

The Praying in Which God Delights

Matthew 7:7-11; Jeremiah 29:13

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If we simply fill our minds with knowledge of God's Word (and though it be ever so accurate), if we do not add to our knowledge fervent, persistent, and urgent prayer, our knowledge of God's Word will simply become a means of spiritual pride and self-righteousness. That does not mean that we should go to the opposite extreme wherein we have fire and passion in prayer but have no real light to direct us because we are ignorant of God's revealed will in Scripture. God desires neither a zeal without knowledge, nor a knowledge without zeal, but rather a knowledge accompanied by zeal.

Moreover, our prayers will never reach the ceiling if they are not offered to God on the basis of Christ's perfect love and obedience for us. It is not prayer that saves us. It is Jesus who saves us. Only His perfect obedience saves, never our imperfect obedience. Only His perfect prayers for us save, never our imperfect prayers. In fact, it is always Christ and His perfect work of intercession that makes our prayers acceptable before God. Prayer is a means of grace. It is not the source of grace.

Having then laid the foundation for offered and answered prayer, let us proceed to ask some questions: Why do we not see more of the power of godliness manifest in our lives? Why do we not enjoy a greater communion with Christ? Why do we not seem to receive from God that for which we ask in prayer? I believe our text this Lord's Day provides some answers to such questions. The main points from our text are: (1) Three Commands and Three Promises; (2) A Powerful Illustration.

I. Three Commands and Three Promises (Matthew 7:7-8).

A. "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7); "For every one that asketh receiveth" (Matthew 7:8).

1. What is the connection in Christ's sermon when He moves from not giving holy things to dogs and not casting pearls before swine to asking, seeking, and knocking in prayer? Jesus has already taught us about prayer in Matthew 6:5-15. What is the purpose of His teaching on prayer at this point? I submit that if we are to judge righteously those who are acting like vicious dogs and like corrupt pigs (Matthew 7:6), we need the help and wisdom of the Lord—not mere worldly wisdom, but divine wisdom (James 1:5). If we do not seek God's wisdom (through His Word and prayer), we will fail to exercise righteous judgment. Righteous judgment is not a mere intellectual exercise. It requires the work of God's Spirit in applying His truth to our minds that we see clearly God's will.

2. How has Jesus taught us to ask in prayer? We are to ask according to God's will, not according to our own will (1 John 5:14-15). False teachers constantly abuse passages like John 14:13 and then abuse those who follow them. They want us to believe that "whatsoever ye shall ask" is a blank check that you can fill in whatever the amount (usually that means material wealth, physical health, and miraculous power). And when the people who follow them don't get what they have asked for, they either conclude that God's Word is not true or that they are without faith (now that may indeed be true—they may be like Simon the magician in Acts 8). But note the qualification that Jesus gives: "whatsoever ye shall ask IN MY NAME". Asking in Christ's name doesn't merely mean ending our prayers with, "In Jesus name. Amen." Praying in Christ's name means praying according to His revealed will, praying in His strength, praying for His glory—not our own. Thus, Jesus limits the "whatsoever" in John 14:13 to His will. Praying according to God's will implies the following three truths.

a. We must know God's will from Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians

5:17). We cannot pray according to God's will if we don't know His will revealed in Scripture. That is why we not only read, but we study God's Word—to know His will. God's will is not found within ourselves but in Scripture.

b. **We must love God's will** (John 14:15). God's promises in His Word have been purchased by Christ for His redeemed Church, but they are not blank checks for any and everything we may desire in this life. God's promises are not for us to spend upon our selfish lusts and desires. They are given to strengthen our faith in Christ, to draw us ever closer in our communion to Christ, and most importantly to glorify Him who purchased them for us (Psalm 37:4). Asking according to God's will is not simply resigning ourselves to God's will because we cannot change it. Asking according to His will is loving it and delighting in it because we love the Lord for who He is and what He has done in saving us and providing for us. Job said that he esteemed the Word of God more than His necessary food (Job 13:23). Our Savior told His disciples that His food and nourishment was to do the will of God (John 4:34)? We will receive when our asking is out of love to serve Christ.

c. **We must do God's will** (John 7:17). Many claim they want to know God's will, but Jesus said we will know God's will when we do God's will. "In thy light shall we see light" (Psalm 36:9). As we walk in the light that we have, God will give us more light. We must not only know God's will, but we must do it. How do we know we love God and His will, we obey it. We cannot be praying according to God's will while living in unrepentant disobedience to God's revealed will in some area of our life (1 Samuel 15:22).

God loves sincerity in His children, but sincerity without obedience is like offering a sacrifice that He has not commanded (worship not appointed by the Lord).

3. Is your asking in prayer biblical? Do you love God's will more than your comforts in this life, more than the approval of others, and even more than life itself? Are you seeking to follow Christ in what you presently know to be His will? These are the questions to ask if you would ask and receive from the Lord.

B. **"Seek, and ye shall find" (Matthew 7:7); "and he that seeketh findeth" (Matthew 7:8).**

1. We live in a technological age that actually teaches us to be impatient. We run everything by a clock and precise schedules. We honk our horns at those who may wait a few seconds too long at a stoplight. We have ready teller machines because we do not want to take the time to go into the bank. We have express lanes in the grocery stores to get us out of the store quicker. This impatience also tends to creep into our prayer life as well, as we look for an express lane to/from God. However, the Lord does not operate according to our calendar. He is God. He is not at our beck and call. He is Lord and we are His servants, at His beck and call. God is not in a hurry to get things done. He is more interested in our character than in our comfort, more interested in our diligence than in our timetable. And if a "delay" will promote the building of our faith in Christ, and the kingdom of Christ, He will exercise His divine prerogative in delaying an answer to prayer.

2. It is the Greek present tense that is used for each of the commands: ask, seek, and knock. The impact of the present tense is, "Keep asking", "Keep seeking", and "Keep knocking." It's as if the Lord said, "How badly do you want to find that for which you seek? Badly enough to seek for it once or maybe twice? Or badly enough to keep seeking for it (provided it is not contrary to God's revealed will)?"

3. If that for which we pray is so unimportant to us that we stop seeking or forget about it after a couple times and give up, then we have ceased to seek as Christ calls us to seek. This is a duty: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17); "Continue in prayer" (Colossians 4:2).

4. Jesus gives a parable in order to illustrate the importance in being persistent and persevering in prayer regardless of your circumstances (Luke 11:5-8). Even when it appears that time is about to run out, we are to continue in faith calling out to God for that which we need from Him. Sincerity in prayer is revealed by persistence in prayer.

5. The Lord does not grow weary of hearing your requests even if you should bring them to

him every day for many years. He is not like many earthly fathers who grow weary of hearing their children's sincere needs and petitions brought to their attention. He delights to know you are coming to Him and waits many times for that persevering faith in seeking Him in your prayers (Jeremiah 29:13).

C. **“Knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7); “and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:8).**

1. How are we to knock in prayer? Faintly, so that our knock can be barely heard? To the contrary, God calls us to knock urgently and boldly as His beloved children. Is God waiting until we become desperately needy and urgent in our appeals to Him (Mark 9:24)?

2. If there is not urgency in our knock, then we must not desire very much that for which we are praying. How did the ruler plead for his dead daughter (Matthew 9:18)? That is the type of urgency that God wills that we have in our knocking—not a casual, nonchalant, gentle knock, but a pleading and storming the gates of heaven with an urgent knocking that makes it clear that we mean business, that we're not playing around or pretending to be serious. Is God waiting to see such urgency in our prayer that we are crying out to Him as if our child was near death? If you were an employer interviewing two applicants for a job, who were equally qualified, who would you hire? The one who simply wanted the job or the one who urgently pleaded for the job?

II. **A Powerful Illustration (Matthew 7:9-11).**

A. Jesus calls us to cry out to Him as our Heavenly Father with all of the confidence that a little child has that his father who loves him will only give that which is good for him. This is an argument from the lesser to the greater—if even we who are sinful, earthly fathers will give that which is good to our child, how much more your perfect Heavenly Father.

1. Does God always give His children that which is good for them? At times we think we know what is good for us or for our loved ones, and so we pray that God would remove the suffering, the hardship, the persecution, or the trial from entirely. We may pray with great fervency, and yet a loved one dies or suffers. It is not necessarily what WE think is good, but what GOD knows is good for our spiritual growth and sanctification to the glory of God. God only gives His children that which is good; and what He withholds is always because He loves us and is for our good (Psalm 84:11; Psalm 34:10). We cannot see the end of all of God's purposes. We are stuck in the present, but God has promised that all things will work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20—12 years of servitude; Daniel cast into the lion's den; Jesus suffered for us). This is always a matter of trusting God's Word over our own knowledge, feelings, desires, and sight. It's walking by faith, not by sight.

2. The Bible does not teach that the good referred to here is our earthly prosperity (Luke 11:13—not a parallel account but similar teaching on prayer). False teachers claim that, but it is a lie. The good is not what brings material prosperity, but spiritual prosperity.

B. The Lord promises that He will not give a stone to one of His children who asks for bread, nor will He give a serpent to the child of God who seeks for a fish. How do we know? Because he has already given us the best gift—His Son (Romans 8:32). And Jesus has given to us His Spirit. If God has given Himself to us, how will he not give us everything else that is good for us? If God is our portion forever, how can we lack anything that we truly need? We can't.

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