But God has graciously provided us in His word His revealed will for us in the way of commands such as we've studied today. And we should follow His commands and seek Him where He may be found or in the preaching of the Gospel wherein His righteousness is revealed (Romans 1:16-17). As we read in Isaiah 55, ***Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:***" His righteousness has been brought near to us in His Gospel message, even this day.

So what about you? Well I'm optimistic if for no other reason than you're privileged beyond measure to have heard, even this day, the Gospel (wherein His righteousness is revealed) being set forth. I say privileged, for it's rare to hear this message in the midst of all the religious clutter that trumpets forth from pulpits on practically every street corner. God has providentially placed you under the sound of His Gospel. You and I can't know the secret things of God, but we can desire to exhibit these evidences of His blessing. And if and when we do or what a glorious thing for we behold a certain, priceless, eternal treasure.

We may lose our health and wealth, our friends and fame, yet this treasure remains forever. It is incorruptible ó not like treasures on earth where moth and rust doth corrupt. What a wonderful blessing to know of the absolute certainty of salvation based upon the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ ó His work made mine by God's judicial imputation of it to my account. It's certain because it's conditioned on one that cannot fail ó the impeccable, spotless Lamb of God who cannot and did not fail ó the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord our righteousness.

So, if you're not sure if this describes you, but God has piqued your interest, hear God's word:

- 1). Ask ó Ask earnestly that the sovereign God of this universe will reveal Christ and His righteousness unto you, recognizing that this is necessary since He is sovereign in all things, including salvation.
- 2). Seek ó Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness with diligent determination, to the exclusion of any other way.
- 3). Knock ó Knock at the door of Christ who clearly tells us that He is the way and none come to the Father but by Him. Knock as one who will not be deterred, convinced that the only way to heaven is through Christ, having that which He accomplished, righteousness, charged to your account.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:”

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.