

Reading: Matthew 7:1-12

Theme: Encouragements in Our Need.

The section of the Sermon on the Mount we are looking at this morning is 7:7-12. It is a section that is well known by many who go regularly to churches and has very encouraging and comforting things to tell us, it is full of hope as we live in a hopeless and confusing world, with lives which can be so self-centred in so many situations. The Lord Jesus gives hope and encouragement to us, even repeating many encouragements to reinforce them and to give us many reasons to trust even more in our Father in heaven. I want us to note 4 things from these verses:

1. The Connection.

It seems an abrupt change of emphasis from v1-6 to v7-12. Some see no connection, but there is one. The whole Sermon on the Mount is a beautiful progression of thoughts and ideas. It would be strange if that pattern is not continued here and I feel it continues, for in v1-6 Jesus has been dealing with the relationship of person-to-person, that we are to be careful in such, for our Father in heaven is watching and will judge, discipline us. In v12 He clearly takes up the same theme of our relationship with each other.

The Lord Jesus has spoken of our not judging others in a harsh, unloving, condemning way. We noted reasons given and the Lord Jesus then teaches we are also to judge - we are to use our discernment, wisdom in not casting sacred things, pearls before dogs and hogs. We are not to be hypercritical but are to be rightly critical - one attitude is negative and destructive; the other is positive and constructive. We are to be humble and

patient, but not too patient... We are to be slow to judge but not be paralysed in inactivity!

The question must be asked “*How can we ever know how to behave and conduct ourselves?*” As we journey through life, trying to live to please God, trying to live aright toward God, toward others around us, we see all sorts of problems, difficulties, personalities laying ahead of us, confronting us. How are we to know what to do? I think Jesus’ 1st hearers must have had this question in mind as they heard Him preach - especially v1-6. At this point, as if to answer their and our questions of how we could possibly do this in a right way - if at all - Jesus shows that prayer - seeking God’s help is necessary. I feel that is the connection and context here. Moving on we see:

2. The Need.

We need God’s help, wisdom, grace and provision in life, especially in this whole area of judging rightly (*the immediate context here – in Luke 11:9ff the context is life’s necessities*). We need to be wise, need to realise the beams in our own eyes before we can help others. There needs to be a work of God in our lives. There may even need to be a work of God to save us 1st of all. Thankfully v7-8 show us our need to ask, seek and knock to get and to keep on getting from God all we need - especially in this area of spiritual needs.

Sadly, some twist these words, pull them out of context and basically see them as a blank cheque to get their own way if they make enough noise, stamp their feet or are stubborn enough. Others see it as naming and claiming to get all that we would desire. Yet it refers here in the sermon on the Mount 1st, foremost and primarily to the meeting of our spiritual needs to

live our lives rightly before God, especially in the area of our judging of others and therefore our attitudes to others. How can we judge aright or have right attitudes to others? Here is the answer - *“Go to your Father for help.”*

In all of life we are to go to God for help, wisdom, instruction and provision. What we read in v1-6 gives rise to these present verses and they come down to us through the centuries, with their beauty and truth still relevant for us, for they encourage us to go to God for wisdom, for help, for understanding, even for salvation if we've never trusted the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, for understanding Christian things and our daily needs materially.

There is a need for us to go to God. We, without Him are helpless and hopeless. We are naturally 'evil' as v11 emphasises. We are not as evil as we could be but we are drawn to evil, prefer evil and wrong compared to the things of God. If we think we are ok, can manage, can judge aright, can live to please God, then these verses will mean nothing to us, neither will the gospel. Until we see our need of God, of His salvation, of His help to live aright, then we will not ask, seek, knock and therefore we will not find and use the provision He has made. We will simply remain in our need, in our sin, its guilt and condemnation before God; we will remain wise in our own eyes and pride and probably be like the Pharisee in the temple who did not pray but told God, rehearsed before God how 'good' he was!

Have we realised our need before God? It could be for salvation, or for wisdom, understanding and help in the matters of life. If we have, then these verses give us great encouragement because

we are given permission, we are shown we have the great privilege of asking, seeking and knocking for that which we need – spiritually and materially. There is a progression of thought in these words. **Ask or plead** means we are as a beggar asking for mercy, money or provisions. Until we see ourselves as beggars upon God’s mercy and love, we will never ask Him for any good thing. Sadly, we may take Him for granted but we will never truly ask Him about our needs until we have recognised we are and have nothing compared to who He is and has to offer us. This may be expressed as something like *‘God if you are there, make yourself known to me, show yourself as real.’*

To seek is asking and action. We go looking for God, for His answers. If God has revealed Himself in time, in history, we’ll seriously look at the claims of the book that says it is His word and tells us of Him. So, we will read the Bible, listen to what it says. **To knock is asking, seeking and keeping on.** It is like knowing there is a doctor in a house and your child is desperately ill in the car, you know he or she has the medicine that can give them health and so you knock and knock until you get an answer.

These terms indicate perseverance - there is keeping on by asking, seeking and knocking. The Amplified Bible brings out the tense of the words used - present, active and imperative *“Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking <reverently> and <the door> will be opened to you.”* We are given liberty to keep on asking, seeking and knocking. To gain wisdom, to be able to judge aright, to become a Christian involves keeping on in and for the things God has provided. It is not a matter of emotions touched,

of a flash in the pan decision that fades away, or some experience, but it is us continually keeping on being serious with God. Even when we are a Christian, there must always be this keeping on of asking, seeking and knocking with God for His help, strength and provision.

Perhaps someone here is questioning if it's worth seeking after God, even wondering if Christianity is real and true, then I urge you to keep on asking, seeking and knocking. Perhaps we need wisdom, need to change actions or attitudes as we have realised we have failed our God and Saviour, then again, we are to keep on asking seeking and knocking for help. Such things are not useless, they are not done in vain because as we see we have:

3. The Encouragements.

Why bother keeping on in this way. Thankfully Jesus gives us the answer in v8. The Lord Jesus promises we will receive, we will find and we will know the door opened. We can take this promise to Him in prayer - as a child will do to its parents "*You said...*". We are to tell Him we are truly asking, seeking and knocking and that we're going to do so until He keeps His promise. From experience I know that we will, sooner or later, be praising and thanking Him for His help, for what we receive, find and what has been opened to us. Here are encouragements for us - the promise of Jesus Christ, the Saviour. It is so sad that we can so easily give up, give in and not keep on keeping on in such.

Another encouragement is given us in v9-10. Jesus takes a lovely, clear and simple example from life. He says that we do not give our children a stone or a snake instead of bread or a fish when they ask (necessities). We give them what we feel, know

is right and good for them. It's a simple illustration - we try and give our children that which is good for them. Even the worst of parents must have this intention and desire! Sadly, even the best parents may make mistakes and may give their child something that may prove dangerous or harmful in the short or longer term. We are limited in our knowledge and can't always help or comfort our children either. Here the Lord Jesus says we may do good and yet we are basically evil and He contrasts that with how much more, if we ask Him, will our perfect Father in heaven give us the good gifts He knows we need and which will truly do us good.

As we go asking, seeking and knocking, our attention is now off self and self-indulgence and we are directed to God, His love for us and His knowledge of what is truly good for us. He always gives us what is good for us - **what He knows is good** for us and not what we want to fulfil our self-centred ideas and desires. I don't know about you, but I'm so glad not all my prayers and pleadings have been answered with 'Yes'. I realise now how many of them would not have been good for me, would probably have been harmful and I would have been a spoiled brat if I'd always had my own way!

We often ask things of God that would hurt us and our loved ones if we had such things. He knows this and wisely does not give it to us. We are to realise that denials in love from our God are better than gifts in anger from Him e.g. the meat provided to Israel in the desert - even as they ate it God judged them - Psalm 106:15 AV reads "*he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.*" NIV "*So He gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them.*" We too would be ruined if we had all we had desired!

Do we trust our Father? Don't we realise this God will answer us aright and provides the good we need and does so at the time **He knows** we need it! We are to take encouragement as we seek help, wisdom, strength; even as we seek God for the 1st time - here is the God who answers prayer and does so in a right way for He is the perfect Father. Have we seen the connection, the need and the encouragements? If so we are to realise we are not to use such provision in a selfish way, but see that in our living, in our judging there is:

4. The Rule.

This rule has to be followed and it is expressed in v12. Every commentator I looked at termed it '*The Golden Rule*' and stressed its vital importance. It is linked to what Jesus has said, for in the original (*and in many translations*) it has the word "Therefore" at its start, but obscured in NIV "So..."

Because there is this need, because there are these encouragements, we cannot live in a detached way, especially in this whole area of judgement. This golden rule covers all of the situations of life for the Christian - whatever the situation. We may not have a great knowledge of Scripture or be well-versed in theology or Christian ethics, but we can apply this golden rule in our dealings with people and be able to fulfil the Law and the Prophets by not only having an absence of wrong, but the presence of the right.

What would we want in a situation, how would we want people to react? Say someone found our purse, wallet or mobile phone we lost; what would we want them to do? We are to do the same! We would not want people to lie to us; then we do not to lie to

them! We would not want people to steal from or cheat us; then we do not do it either! We would not want people to be hypercritical and harsh with us, do not to do it to them. We would not want people to cold-shoulder, ignore us or mock us – do not to do it to them.

We are to love our neighbour as ourselves i.e. in everything we are to do to others what we would have them do to us. This sums up the OT teaching in its positive and negative aspects concerning our duty to others - it includes a judgemental attitude. It means we are to be concerned for others' well-being, encouragement and comfort, to treat them as if they were us. They should likewise be concerned for us and suddenly we are left deserted of any harsh and bitter thoughts, for we are treating them as we would want to be treated!

You may think and feel that is impossible – you'd be completely right! We are selfish by nature as sin does that in us. It takes a work of God in salvation to create in us new hearts, motives and to be able to care for and deal with others in this way. Again, we come back to see the need for asking, seeking and knocking for God's help, enabling, wisdom, grace in our lives, our areas of need, especially as we see our own self-centredness and pride.

For us all I pray that we would learn of our Saviour and apply these things to our lives, realising we need His help and yet delighting in the fact that He gives us encouragements and promises to seek such, even to seek 1st of all His forgiveness and the salvation that He offers. I pray we would be able to live these things out in our lives for His glory, His honour and for the well-being of the church He loves.