

*“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. 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 things to those who ask him! So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”* Matthew 7:7-12

I grew up in a home where my step-father was a mechanic, and so it was assumed that once I got my own car I had learned enough to make my own repairs and keep my own car running without his help. And for the most part I was able to do so, since it was in the days before they put all sorts of computers and environmental gadgets under the hood. But I do remember the time I did need to ask for my dad’s help, and it was pretty embarrassing because no matter how hard I tried I could not loosen a simple nut on bolt. After hearing my frustration my step-dad said: “Try the other way – it’s a *reverse thread*.”

This is what Jesus has been saying to us throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Those who joyfully and sacrificially follow him into the Kingdom of God will have a Kingdom character that will be in *reverse thread* from the world. Jesus exhorts us to be different, and so reverse-thread theology will not fit how we see things because his way of viewing things is diametrically opposed to that way we view things. There is a sense in which the Kingdom of God is a *reverse thread* from the way we fallen human beings tend to do things. Everything the Word of God teaches us is *reverse thread* from what our culture says. The way up is down. The way to riches is through poverty. The way to rule is to serve. The way to live is to die.

This came to mind when I studied this text this past week. The verses we are looking at today did not seem to fit in well with the text we looked at last week. At first glance “praying/asking God for something” seemed to be in a *reverse thread* from the issue of “God warning us about standing in judgement” over one another. But after taking a second glance, it made perfect sense - when seen in the context of the theme of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount regarding the Kingdom conduct that flows out of the Kingdom character of those who are in the Kingdom of God. We begin to see how that makes sense when we look back in Matthew 7:1-6 where Jesus spoke of the negative, critical, judgmental attitudes that we all have as fallen, thorn-in-the-flesh sinners who live in this fallen thorn-in-the-flesh sinful world. As the old poem says: “There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us, that it hardly behooves any of us, to talk about the rest of us.” As we have seen throughout the Sermon on the Mount, and as it is written throughout all of Scripture, sin is deadly business, and God is deadly serious about sin – that’s why He sent Jesus Christ to the cross to die in our place for our sins – so that by his death and resurrection we might be forgiven and redeemed and restored back to God.

Last week Jesus told us that rather than looking at others with the critical eye of judgment – we should instead look at ourselves and critically judge what is going on in our own hearts. Jesus used an extreme but humorous illustration using specks and logs that are stuck in our eyes to make his point. He had warned us of this in Matthew 5 when he told us that our anger, insults and criticism of others is equal to murder that could send us to hell. But he also told us that while we must not be judgmental, we still must be discerning. Although we dare not be judgmental and critical of others - neither must we be so naive as to not distinguish between those who are open to God’s truth and those who vehemently oppose it. The truth is, when we criticize one another we find ourselves in prideful rebellion against the King of the Kingdom. And even more so, when we engage in reckless judgmental attitudes with critical spirits we set ourselves up as God. We must remember that God is the ultimate judge of all things because we surely for certain cannot look into someone’s heart. Only God can do those things. Therefore, only God is qualified to judge. We can evaluate certain things. And we should. But we must always remember that our evaluation is always tainted by our own imperfect, fallen, sinful nature.

And so, it's here, at the end of last week's text, that a question rises up. Jesus has just taught us not to be critically judgmental of others, and that we are to examine our own hearts and acknowledge our own sin before attempting to judge or help others with their sin - but at the very same time he told we are to use discernment in determining whether we should even waste our time sharing the truth with those who oppose it. The question is: "How can we know the difference between what is destructive criticism and careful discernment?" As fallen, sinners who still possess deceitful hearts that blinds us to our own sin, we desperately need an answer to that question. Jesus answers that question in our text for today.

*"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"* (Matthew 7:7-8). In order to know the balancing point, as we walk the tightrope between destructive criticism and careful discernment, Jesus tells us here that *we desperately need God's help*. When we don't know the difference between criticism and discernment, we are to *pray* for God's help. "Ask, seek and knock" and God will help us. God promises that He "will" help us because God's divine enablement flows into us out of our relationship with Him. God answers our prayers when we ask for something we need because we have a humble, joyous, dependent, love relationship with Him. The reality of prayer is that prayer does not move God to do things He is disinclined to do. But rather prayer is God's way of drawing us to Himself so He might bring our hearts into line with His heart. God wills and purposes to do great things as a consequence of our prayers, when our prayers are the consequence of His will and His purpose, which is the consequence of the humble, joyous, dependent, love relationship we have with Him.

If we are truly a people of the Kingdom of God, God will be our greatest treasure over and above all things. And when He is, God will answer our prayers, because our prayers will be according to the will and purpose of God, because of the humble, joyous dependent, love relationship we have with Him. In the context of our text from last week, that means God will answer our prayers in helping us know the difference between destructive criticism and careful discernment. The truth is, we will not become critically judgmental nor naively discerning, when we stop and evaluate our own hearts and acknowledge our own sin and *trust in who God is and what God has promised us*. Jesus points us to the relationship we have with God in regards to His wisdom and His promises for us. One of the greatest truths that can impact our lives is the fact that we, as followers of Jesus, are the beneficiaries of God's wisdom and promises, which flow out of God's character and into our lives. Because we are adopted into the family of God, we are now recipients of the privileges and promises of His Kingdom.

2 Peter 1:3-4 tells us: *"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."* God has promised that when we surrender our lives to Jesus and follow Jesus, God will grant *"to us all things that pertain to life and godliness."* Peter tells us that God gives us all those things *"through the knowledge of him."* This is not "knowledge" in the sense of knowing things *about* God, but rather "knowledge" in the biblical sense of knowing *an intimate relationship* with God. Jesus spoke of this in John 17:3 when we said: *"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* And because through Jesus Christ we are restored back to God and reconciled to God and become children of God, we are then beneficiaries of God's promises, which flow out of His character and into our lives.

This what Peter meant when he said: *"He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature."* In other words, because God *"has granted to us his precious and very great promises"* those who are truly following Jesus will *"become partakers of the divine nature."* This the *"righteousness"* Jesus has been talking about throughout the Sermon on the Mount: the *"righteousness"* that is our heart, mind and body response to the transforming, recreating and perfecting work of the Holy Spirit in those who embrace the reign and rule of Jesus.

What this means is that God's divine enablement to *not become critically judgmental* and to *not become naive in our discernment* is dependent on the health and the depth and the intimacy of our personal relationship with God. When we, in Jesus' words from Matthew 5:6, desperately and humbly "*hunger and thirst for righteousness*" - God will grant us "*his precious and very great promises*" - and then we will be "*satisfied*" because we will have "*become partakers of the divine nature*" with God. This is why Jesus exhorts us to "*ask, seek, and knock.*" But we must not presume upon God when we do. Yes, God can grant us "*his precious and very great promises*" but He will not do so unless we "*ask, seek, and knock*" out of our weakness, and insufficiency. We must recognize our desperate spiritual, emotional, mental and physical need for God - and utter our inability to relate to each other in love. Once we realize our desperate need - we can then ask, seek and knock. "*Ask*" as a hungry child asking for milk. "*Seek*" as a lost traveler searching for which way to go. "*Knock*" as a sick, suffering patient who is begging for help.

There is something in Jesus' words that is highly significant which doesn't translate in the English language. All three of the verbs "*ask, seek, knock*" are imperatives (commands) and all three are in the present imperative tense, which means the commands are to be done continually and indefinitely. We are told to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. And when we do so, "*everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened*" - because God has promised He will answer our Kingdom prayers. God promises come in the implied qualifier "*will.*" Jesus said when we "*ask*" and it "*WILL*" be given to us; "*seek*" and we "*WILL*" find; "*knock*" and it "*WILL*" be opened to us - and we will then fully know the wisdom of God and the promises of God through the humble, joyous dependent, love relationship we have with Him. Notice Jesus doesn't just say this once. He goes on to reinforce this truth by repeating it: "*For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*"

God has promised us that He would give us what we need when our prayers are Kingdom prayers. He has told us that when we ask for things of the Kingdom, the door of opportunity would be opened to us. But God's promises are not a license for personal gain. Our asking, our seeking, our knocking is to be done with our heart claiming God as our greatest treasure. Our motives must be right to ask, seek and knock. God will provide but He is not obligated to grant every selfish desire we have. James 4:3 tells us: "*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*" Jesus said: "*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*" (Matthew 6:33).

*"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 things to those who ask him!"* (Matthew 7:9-11). Here Jesus is telling us that when we trust in who God is we will experience the fullness of the promise of the provision of His love. He pictures a son coming to his father and asking for food. What father would give his son stone instead of bread or a snake instead of a fish? No father who loved his son would do that. Even though we are selfish people, we love our children enough to give them good things. And this is the point Jesus makes. Though our love is imperfect with sin, we give good gifts to our children. But God isn't like that. He is not tainted by sin or selfishness like we are. How much more does God love us than we love our children? He loves us *perfectly*. The promises and provision we receive from God are not entitlements but rather simply out of His love for us. The epitome of God's love was His giving His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. And Jesus manifested his love toward us by laying down his life, so that we might be restored back to God. The cross is where we fully know God's love.

*"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets"* (Matthew 7:12). Here Jesus tell us that when we stop being critically judgmental, and when we trust in who God is and in the fullness of His promises - we will then love *each other and others as God loves us*. This verse is commonly known as "The Golden Rule" - which, just like "*judge not, that you be not judged*", is one of the more better known, most often misquoted and misapplied verses in the Bible.

*"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets"*  
The key to understanding the true meaning of "The Golden Rule" is to look at the last eight words of this verse: *"for this is the Law and the Prophets."* In Matthew 22 we read of a Pharisee, who was a lawyer, asked Jesus: *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"* And Jesus said to him, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* (Matthew 22:36-40).

The "Law and the Prophets" are the summation of the character of God in what required of His people in the Old Testament, which was the greatest commandment to love God more than anyone or anything else, and to love each other and others as God loves us. That requirement of God's people did not change in the New Testament and it has not changed for us today. What is different in New Testament from what is in the Old Testament is that God fully revealed the character of His love to us through Jesus Christ by sending him to die on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins; and God also clearly commanded us to that same standard of sacrificial love when it comes to our relationship with others. In John 13:34 Jesus said: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."* Jesus is telling us that those who are of Kingdom of God are those who live out their Kingdom character in all their relationships by following the example of Jesus. Those of the Kingdom of God are *reverse thread* different from those in the world – in that they are radically committed to God and one other - because their greatest desire on earth is to live in redemptive love relationships with each other, just as Christ did for us. That requires vulnerability, honesty, humility and sacrifice. And it means we must be willing to speak and hear truth without offense, casting aside the cloak of critical judgment and clothing one another with robes of grace, mercy and forgiveness.

In Matthew 5:9 Jesus said: *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."* Jesus came to bring the peace of God into every heart and every life and every soul – but his enemies still criticized and judged him and they ultimately "murdered" him on a cross. But even on the cross, Jesus revealed his redemptive heart for us as he prayed that God would forgive those who nailed him there: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34). I suspect few of us would have prayed that prayer because reconciling with those we feel have hurt us is *reverse thread* from our natural fallen tendency to view our lives through the lenses of critical pride. We can be like the two little brothers, Robert and James, who had finished supper and were playing until it was time to go to bed. Somehow, Robert hit James with a stick, and tears and bitter words followed. Charges and accusations were still being exchanged as mother prepared them for bed. The mother said, "Now, James, before you go to bed, you're going to have to forgive your brother." James thought for a few moments, and then he said, "Well, OK, I'll forgive him tonight, but if I don't die in the night, he'd better look out in the morning."

Reconciling with one another is hard and complicated because relationships are hard and complicated. And relationships are hard and complicated because we are all have a sinful nature. We live in an age that is saturated with entitlement and selfishness and rebellion and cynicism; it is all around us and it is all in us. But as followers of Jesus Christ we can reconcile with one another because Jesus died on a cross so that we all might be reconciled to God. Romans 5:10: *"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."* Members of the Kingdom of God who have been reconciled to God do not criticize or judge others because they recognize their own desperate spiritual, emotional, mental and physical needs - and their utter inability to relate to each other in love. But those of the Kingdom can love and reconcile because they have God's divine enablement that flows out of their relationship with Him. God answers their prayers when they ask for something because they have a humble, joyous, dependent, love relationship with Him. Kingdom prayer is the reality that our most sovereign and loving God has promised that when we claim Him as our greatest treasure, He will answer our prayers, so that we would know the difference between judgement and discernment so that we might love Him and love all others.

A story is told of a man who went for a walk one day, and fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out.

A SUBJECTIVE person came along and said to him: "I feel for you down there."

An OBJECTIVE person came along and said: "It's make sense that you would fall into that pit."

A REALIST came by and said: "Yep, that's a pit."

A PHILOSPHER came along and said to him: "You only think that you are in a pit."

A MATHEMATICIAN came and calculated how far the man fell into the pit.

A NEWS REPORTER came by and interviewed the man about how it felt to fall into a pit.

A PROFESSOR stopped by and gave the man a lecture on: "The Elementary Principles of a Pit."

An ENGINEER stopped by and measured the length, width, depth and volume of the pit.

A SCIENTIST calculated the pressure the man's body felt when he hit the bottom of the pit.

A GEOLOGIST informed the man about the soil composition and rock strata in the pit.

The CITY INSPECTOR asked the man if he had a permit to be in the pit.

The CITY TAX ASSESSOR came along and figured out the taxes the man need to pay on the pit.

A PRIDEFUL person came and said: "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit!!"

A SHY person walked on by and avoided the pit altogether.

A PROSPERITY PREACHER said: "Just believe and you will be out of the pit."

An OPTIMIST came by and said: "Things could be worse."

A PESSIMIST came by and said: "Things will get worse!!"

A PHARISEE came by and said: "You deserve that pit."

And JESUS came by, and seeing the man in the pit, he climbed down in the pit with the man, and bandages up his wounds, and helped the him out of the pit, and took him home and cared for him, until he was well.

And those of the Kingdom of God followed Jesus and spent their lives rescuing people from their pits.

We seek to passionately proclaim glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people. Jesus has told us:

*"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. 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. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

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