

**Sermon Title: "Keep on Asking" Series: "Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven"**  
**April 27, 2014 Pastor Dave Sattler Text: Matthew 7:7-12 Sources:** NIV Life Application Bible; Commentaries: Keener, McKnight, Wilkins, & NT Wright; "Water From a Deeper Well: Spiritual Poverty" by Cloud & Townsend; Dr John A. Beck.

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## Review & Introduction:

- I'm Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC. We'll begin with a 'Sattler Straw Poll' to get the juices flowing on our theme for today. Let's play a little game of: "What's HARDER to **ASK** for?"
  - **<Slide>** 1) A-A refund from the store? OR B-directions when you're lost?
  - **<Slide>** 2) A-A Stanley Cup from the Canucks? OR B-A sunny day from the North Shore?
  - **<Slide>** 3) A-A raise from the boss? OR B-A favour from your friend?
  - **<Slide>** 4) A-Healing from God? OR B-Medicine from your doctor?
- Perhaps a GQ is: Why are we afraid to ask certain people for certain things? Why is it so hard to even ask God sometimes? You'll have to wait till the end of the sermon for an answer on that one!
- **<Series Slide>** Today we're back to our series on Jesus' most famous teaching and over the next few weeks we'll follow the Sermon on the Mount through its exciting conclusion in Matthew 7.
- First, some refresher points on the larger context of the story ...
- By now, news had spread throughout the entire region of Galilee: testimony of great miracles, people being healed - set free from demons; word of a powerful new teaching.
- And crowds began to follow on all fronts (5:1a).
- Jesus had His precious 12 and discipling His disciples was now high priority. The life to which Jesus called them would clearly pull them away from the Judaism they'd been versed in since childhood.
- And, following Jesus' Way would blatantly fly in the face of the dominant 1st Century Roman ideal.
- Jesus needed to teach them how to live and ultimately what and Who to give their lives for.
- Knowing His time on earth was limited, Jesus thought, "Where can I escape to teach these guys?" So He "went up on a mountainside & His disciples came to Him & He began to teach them" (5:1b-2).
- **<Slide>** ILL - Mt Arbel's spectacular overlook of the Sea of Galilee surely played a role in the communication and experience of Jesus' audience that day.
- To enhance His teaching as a sort of 'living powerpoint', I envision Jesus pointing out below geography, buildings, & customs familiar to every Galilean gathered there.
- The power of ancient Rome was displayed across the lake in the Decapolis cities' daunting white marble structures that gleamed in the Mediterranean sun.
- The daily activities of wealth accumulation could be seen (and heard) from here - construction, fishing, salt-refining; even author and now disciple, Matthew's old tax-collecting post could be spotted from here along the International Highway off to left in the picture.
- And Jesus' message? It's chalk-full of practicality: faith is challenged to 'take feet' in real life.
- We see that relationship with God is not merely about keeping the 10 Commandments - avoiding the big sins, and feeling smug or super-spiritual about it.
- With God's Kingdom now come to earth, Jesus was 'changing the scorecard' of the Jewish religious system and exposing gut-level our struggle with sin; Jesus said:
  - J: "You think you haven't murdered anyone, well you're killing people with your rage!"
  - J: "You think you haven't cheated on your spouse, but your life is driven by lust."
  - J: "You think you're a faithful worshiper, but day after day after day you bow to the false idol of money storing up earthly treasures for yourself. No one can serve two masters (6:24a)."
- **<Slide>** Please turn to Matthew 7:7-12 in your Bibles, electronic device, or p.1505-6 in blue Bibles.
- This passage is the heart of Jesus' teaching. It points to the one place we find stability to navigate our world full of darkness, opposition, & brokenness.
- One commentator I read this week reminds, Q: The Sermon on the Mount "isn't just about how to behave. It's about **discovering the living God in Jesus** and learning to reflect His love into the world that needs it so badly." - Tom Wright in McKnight, p.13.
- And this is where - and only where hope, transformation, & true life comes: in seeking after and discovering the living God in Jesus. He alone is the Source of all things. Our Source.
- **<READ>** Prayer: "God, control me by Your Spirit and move me out of the way."

## Text Outline:

- Jesus began this section with a series of commands:

### 1. <Slide> Ask, Seek, Knock (7:7) ...

- You "ask" when you want or need something you do not already have.
- You "seek" what you desire and long to possess.
- You "knock" when you want to someone to know that you're there.
- All 3 of these great action words involve communication and invoke relationship.
- And most importantly, asking, seeking, & knocking are integral to cultivating life with Jesus.
- ILL - Sadly, many people - even friends of mine - have often given up after a ..
  - few half-hearted stabs at pursuing relationship with God. And when in their lives they've experienced 1 or 2 perceived 'God no-shows', they've concluded:
    - God is not worth seeking anymore because God cannot be found.
  - And they're living today as 'functioning agnostics' - believing God to be unknowable.
- But knowing God takes time, life-focus, & intention ... and it's entirely worth it!
- Prioritizing our spiritual growth is something we have been beating the drum for this past ministry year at NSAC through our "Cultivating Life" initiative. Many of you have participated.
- Following Jesus is not a passive exercise; growth spiritually is not some procedure that can be performed on you or a process that happens to you; you can't grow by osmosis. Too bad, but no!
- This is what Jesus was driving at. Yes, our faith is God's work, but we do play a significant role in it through conscious choices we make to seek after Him, surrender to Him, & cooperate with Him.
- We are called to persist in pursuing God. And asking ought to be a continual part of it.
- Ask and **keep on asking**. And expect the Father to answer.
- V.8: "Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened."

### 2. <Slide> Answers (7:8) ...

- Maybe it's just Jesus' exaggerated sermon rhetoric, but this is one of the most controversial verses in all of scripture ... for it lends itself to a number of dangerous interpretations and raises some lofty theological questions.
- First there's the 'name it & claim it' idea:
  - God will give you whatever you name if you just claim it hard enough.
- A difficulty with this understanding is that it conveys what I believe to be a false image - that of a tired and busy god, who, if we hassle him enough, is forced to pay attention and meet our request.
- But God is infinitely more than just a 'cosmic vendor' with whom we barter or perform transactions.
- Other huge debates emerge from this text: What's the relationship between God's sovereignty & human responsibility? What's prayer really all about? If God is all-knowing and already has it all figured out, then why bother asking Him at all?
- My simple answer to all these questions is this: I believe there's something in the asking.
- <Slide> ILL - A story to explain: Imagine a young man & woman have been dating awhile & have at long-last decided to get married.
  - Now it's time for the young man to ask his girlfriend's father for permission to marry his daughter. [I've been that guy approaching the father ... scariest moment of my life, but so worth it! Sure felt good when it was over!!!]
  - The father, who's watched the relationship unfold over time (and knows his daughter is very happy) already knows what the young man wants ... and as the young man approaches, the father knows exactly what the young man will ask for before he even puts it into words.
  - But the father still longs to hear it expressed. He's excited to interact with the young man on a topic so precious to him. He appreciates and even loves the honour of being asked.
  - And finally, the father delights in giving the good gift of his approval to the young man.
- This illustration shows the balance between us asking and God granting.
- I believe it's wrong to say, "it's all on God" and it's also wrong to say "it's all on us." Indeed God is all-knowing, but **there is something about our asking** that deeply touches His Father-heart.
- This is further illustrated in Jesus' 'mini-parables' regarding the Father's desire for ...

### 3. <Slide> Giving Good Gifts (7:9-11)

- And this is the linchpin for today's message: prayer is anchored in God's goodness.
  - We are encouraged to ask God for things because God is good.
- His ability to "give good gifts to those who ask Him" (11) flows out of His nature and from His divine role in our lives as our Heavenly Father full of goodness.
- ILL - Yet, at the same time I know this to be a 'lightning-rod' concept ...
  - For those of you who've not had a 'good' earthly father or perhaps had no father at all.
  - Your life-foundation has been rocked - your trust broken.
  - Perhaps even the belief in an authority figure who desires to meet your needs and who actually has your best interests in mind is a huge stretch for you.
  - And, then to be encouraged to ask Him for something?
  - You say, "Sattler, absolutely not! Tried that. Don't wanna get hurt. Again."
- My prayer for you this morning = that God would bring healing to that 'father-wound' ... and that you might have the courage to open up your heart to Him in some new way today.
- I love Cf. James 1:17; it says: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."
- So hurt, some of us have closed ourselves off from our Heavenly Father and no longer trust Him to provide. To survive, we've been 'feasting on stones when it's His bread that we really need.'
- "Come, Holy Spirit. Make the love of the Father real to my friends today."
- Right here, in the "shifting shadows" of your brokenness, may you receive the healing of Jesus and open up your heart again to receive from your Heavenly Father one of His good gifts. God is good.
- Jesus ends with the old saying commonly known as ...

### 4. <Slide> The Golden Rule (7:12)

- As this is a whole sermon in itself, I will only give a few thoughts.
- Not only is goodness resident in the character of God, but it is also one of the "spiritual fruits" God wishes to grow in us. When we pursue God, His character rubs off on us.
- And the principal way this is measured is in how we relate to others.
- Normal living for Christ-followers can be summed up this way:
  - "We should treat others exactly how we ourselves wish to be treated."

**Application:** Time to land the plane ...

#### 1. <Slide> On Life-Posture ... What is the posture of your life?

- There is a clarion reminder here that we are invited in to an ongoing quest of pursuing God.
- Truth is: our lives are defined by the things after which we seek.
- That which we desire inevitably controls us and becomes the point around which our life orbits.
- ILL - As a soccer coach, I appreciate many qualities in a player, but one stands out for me.
  - It's derived from a Jewish concept of this time period and the Hebrew word chutzpah (חֲצִפָּה) which refers to the amount of courage, mettle, or ardor an individual possesses. **Chutzpah.**
  - In the game and also in life, when things don't go our way (which seems at least to me to happen a lot), it's tempting to blame others, get angry, and stop trying.
  - But chutzpah presses on. It's resolute. No matter the circumstances.
  - Fixed on the true goal. With passion, belief, & courage.
- And I believe God appreciates this quality too.
- I don't know about you, but for me it's so easy to coast in my relationship with God - to push God to the background and call on Him only when needed. But this is destructive in the long run.
- Recently I have felt the urge to seek more intentionally - to not just have a good relationship with Jesus, but a great one.
- That's one of the great things about Him: with God, there is always more. More to experience, more transformation, more about His character to discover.
- So together, let us pursue God zealously, with holy chutzpah!
- ILL - But for this to happen it often requires some sort of life-realignment.

- Often in the rigours of driving, my car tires come out of alignment; subtly over time and sometimes more abruptly with a crash into a curb, they get out of whack; and need work.
- And I love driving my car after that wheel alignment - it handles well, feels so smooth; and the benefits are great: less wear and tear, better fuel-efficiency; the car just drives safer.
- Cf. Psalm 37:4: "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."
- There is a sense that as we seek God more intently - delight in Him, our desires begin to align more and more with His desires for us, and we learn to ask Him for what is also good for us.
- A good life-posture for us is: seeking God, heart asking, hands wide open.

## 2. <Slide> On Being Afraid to Ask ...

- History tells us Israel was a praying nation. The average 1st Century Jew I'm told had the entire book of Psalms memorized and it's full of prayers - asking God for stuff.
- So, why are we afraid to ask? I want to suggest that it's hard for us to ask, either because:
  - 1) to ask is to need and we don't like to admit needy-ness or appear needy, OR
  - 2) because we don't trust the capabilities or the goodness of the person we're asking.
- ILL - I've been in church my whole life ...
  - And in my experience, the majority of people who ask for prayer or come forward when prayer ministry is offered, are women.
  - Q: Is it because men don't have burdens? No!
  - But, we men like to think we're macho, 'islands', self-sufficient; we're too proud to appear like we need help, too narcissistic to reach out beyond ourselves to God and others.
  - We have an image to uphold and we've been taught our whole lives to be independent, to make things happen on our own - to 'get 'er done.'
  - Prayer is for when we've run out of options.
- But as dependent children we are called to simply come to our Good Father and ask.
- I love this! So often I've believed that if I don't or I can't make it happen, it'll never happen.
- This for me breeds tons of fear and anxiety and worry - even seemingly adds years to my life.
- But God says: "Do not be afraid. Come to me. Ask me. Be at peace. I have this one."
- This kind of asking is humbling. Especially for us men.
- Our courage to ask flows from a compelling vision of God's goodness - big picture for the world ... and small picture, God's goodness for you.
- However, naturally we feel hurt when our deeply-felt petitions go seemingly unanswered: when a loved one dies without the healing we prayed for, when that relationship stays broken, when justice isn't served, when that loved one for whom we've prayed for decades still isn't saved.
- And I don't know about you, but the church answers I've been given about 'why?' don't do much for me either: "God answers all our prayers with 'yes', 'no', or 'wait!'" "You're just not praying His will for you, brother." "It's all part of God's mystery." Uh!
- Perhaps this is you today. Deeply disappointed, you've been hurt by God's 'insensitive' answers to your prayers or His lack of response to your requests.
- And you've retreated. God feels distant right now and it seems hopeless or useless to even ask.
- <Slide> There is some solace today in knowing Jesus Himself prayed and didn't get what He asked for from His Father. In Cf. Matthew 26:39, facing the cross, Jesus asked,
  - "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. **Yet not as I will, but as you will.**" And we all know how it went.
- I believe God is asking you and me to be a people who keep on asking Him. Our Good God. To receive what we need. From Him. In His way. In His time. Amen.