

Sunday Sermon

11/19/23

Series: Raising the Bar

Passage: Matt 7:7-14

Title: Finding God's Good Gifts

Good morning, Church! Thank you so much for praying for my wife this week. She came through surgery well. She was able to come home yesterday from the hospital and is now resting as comfortably as possible at home.

Please turn in your bibles this morning to Matt. 7:7-14. We have two weeks, this week and next, left of our series "Raising the Bar" before when transition to the Advent season. Raising the Bar has been a series through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. I know I've reviewed this every week, but it's important to understand our passage in the proper context so I'll say it. Once again, Jesus has been preaching to a group of people who believed that, if they could just be good enough, that would merit them right standing before God. Jesus says, "You could never be good enough."

And throughout the sermon on the mount Jesus has been exposing that it is not just our actions but even more so our hearts that betray us concerning the issue of righteousness. Jesus has been masterfully revealing that there is, in fact, a huge gap which lies between where we are and God's actual standard when it comes to the issue of righteousness. He says, "Bottom line, God's righteous standard is perfection. And no one measures up." Therefore, what Jesus is exposing in the lives of all his listeners is that we all are in need of an alternative righteousness.

As we've been studying through these chapters, we've seen a lot of instruction, and a lot of things that have been challenging to us, but as we get into the end of chapter 7, we're going to see it transition from telling us all these things that we're supposed to be doing, to Jesus giving us an encouraging understanding of how we can do it. And how it's possible for us to become what God wants us to be. That's what we will be studying this morning in Matt 7:7-14. These verses help us to understand how we can enter into God's salvation and how we can begin to enjoy the blessings of his kingdom. It's good news. That's what the sermon on the mount is ultimately pointing us to: good news. **(Read Matt. 7:7-14)**

Soren Kierkegaard once made the observation that many people think that Jesus overstated commands. His quote: "**Most people really believe that the Christian commandments (for example, to love one's neighbor as oneself) are intentionally a little too severe – like putting the clock ahead half an hour to make sure of not being late in the morning.**" Did God really mean that? Maybe he was overstating something to make a point. After all, even if we do believe something at first, experience often tells us that it's not really the case. (\$20)

We have a few of those potential overstatements in our text this morning. 3 Commands – Ask, seek, knock – 3 Promises – it will be given, you will find, it will be opened. Then we have the golden rule. Not a command in the same way, but instead a brutal saying, "In everything, treat people the same way you want to be treated." It sounds good, because it is good and it is right,

but that doesn't make it easy. The homeless guy on the street corner. the pedophile, the really annoying personality – you treat them how you would want to be treated if you were them. Really Jesus? Aren't you overstating that a bit?

The answer is no. But to understand them properly we can't look at them in isolation. In doing that we create a blanket statement that was never intended. So that said, let's jump into the text this morning.

Verse 7, ***“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.”***

So what we start with this morning is, ***“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”*** Often times when studying through the sermon on the mount, it feels kinda like simply a splattering of sayings, spontaneous thoughts of Jesus, and they're not connected to each other. Now, hopefully we have seen throughout the series that is not the case. But as we get to this section, if that is my mindset, ***“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you”*** sounds a bit like that blanket promise, doesn't it? Like, “All we have to do is ask God and he will give us whatever we want.” That's what it feels like, and it kind of sounds like that. But is that really what Jesus is trying to say? That doesn't really make sense, does it? That we can ask God for anything and he will give us anything and everything, all the time – like a drive-through window. We just speak into the speaker and then we show up at the window and we get what we want. That's not really the way that it works. In fact, if it does work that way for you, come see me because I have a few things I'd like you to pray for.

That's not the way it works, but we can conclude that that is what Jesus is saying if we take these words out of the context of the sermon on the mount. So what is the context? ***“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you”*** is connected to and referring to what he was talking about in verse 6. ***“Do not give to dogs what is holy. Do not throw your pearls to pigs.”*** “You are being given truth that is holy, but the dog doesn't value it. You are going to be given truth that is precious and valuable like a pearl, but the pig doesn't value it. This truth is only going to be given to those who are willing to value and accept it. Who recognize the treasure and who don't see it as the worthless brown paper bag full of junk.”

Listen: What Jesus is saying is simply that there are going to be some who are not going to receive the blessing that God is trying to offer them. The holy thing, the precious pearl is the blessing of the Kingdom. Jesus tells a parable later in Matthew's gospel of a merchant finding a pearl of great price who sells everything he has in order to go and acquire that pearl. And what is the pearl? It's the kingdom of God and the blessing of the kingdom. But there are some who don't value it.

That's verse 6, but as I mentioned before, Jesus is transitioning here to showing those who do value it, who are hearing the truth, seeing the gap, how to begin receiving the blessings of God's kingdom. And how do they get it? **Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.** Remember Jesus started the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes? What attitude are the beatitudes pointing toward? A people of humility or a humble spirit before God. And what is Jesus saying one has to do in order to receive God's kingdom and all those blessings? They have to ask or seek or knock. And God will give it to them. Isn't it interesting that, if that is how you take this, then it fits in line with everything that Jesus has been saying about our heart. It's not just random. God says it in the Old Testament, Here's the way to laying hold of God and his kingdom, **"If you seek me you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart."** – Jer. 29:13. Is. 55:6 says, **"Seek the Lord while he may be found."**

Here's our takeaway, God is open to all who are searching and seeking. He's available. He's ready to accept those who are searching or seeking. He is not the harsh judgmental God who is trying to crush everybody. He is wanting to bring people in.

Whether you are close to God, you are right there, and you just need to ask.

Or whether God is hidden from you, but your heart is for him, and you have to seek a bit. God says, "he will find me."

Or whether God is your desire, but right now there is something you need to work through with him, a significant barrier between you and him. A closed door. Jesus says, "If you knock, if you come after me, God is going to open it for you."

I've had the privilege to lead three people to Christ in my office this past month. They were all so close already to the Kingdom, all they had to do was ask. They had a right posture. A desire for the Lord. For truth and righteousness. They asked, and it was given to them.

Others may have to search a little bit for it. Maybe you have a major obstacle in your way. But listen: If we knock it will be opened. God wants to give the blessings of the kingdom to everybody. Just like a loving Father.

Verse 9, **"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 gifts to those who ask him!"**

"Which one of you if your son asks for bread will give him a stone." The picture here is that of a loving Father who wants to give good gifts to his children. This just reminds me so much of Luke 15 and the parable of the prodigal son who has all these obstacles before him and he seeks the Father, he's willing to go knock on the door and what he finds is the Father willing to open it again to him. And this is the picture that Jesus is trying to paint for us. **If you ask, if you seek, if you knock, it will be given to you. You can find this. You are never too far away from the blessings of this kingdom. It is available to everybody.**

But this brings us to that second possible overstatement, and again, it seems like a shift of thought. Verse 12, **"So, in everything treat people the same way you want them to treat you - for this is the Law and the Prophets."** Now why does he say this? Is this just another random thought? No – look at that word "so" - it's the word "therefore." You know the saying,

“Whenever you see a ‘therefore,’ you need to see what it’s there for.” It’s a word that connects what he says next with what he just got done saying. So then think about the often misunderstood ‘golden rule’ in context. Jesus is saying that, in light of the fact that God is a loving Father who wants to give good gifts to those who ask, we, as those who ask, who have found him and begun to understand the blessings of his kingdom, should be like him as we relate to other people.

In light of the fact that God is a loving God who desires to give good gifts to everyone, God’s heart is that we be the kind of people who desire and are willing to do good things for everyone. A few weeks ago, we read about retaliation, and in that section Jesus point to the fact that God is blessing his enemies. This is who God is. He loves and blesses his enemies. He causes the rain and the sun to come on the just and on the unjust. This is perfection in righteousness, do you see the gap?

We must be willing to learn from God’s righteousness and God’s goodness, and become like Him. But here’s the question: **How do we do that? Humble submission.** Let him transform you by renewing your mind. In all of these commands that we’ve seen throughout the sermon, God’s desire is that we grow more like Him. All of these descriptions of righteousness are ultimately a description of God. What glorifies his name is when his people become like him. That’s where life and human thriving are found. It is good for us. He is, in his nature, everything that is good for us.

And this is what he calls us to do: to lay aside all of our selfish pursuit and pursue him. And by the way, this will lead to the love and good of other people. He says, **“this is the law and the Prophets.”** Think about that for a minute. The entire OT is pointing to this. The entire OT is pointing to Christ. Remember Matt 5:17? He’s talked about the Law and the Prophets before, saying, **“I have not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them.”**

And now we come to our final 2 verses this morning: 13-14. This whole passage is largely misunderstood, but these two verses are extremely important for us to understand. Verses 13-14, **“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”**

Two gates, two ways, two destinations. Notice, he does say that there are two gates – narrow gate/wide gate. There are two ways – easy/hard. There are two destinations – destruction/life. What’s he getting at? Who’s ready for God’s truth this morning? If you are ready say, “Go.”

If I were to ask for a show of hands, “Who here thinks that they are walking the way of the narrow gate?” I believe most of us would raise our hands. We like to think we are doing pretty well. But by definition the “narrow gate” is, well, narrow. Meaning that it’s not the broad open gate where everybody finds it and everybody goes through it. Jesus says right here, **“Those who find it are few.”** We all like to think we know what this narrow gate is. Heck, the world is constantly telling you it’s found the narrow gate – shouting in our face “Here’s the way to real

life – acceptance, and tolerance, and co-existence, and political ideologies!” But Jesus says, “Very few find it.” So have we really found what the narrow gate is? Do we really understand what he’s talking about when he says, **“Enter by the narrow gate.”** Is Jesus talking about good people and bad people? No, that’s what the whole sermon has been about! We all fall short and need an alternative righteousness. But I think this is the way this is often understood. The narrow gate is the gate where all the good people go. And I’m a good person and these people are good people, so we are all going down the narrow gate. Not the bad people, whatever that means, obviously they are not walking in the narrow gate. They are the ones entering the wide gate right toward their destruction.

Here's the truth: **We are all tempted to kind of make the narrow gate relative to us and where we feel we are.** But let’s let Jesus describe what the narrow gate is.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been comparing two ways. If you go back to chapter 5 he goes through this progression where he says, **“You have heard that is was said...but I say to you.”** We see the two different ways contrasted. One of them is based in action, one of them is based in the condition of the heart. And then in chapter 6, you’ve got people who do good works to glorify themselves, but God says, “do good works secretly for me because I am your treasure.” Two ways being shown to us. **One believing that my righteousness is determined by how I act – a way of external obedience. And one understanding that righteousness could never be about right action, but about having a right heart – an internal orientation of the heart toward the Lord that results in a heartfelt desire to live like him and do his will.** A heart that first has been transformed by the Lord, awakened and brought into alignment with his heart.

This is the narrow gate. **But here’s the next question: Why don’t more people want to enter it? Answer: Because the path is hard.** We don’t want to take that path. We don’t want to accept that obedience to God requires our hearts. That he desires authority over every word and thought. It scares us to think that my life would have to be marked in this way. The truth is that we don’t want to go down that path because that is really, really hard.

Wouldn’t it just be easier if I just showed up to church every Sunday, or gave up a portion of my income, or made sure I put in the time at Rochester Family Mission. Wouldn’t it just be easier if I acted like a righteous person when I felt it was appropriate, but then could go home and be angry with my family, and lustful toward others, and appropriately judgmental behind closed doors, and didn’t really have to care about any of that heart stuff? If I could continue to be self-centered in my desires? Wouldn’t it be easier to go down that path?

Yes. But Jesus is trying to help us understand the gap. That we’ve wandered away. And that we are not walking in the way that will lead to life. If we’re learning all this and still saying, “I’m not gonna go through that gate. I’m gonna go through this gate” then we are walking in the way that will lead to our own destruction. **And that is something that should concern us.**

God wants relationship with us. He is the source. He is the treasure. He is our life. He says, **“Come seek me. Come find me when you seek me with all your heart.”** When God becomes our everything.

So how then do we enter the kingdom? Jesus here is talking about entering into something. It doesn't happen by chance. Jesus is exhorting us to enter in. And telling us that entering is a matter of asking. It's not a matter of earning. It's not a matter of becoming good enough or being able to do everything God says in his law perfectly. We've seen the bar. It's too high. **Entering the kingdom of God requires the choice to let him rule and reign in our heart.**

In a sense, finding the gate is not the problem, Jesus makes that part easy. He says to the whole world, "I want you in here. I want you with me. Here's the good news. I came to show the world the good gifts of the Father." It's the path through the gate we get caught up with.

The path to life is narrow Jesus says, "You must choose to follow ME. You must choose to enter through that gate. John 10:9, ***"I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and go in and out and find pasture."*** It's our choice to make. No one can make it for us. And by making it, we are choosing to lay ourselves down in humility before him. We are choosing to say, "I am not able, but you are able to save me and fill me with life." Would you choose him now in this moment this morning as both Lord and Savior? Narrow is the path and hard is the way to life. Not a bit overstated. And yet totally worth it.



RAISING

THE BAR

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

“Most people really believe that the Christian commandments (for example, to love one’s neighbor as oneself) are intentionally a little too severe – like putting the clock ahead half an hour to make sure of not being late in the morning.”

- Soren Kierkegaard

“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.”

- Matt. 7:7-8

“Do not give to dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn and attack you.”

- Matt. 7:6

“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

- Matt. 13:45-46

“If you seek me you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart.”

- Jer. 29:13

“Seek the Lord while he may be found.”

- Is. 55:6

“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 gifts to those who ask him!”

- Matt. 7:9-11

“So (therefore) in everything treat people the same way you want them to treat you - for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

- Matt. 7:12

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“I have not come to abolish them (the Law and the Prophets) but to fulfill them.”

- Matt. 5:17

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

- Matt. 7:13-14

“I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and go in and out and find pasture.”

- John 10:9