

Jesus' Life in the Gospels

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Keep on Asking, Seeking, Knocking

Scripture: Matthew 7:7-11

Lesson Goal: To better understand how persistent praying reveals the love of the Father.

Introduction:

Believer's Bible Commentary says:

If we think we can live out the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount by our own strength, we have failed to realize the supernatural character of the life to which the Savior calls us. The wisdom or power for such a life must be given to us from above. So here we have an invitation to ask and keep on asking; to seek and keep on seeking; to knock and to keep on knocking. Wisdom and power for the Christian life will be given to all who earnestly and persistently pray for it.

Taken out of context, verses 7 and 8 might seem like the ultimate blank check for believers. In the improper context, it would seem that all we have to do to receive something is simply ask for it. This is not true. This kind of interpretation is a misapplied and misunderstood interpretation. These verses should be understood in their proper context and meaning. For a correct interpretation, we must understand them in their immediate context and in the context of *all* Scripture. As we interpret these verses in the context of Scripture, we understand they are not a blank check called prayer. These verses certainly have application in the context on Jesus' sermon, while at the same time having application as interpreted by the whole of Scripture. Although not an exhaustive list, some helpful passages for proper understanding are Psalm 66:18; James 1:6-8; 1 John 5:14; Luke 18:1-8 and Hebrews 10:22a.

What can these passages teach us concerning Matthew 7:7-8?

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches about the true character of His followers. In chapters 5 and 6 and chapter 7:1-6, He expounds upon the Kingdom character of His followers. There is a difference in the lives, actions, attitudes and behavior of His followers, as compared to the world. There is also a difference between His true followers and the religious scribes and Pharisees. For many of Jesus' listeners, His words seem like an impossibility (see 5:20). In today's verses, Jesus helps His listeners to understand that what they may see as impossible can become possible.

(VV 7-8) As we read these words, we understand the context and meaning to be that of "prayer." But let us also remember that these are not Jesus' first words on prayer found in the Sermon on the Mount. "Jesus has already warned us against pharisaic hypocrisy and pagan formalism and has given us His own model prayer. Now however, He actively encourages us to pray. Prayer is the very way God Himself has chosen for us to express our conscious need of Him and our humble dependence on Him" (Stott).

In Matthew 7:7, we find the words “ask,” “seek,” and “knock.” Each of these words is found in the present imperative tense. The idea is that of persistence, continuance, and constancy. The idea is that of asking, seeking, and knocking. As followers of Jesus, we are to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. We also find in these three words a progressive intensity. Jesus offers these words to help us understand the simplicity of making our request known. It is not a highly complicated process of ritual or formalism. With a pure heart, as a follower of Jesus Christ, simply “ask, seek, and knock.”

In summary of verses 7 and 8, John Phillips writes:

We can picture Jesus looking into the incredulous faces of His disciples who wondered how in the world anyone could possibly live the kind of life described in the Sermon on the Mount. He was well aware that no one had the wisdom or strength to keep His commandments, so He linked our impotence to God’s omnipotence. We must come to God and ask. That is, we must recognize our dependence on God. We must seek. That is, we must bestir [rouse to action] ourselves; we must earnestly desire to live the life the Lord described. We must knock (*krouō*). That is, we must importunate and besiege the battlements of Heaven and strike with determination at God’s door (knock, knock, knock). The Lord urged us to be importunate not because God is hard of hearing or slow to respond, but because we are sluggish and prone to give up.

Let us remember that, as G. Campbell Morgan said, ‘It is not a servant who keeps the door, but our Father.’ And what a Father He is.

As you pray, what do the words ask, seek, and knock mean to you personally?

What is persevering prayer? How does a true believer persevere in prayer?

Why does God not always immediately answer our prayers?

(VV9-10) “What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?” Jesus offers some very helpful and pointed illustrations. But we must understand the context and framework of His illustrations. Jesus speaks in terms of a loving, caring father. The phrase “what man” makes reference to such a person.

It is important to remember that not everyone has had the blessing of a loving, caring earthly father. For some, because of cruelties of the past, the very mention of the word father causes pain and anguish. This pain makes it very difficult to define the love of the heavenly Father, because the only meaning that can be drawn upon for the word “father” comes from the disappointments associated with an earthly father.

Jesus tells us that the very best of earthly fathers, as we define them, cannot compare to the love of the heavenly Father. Just as we know that no loving father would give his child anything to harm him. An earthly father would not deceive a hungry son or give him something that would inflict pain.

(V11) “If you then, being evil...” (as compared to a holy God “Father”)

As a father and grandfather, I, Brother Mickey, can say I love my children and grandchildren with the greatest and highest love to which I am capable. But my highest and greatest love cannot compare to the way and manner in which they are loved by the heavenly Father. He is a holy, good and loving Father who understands, cares, loves, and willingly gives good things to those (His children) who ask, seek and knock.

Please explain this phrase in regard to earthly parents: *Good* parents give *good* gifts to their children.

What happens to our children if we simply give them everything they wish for?

What are some good gifts parents may give their children without buying a thing?

Can you think of a time when you witnessed the blessing of God by persistent praying?

Can you acknowledge a time in your life when God did not answer your prayer immediately in order to show His love to you in a greater way after a time of waiting? Please prayerfully explain.

Has there been a time in your life when God answered your prayer by not giving you that which you had asked? How did this show His love to you? Please explain.

Radical Living

Scripture: Matthew 7:12

Lesson Goal: To gain a better understanding of the passage commonly referred to as “The Golden Rule.”

The *Life Focus* teachers have requested a little extra time to catch up, so because we do not have a 5th Sunday until May, today’s lesson has been condensed to allow extra time for catchup.

Introduction: The *Believers’ Bible* says:

Verse 12, commonly called “the Golden Rule” or the principle of reciprocity, sums up all the moral and ethical requirements of men who live in society as Kingdom citizens. The law of Jesus demands a standard of conduct that surpasses what is normally expected, because it is addressed to those who possess a fullness of life, which is the gift of God’s Spirit.

Please read Leviticus 19:18b.

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus shares with His followers what perhaps might be His most well-known saying or teaching. It is most often referred to as “The Golden Rule.” In this one short and precise saying (teaching), we find the summit of ethical and practical living.

What does this really mean: Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them?

What does “Love your neighbor as yourself” mean?

The second portion of verse 12 points us to the indescribable significance and unfathomable importance of this verse. The Golden Rule, in one sentence, embraces all human behavior toward others and encompasses the complete teaching of the law—“for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Most of us have heard and been taught the words of Matthew 7:12. I believe it is one of those verses that we have stored in our memories. Most are able to recite it, but very few have studied the depths of its meaning and application. In these few words we find the way we are to live, act, and behave. At the same time, these words teach us how we are *not* to behave.

“The Golden Rule is concerned with true love and with positive, active behavior. It is more than not doing wrong (lying, stealing, cheating). It is more than just doing good (helping, caring, giving). It is looking, searching, and seeking for ways to do the good that you want others to do to you. It is seeking ways to treat others just as you want them to treat you” (*Preacher’s Outline and Sermon Bible*).

Please read Matthew 22:37-40.

How are we (followers) to live life based upon Matthew 22:37-40 and Matthew 7:12?

How can each of us personally live out the truths of these verses?

How would all our relationships be if we lived out the truths of these verses; for example, family, work, ball team, church?

As we live out the truth of Matthew 7:12, we are showing forth the love of God to others as He has loved us. How is it possible for the follower of Jesus Christ to live out the truth of Matthew 7:12 in everyday life?

This great truth is a principle that ought to govern our attitudes toward others. The person who practices the Golden Rule refuses to say or do anything that would harm himself or others. If our judging others is not governed by this principle, we will become proud and critical, and our own spiritual character will degenerate. Practicing the Golden Rule releases the love of God in our lives and enables us to help others” (Wiersbe).

What should be our attitude toward others? (Answer in light of the truth of verse 12.)

In the light of the truth of verse 12, what should be our actions toward others?

Please prayerfully explain this statement: Christianity is not simply a matter of abstinence of doing bad things, but also the doing of good things.

How radically would our lives be changed if we lived out the truth of verse 12 in Holy Spirit power?

Lesson 110—April 17, 2016

The Choice is Yours

Scripture: Matthew 7:13-14

Lesson Goal: To understanding the importance of choosing the narrow gate and the narrow way.

Introduction: Please read Matthew 7:13-29.

As we begin today's lesson, would you please take a moment to think about and write your answer to the following requests.

Please prayerfully list 10 important decisions you have made in your lifetime.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Please list 10 important decisions you have made today.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

What is the greatest decision you must confront?

There are many important and critical decisions we must make in this journey of life. But the most important and critical decision we face is the decision we must make concerning Jesus Christ. Our eternal destiny hinges on this decision. Throughout time and Scripture, God has allowed man to make decisions, to choose. With man's decisions come the consequences of such decisions.

**Please read Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:13-15; 1 Kings 18:21 and Jeremiah 21:8.
What do all these verses share in common? Explain.**

Please read John 6:66-69. What happened in these verses?

As Jesus nears the end of this great sermon, He once again brings His listeners to a decision. He has shared the greatest message ever preached concerning the life and character of those who follow Him. But as He draws to a close, He ultimately calls for a decision. Once again we are reminded there is no

happy "straddling of the fence" position or decision to be made. In fact, Jesus very directly, pointedly and openly calls for a decision from those who have heard His word.

One thing we must always remember, as we study the Sermon on the Mount, is that as Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God, He describes clearly that some will enter in and some will not. The basis that determines the outcome of a person's final destination will be the decision that person makes concerning Jesus Christ. In this closing section, Jesus speaks of two gates and two ways.

(VV13-14)

But Jesus cuts across our easy-going syncretism [combination of different forms of belief and practice]. He will not allow us the comfortable solutions we propose. Instead, He insists that ultimately there is only one choice, because there are only two possibilities to choose from (Stott).

Please give careful thought as John Stott farther expounds:

One way is easy. The word means "broad, spacious, roomy." There is plenty of room on it for diversity of opinions and laxity of morals. It is the road of tolerance and permissiveness. It has no curbs, no boundaries on either thought or conduct. Travelers on the road follow their own inclinations, that is, the desires of the human heart in its fallenness. Superficiality, self-love, hypocrisy, mechanical religion, false ambition, censoriousness—these things do not have to be learnt or cultivated. No effort is required to practice them. That is why the broad way is easy.

Stott continues:

The hard way, on the other hand, is narrow. Its boundaries are clearly marked. Its narrowness is due to something called "divine revelation," which restricts to the confines of what God has revealed in Scripture to be true and good. It is a fact that revealed truth imposes a limitation on what Christians may believe, and revealed goodness on how we behave. The gate leading to the easy way (broad way) is wide, for it is a simple matter to get on to the easy road. We need leave nothing behind, not even our sins, self-righteousness or pride. The gate leading to the hard way (narrow way) is narrow. One has to look to find it. The entry into it has to be entered one by one.

We are told that the one gate (broad) and one way (broad) lead to the place of destruction. We are told that the one gate (narrow) and one way (narrow) lead to life.

The broad way is heavily traveled and leads to destruction. The broad way is death. The narrow gate (hard way) leads to life. This journey takes us the way of eternal life, not to death and destruction.

Which way (road, path) are you traveling? Please do not avoid or skip this question! Which way are you traveling?

Jesus taught truth and that truth rings forth in 2016. Jesus spoke with compassion and understanding that His followers would be a despised minority.

The underlying truth of verses 13 and 14 is that Jesus makes it plain and clear that all who travel have been presented with an opportunity to choose a gate and a road. When a person chooses the gate, be it narrow or wide, he must travel the road that the gate opens to, and the destination is determined by the decision made standing before the gate.

Today, do we stand before two gates? Which gate will you choose? One leads to death and the other leads to life.

The choice is yours! Choose wisely, for you will live and die with your choice. And your choice determines where you will spend eternity.

Lesson 111—April 24, 2016

False Prophets—Ravenous Wolves

Scripture: Matthew 7:15

Lesson Goal: To understanding the reality of false prophets and teachers.

Introduction: Please read these Scriptures: 2 Kings 3:13; Isaiah 44:25; Jeremiah 23:16; Ezekiel 13:2-3; Micah 3:5; Zechariah 13:2.

What do these Old Testament passages have in common?

False prophets claimed to receive messages from God, but they prophesized only what the king and the people wanted to hear. False teachers are just as common today. Jesus says to watch out for those whose words sound religious but who are motivated by money, fame or power. These false prophets will come in among the believers like wolves covered in sheep pelts, pretending to be sheep, hoping to go unnoticed as they do their damage. But Jesus described these people as ferocious wolves. Just as the false prophets arose from God's people, Israel, so false prophets and false teachers would later come out from among the believers and from the church. Jesus warned his followers that false prophets would come (Matthew 24:11; Mark 13:22-23). False teachers infiltrated the early churches just as the gospel message was spreading (Acts 20:29; 2 Corinthians 11:11-15; 2 Timothy 2:14-19; 2 Peter 2:1-3, 17-22; 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:1-6). Jesus' followers would need the ability to discern true sheep from wolves in sheep's clothing (Barton).

Webster offers these definitions for "wolf:

- 1) a large wild animal that is similar to a dog that often hunts in groups
- 2) any of several large predatory canids (genus *Canis*) that live and hunt in packs and resemble the related dogs.

"Wolf in sheep's clothing" is defined by Webster as "one who cloaks a hostile intention in a friendly manner.

(V15) "Beware"—Greek "*proschette*," "to be on guard, to give heed to" (Rienecker).

We (followers of Jesus) are instructed by the literal original language that we are not to turn our minds to, not to pay or give attention to these false prophets.

In your own words, how would you describe a false prophet?

(V15) "false prophets"

False prophets are those who deviate from the truth and who advocate the wide gate and the easy way (read Matthew 7:13-14).

In the words of Charles H. Spurgeon: "They deviated from the truth so much there is not enough left to make soup for a sick grasshopper" (MacDonald).

False prophets claim to be, and give the appearance of, true believers, but they have their own selfish motives, often preying upon unsuspecting believers. Many times these false prophets seek a platform or venue by infiltrating with a religious appearance or façade. They often appear sincere and genuine as they prey upon the hearts of trusting individuals, often choosing to prey upon the weak or wounded.

John Phillips explains:

False prophets are satan's emissaries to lure people along the broad road that leads to destruction. They come wearing the outward garb of the genuine. They say the right things and do the right things. They do all they can to resemble the sheep in order to gain admittance and win acceptance by the true people of God. The ultimate test of a false prophet is not the attractiveness of his personality, the persuasiveness of his eloquence, or the size of his following, but his doctrine and manner of life.

Warren Wiersbe writes concerning false prophets: "The closer we get to them, the more we see the falsity of their lives and doctrine. They magnify themselves, not Jesus Christ; and their purpose is to exploit people, not to edify them."

What makes a false prophet so dangerous?

According to John R. W. Stott:

Jesus held that truth and falsehood excluded one another, and that those who propagate lies in God's name are false prophets, of whom His followers must beware. In reality they (false prophets) are wolves. In first-century Palestine, the wolf was the natural enemy of sheep. Hence a good-shepherd, as Jesus was to teach later, was always on the look-out for wolves in order to protect his sheep. False prophets are more than dangerous; they are also deceptive. The wolves sneak into the flock in the disguise of sheep. As a result, the unwary actually mistake them for sheep and give them an unsuspecting welcome. Their true character is not discovered until too late and the damage has been done. The false teacher (prophet) claims to be a teacher of truth. He conceals his dark purpose beneath the cloak of Christian piety. He also hides behind the cover of high-sounding titles and impressive academic degrees. So, 'Beware,' Jesus warns. We must be on our guard, pray for discernment, use our critical facilities and never relax our vigilance. We must not be dazzled by a person's outward clothing-his charm, learning, doctorates, and ecclesiastical honors. We must look beneath the appearance to the reality. What lives under the fleece: a sheep or a wolf?

Please read John 8:43-45, 47. To whom did Jesus speak these words?

Please read Matthew 23:1-34. The Pharisees lived by and taught by the dedication to falsehood.

Jesus warns us (true believers, the church) to be both on alert and on guard for these false teachers (prophets). The danger of these false prophets (ravenous wolves) cannot be overstated or over emphasized. Just as the wolves of Jesus' day were the most common and most natural enemy of sheep, the false prophet (teacher) is an enemy of the believer and the cause of Christ. As wolves seek out their victims, so does the false prophet.

The sheep most vulnerable to the wolves' attack is that sheep who has strayed away from the flock. The sheep that is a straggler or has lagged behind is an easy target for the wolf.

Important Truth

In Old Testament as well as New Testament days, shepherds wore woolen clothing obviously made from the wool of the sheep they were entrusted with. This clothing, made from the wool of sheep, was “sheep’s clothing.” False prophets or teachers disguise themselves as true shepherds, teachers, and prophets. They (false prophets) try to look, sound and appear to be just like the true shepherd, but while claiming to be pure and true, they seek to deceive, mislead, hurt, harm and destroy the sheep.

The false shepherd (the deceiver) gives the appearance of orthodoxy, frequently with great declarations and fanfare. He speaks favorable of Christ, the cross, the Bible, the Holy Spirit and so on, and who associates with true believers. From his looks, vocabulary, and associations, he gives considerable evidence of genuine belief. But he is not genuine; he is a fake and a deceiver. He has the speech of orthodoxy, but is a living lie. False prophets are almost always pleasant and positive. They like to be with Christians, to talk like Christians, and to be identified as Christians. They know and use biblical terminology and often appear highly knowledgeable about Scripture. Many false prophets also appear to be sincere, and because of that sincerity they can more easily mislead others (MacArthur).

Next week we will study *how* we, true believers, can recognize these false prophets.

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