

The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached
The Sermon on the Mount Series (Part XI)
“You Should Have Asked”

Liturgical Date: Lent 5 (A)

Primary Text: St. Matthew 7:7-11 (not assigned Gospel text for Lent 5 A)

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Fifth Sunday in Lent, is the Gospel Lesson from St. Matthew 7. Our sermon series “The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached: The Sermon on the Mount” continues today with the eleventh installment. The title of the sermon is “You Should Have Asked”.

No doubt you have been presented with the scenario I am about to give you. The story is familiar and popularized by movies like *Aladdin*, TV shows like *I Dream of Jeannie*, and even many jokes. You find an old lamp. You pick it up, rub it, and “poof” a genie appears saying, “Your wish is my command.” The genie then tells you that you get “three wishes.” What do you wish for? Money, a certain position of power, some superhuman ability? Knowing that you could have anything that you ask for, what do you wish for? Many of you know the trick, right? For the final wish, you make sure that you wish for an unlimited number of wishes.

Now, let’s look at what Jesus tells us in our text from the Sermon on the Mount today. *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”* Is Jesus telling us that God will give us everything we ask for? It does kind of sounds like that. Just ask for it, and it is yours. We know that can’t be exactly right, though. Most people do.

This is because I am sure that you have asked God for something before, and He didn't give it to you. If Jesus is saying that God will give us anything we ask, seek, or knock for then we would be turning the God of the universe into no more than a genie in a lamp. That would be a serious downgrading of who God actually is. But that has not stopped some from trying to simply see God as a genie that they talk to when they need something. There is even a stream of Protestant theology that teaches that God will basically give you what you want. Then how do they deal with the fact that everyone doesn't always get what they ask God for? They add the element of saying you have to have enough faith. If you just believe hard enough and speak and claim it enough, then it can be yours. This is known as the "Word Faith Movement" and it is false teaching.

If we have determined that we can't guarantee that God will give us everything we want, then what is Jesus teaching here? As you have probably already figured out, this portion of the Sermon on the Mount is about prayer. That is how we talk to God. Prayer is a vital part of the Christian life. Luther said that besides preaching, prayer is the chief work of the Christian. Jesus has already taught about prayer back in Chapter 6 when He showed us the wrong and the right way to pray. Here He is returning to the true nature of prayer. This is a beautiful and reassuring passage because it tells us that we are to not be afraid or shrink back from asking God for things in prayer. Petitioning God with our requests is only a part of prayer (don't forget about the praise and thanksgiving), but it is certainly a significant aspect of prayer. God invites us to ask, seek, and knock. That is clear. Hebrews 4:16 begins with these words, "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace.*" It is almost as if God is saying, "Don't complain that you don't have something, because you didn't ask. You should

have asked.” If we are struggling, we want to ask ourselves, “Did we pray about it?” Can we even get through life without prayer? Luther put it so well in a sermon on this text, *“But the shortest and surest way is to go into a little room (remember Matthew 6:6) or a corner and there to open up your heart and to pour it out before God, filled with complaints and sighs, but also in confidence and trust that as your faithful heavenly Father He wants to give you His help and advice in this distress.”*

We can really ask God for anything, as long as it is not sinful. At the same time, though, we should not be disappointed and certainly not get angry if God does not say “yes” to everything that we ask Him. He is not a magic genie, bending His will to our selfish desires. And back to the little story I began with, if God guaranteed us that He would grant three prayer requests, whatever we asked and we said, “a billion dollars, a Lamborghini, and a supermodel”, then we have missed the whole point of the Sermon on the Mount. If these are the main things you want from God, then you have obviously not taken in what Jesus has taught about humility, love, and righteousness in the preceding chapters and verses. Remember Solomon? God essentially *did* tell him to ask him for anything that he wanted. Instead of mammon, Solomon asked for wisdom. This pleased God and He added so much to Solomon’s blessings. Remember Matthew 6:33, *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”*

I quoted the first part of Hebrews 4:16 earlier which says to come boldly before God’s throne. What does the rest of that verse say? *“That we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”* Ultimately, what we should be asking God for, seeking, and knocking for is mercy and grace. In every sermon

that I preach related to pray, I tell you that God answers every prayer of His children. This text is a great “proof text” for that. Jesus says to ask, seek, and knock. And there is no “maybe” stated, it is presented in a definite sense that you will receive, find, and it will be opened to you. Every prayer is heard, but every prayer is not answered with a “yes”, sometimes it is a “no” or a “not now.” This Bible text also tells us why that is so.

In teaching on this, Jesus, as we have seen multiple times before in the Sermon on the Mount, asks a few rhetorical questions. He uses the example of an earthly father and child. A child, especially a young one, is very trusting of their father and when he or she asks their father for something they expect that they will get an answer and trust their dad to do right by them. Now we understand that there are some less than stellar earthly dads out there, but even in those cases very few fathers would deliberately give their children something that would harm them. Jesus says that if a child asks his father for bread, will he give him a stone? Of course not. If the child asks the father for a fish, will the father give him a serpent. No, way. Jesus says something very similar in the “Sermon on the Plain” in St. Luke 11, this time adding the example of the child asking for an egg and not receiving a scorpion. The point is that fathers will provide what their children need and is good for them.

And we must notice the two things Jesus says the child is asking for here: bread and fish. This is no accident that our Lord chooses these two things. For starters, Jesus is the bread of life, and a number of His disciples were fishermen. Taking it further and tying this into God providing what we need in life, both physical and spiritual, remember what happens later in the Gospel of St. Matthew. In Matthew 14, 5,000 people are miraculously fed and then one

chapter later, 4,000 are also miraculously filled with food. And what are the elements that Jesus uses to reproduce to this mass amount of food? With the 5,000 it was 5 loaves of bread and two fish and with the 4,000 it was 7 loaves of bread and one fish. The same elements that He introduces here. God will provide both our daily physical bread and our eternal spiritual bread as He is the bread of life.

Then in verse 11, comes the comparison. If earthly fathers, who even the best of them, are evil sinners will provide good things to their children, then how much more will our Father in heaven who is good and perfect provide? Again, that is a rhetorical question. The answer is obvious. We pray in confidence that our heavenly Father knows best. Thus, like an earthly father sometimes has to say “no” or “not now” to a request from their son or daughter because they know that if they granted that request it would harmful to them. If their child wants to hold a venomous snake, the answer has to be “no.” If you 7 year old wants a car the answer is “not now.” Thus, God tells us to speak to Him, anywhere, anytime, about anything and He promises to hear and answer us. But, the answer that we seek may not be “yes”, at least at that time. We often don’t understand why God did not answer a prayer with a “yes”, just as a child may not understand why you won’t let them go play at a certain kid’s house. But we must trust God in knowing that as the perfect Father, He knows what is best for us.

Thus, we ask. We seek. We knock. We do so and should have no regrets thinking, “I should have asked.” Because God tells us to ask. He promises to answer. We pray for our own needs, even our wants. We pray certainly for others. We pray for our leaders, including those in our congregation and for our

pastor. We pray for our congregation, that God would give us the direction and open the doors for us in the direction that we should go.

It also a good idea to attach, "if it be thy will" to our prayers, as we model Jesus when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even for things that may be seen as good. We pray for a family member stricken with cancer that God would heal them. But even in things like this, it is appropriate to add "if it is your will, Lord" because the Lord's will may be to call that person home to His eternal side. But, did you know that there are some things that we can pray for that we don't need to attach, "if it be thy will" to?

There are a number of things that we pray about that we *know* are God's will, because He has promised them. When we pray for Jesus to return, we don't need to add "if it is your will" because He has already told us that He is definitely coming back. When we receive the Lord's Supper, we don't need to pray that we would receive the body and blood of Christ and that He would be with us, because He has already told us that He will do that in the Sacrament. And here is some really good news for you. When you pray with a penitent heart that God would forgive your sins, you don't need to add "if it be thy will." God has promised to do that. When I pronounce the Absolution after confession, I add no qualifiers that maybe God will forgive you, maybe He won't. Because I am simply announcing what God has promised to you. 1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* God has promised that the blood of Jesus is sufficient for the atonement of our sins. God has promised that He will take His forgiven children, those with faith in Him, to live with Him eternally in heaven. God's promises are His will, and they will be done.

This is what I believe this text is ultimately about in keeping with the theme of the Sermon on the Mount and this Chapter. This is not about getting every selfish desire fulfilled, like in a genie legend. What Jesus is telling us is that we are to not doubt the mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God. We are to talk to Him, not afraid to ask, but trusting in His divine Fatherly goodness. Don't be like the foolish one who doubted the goodness and willingness of God to forgive. We don't want to hear, "You just should have asked." We want to *know* from God's Word, the Bible. When we humbly and sincerely ask God to forgive our sins, we *will* receive that forgiveness. When we seek the truth of God in His Word, through the work of the Spirit, we *will* find it. When we knock at the door in faith, the gates of eternal life in heaven *will* be opened to us.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.