

A MAGNIFICENT PROMISE

MATTHEW 7:7-8

Pastor Andrew B. Pigott

Chinese Christian Church of New Jersey

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“ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU; SEEK AND YOU WILL find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” When taken alone, these words sound like God is promising to give us anything we ask. And if we don't get what we ask for, it is simply because there was something wrong in the way we asked. Perhaps our asking was not sincere enough or maybe we doubted while we were asking or perhaps we did not ask enough times.

This is the conclusion that many people come to when they consider the promise recorded here in MATTHEW 7:7-8. But, to come to that conclusion one must separate these two verses from all the teaching that has come before it and the words that immediately follow the promise. I think it is tragic when people take this promise out of its context and conclude that God is going to give them anything they ask for. It is tragic, because when people do this they are doing something that is bound to lead them to become disillusioned with God. Everyone who takes this approach to prayer will sooner or later come to the place where they will ask God to give them something very important and their request will not be granted. Perhaps that very important thing will be a job or a marriage partner or success in school or success in business or healing from some kind of illness. The person will pray with great intensity and repeat the prayer time and time again. When the request is not granted, the person who asks will inevitably fall into depression and despair. I have seen it happen time and time again.

Some of these people who enter into despair will never recover. They will spend the rest of their lives bitter toward God for not keeping His promise. Others, over time, will come to realize that there was a good reason why God did not give them what they had asked for, and they will actually be thankful to God for not granting them something that would have actually done them more harm than good. They will have grown to see the wisdom in God's choice.

Today my goal is to convince all of us that the promise recorded in MATTHEW 7:7-8 really is a magnificent promise when understood in the proper way. My observation is that most people have not considered this promise the way that Jesus intended it to be considered, so my goal is not an easy one to achieve. But, I'm going to try anyhow.

EVERYTHING THAT JESUS HAS SAID PRIOR TO THIS magnificent promise has to do with the meaning of the

Christian life and how to live the Christian life. He started out by describing virtues such as poor in spirit and mourning and meekness and hunger and thirst after righteousness and being merciful and pure in heart and being a peacemaker. He used these virtues to describe who a Christian is. Immediately following that, Jesus declared that people who have such virtues will be like salt and light in this world. So Jesus begins by giving His readers a vision of their identity and a vision of their purpose; that is, He tells them who they are and the effect that they should have on the world. Following that we have a long section describing what a Christian's relationship with the law should be. That was necessary because of the false teaching of the Pharisees and scribes. Instead of giving His followers strict rules of behavior like the Pharisees did, Jesus gave them principles to live by.

Following the instruction about the law we have a whole section describing **the most important thing about the Christian life**; namely, **a Christian's private devotional life**. The private devotional life is what enables us to grow and mature spiritually in our inner being. It deals with the intimate fellowship we are meant to have with God our Father. Without the devotional life, Christianity will become nothing more than a bunch of busy activity made to please us or impress others.

After dealing with the devotional life, we find a series of commands that we have recently been considering one by one. Our Lord gives these commands as He considers the way Satan will use the world and the flesh to attack the Christian. The commands help us to do battle with the enemy so we can continue being the light and the salt that we are meant to be. **The first command is “do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.” The second command is “do not worry.” The third command is “do not judge” (that is do not judge people the wrong way, but judge them the right way).**

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE BRIEFLY REVIEW EVERYTHING that has been said thus far, because the promise we are now considering is given in light of all that has been said.

The more I consider the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, the more humbled I become. The standards found in the Beatitudes and the description of the devotional life that Jesus uses are so high and so different from the rest of the world that they seem utterly impossible to keep. And the commands Jesus gives us

also seem absolutely impossible to obey. Satan uses the world to convince us that we should store up treasures on this earth, and the world tells us to worry when fail to store up those treasures. Satan also uses our own fallen nature persuade us to judge people the wrong way and neglect to judge people the right way. How can we keep such standards and how can we obey such commands? How can we live the Sermon on the Mount? It seems so entirely impossible for anyone. We definitely need help and grace. Where can we get it? And here is the answer: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

Do you see the connection? The Sermon on the Mount, among other things, is meant to crush our prides and give us a sense of total hopelessness and helplessness in the light of the highest standards and toughest commands ever given to human beings. Any person who carefully considers everything that our Lord has taught up to this point and who is not crushed to the ground and come to realize his total helplessness and need for grace has failed to catch the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes I think it is better not to study the Bible at all rather to study it and not catch its spirit. HEBREWS 4:12 says, "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The word of God as presented in the Sermon on the Mount is meant to crush our prides and make us feel desperately in need of help.

Only in light of such a desperate feeling of need does the command of MATTHEW 7:7-8 make sense. For the person who truly desires to live the high standards and obey the tough commands, this promise is the most magnificent of all. How foolish it is to disconnect this promise from its context and read it as a guarantee that God will give us whatever we ask for. That approach is nothing more than a guarantee for disappointment. But, think what this promise does for the person who is already humbled by his own inability to live the high standards and obey the difficult commands. It tells him that the standards are attainable and the commands can be obeyed. It guarantees strength to the weak and hope to the weary.

So you see, this promise is first and foremost given to those who recognize their need to live out the Sermon on the Mount. That is the first condition of the promise. People who don't recognize their need to live the Sermon on the Mount may ask and seek and knock, but they will be doing so for the wrong reasons. JAMES 4:2 says, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." But, when we do ask with the right motives — when our asking is born out of a strong need that we feel to be what Jesus wants us to be and obey all of His commands — then the promise is certain.

And, how can you know if you have recognized your

need in a way that will make you a recipient of this magnificent promise? You will know when you begin to come to God daily in prayer and plead with Him to give you all the virtues that a Christian should have. You will know when you ask Him with all your heart to help you develop a stronger devotional life. And, you will know that you have become a candidate for this promise when you plead with God to help you obey all of His commands. You will persist in your asking, because your need for these things never goes away. Some people think the Bible teaches us to persist in prayer, because the more we pray the more God will be likely to answer the prayer. But the best reason to persist in prayer is because the need for the things we are asking never goes away. "Asking and seeking and knocking"—these three words all emphasize the same thing; namely, a persistent pleading for God to meet a need that never goes away. Seeking and knocking are simply intense ways of asking. The important thing is that we never stop asking with great intensity because we are so deeply aware of our desperate need.

We won't ask and receive and we won't seek and find and we won't knock so the door will be opened unless we recognize our need to do so. That is the first condition of the promise.

The second condition of the promise is to believe that God can and will meet the need. MATTHEW 7:9-11 tells us about a heavenly Father who, unlike earthly fathers, never makes a mistake. He always knows the best way to help His children in every situation. He is far better than any earthly human father who is limited by a fallen, evil nature. He knows exactly what is best and He is unlimited in power to help us.

Verse 11 talks about the good gifts our heavenly Father will give us if we ask Him. We should not make the mistake to think these gifts refer to wealth and health and long life. Those things do little in helping people live out the Sermon on the Mount. The gifts our heavenly Father gives us come in one package. LUKE 11 records this same magnificent promise. In LUKE 11:13 we find a better description of these "gifts" the heavenly Father will give us to help us live out the Sermon on the Mount. That verse reads like this, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" That is it. In giving us the Holy Spirit, our heavenly Father gives us everything needed to be what we should be and do what we should do. 2 PETER 1:3 puts it like this, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness."

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS REALLY FAR LESS COMPLEX THAN we make it out to be. It becomes complex when we use our religion to try and get what everyone else is trying to get. It becomes simple when we recognize our desperate need to become godly people who live a life of simple obedience. All we have to do is recognize

this need and believe that God can meet the need through His gift of the Holy Spirit. That is all we have to do to experience this magnificent promise. There is nothing else.

You are not being too charismatic when you ask God in prayer to fill you with His Holy Spirit. If you really want to live out the Sermon on the Mount, don't be afraid to ask God often to allow you to experience the fullness of His love which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Ask boldly that your heavenly Father will anoint you with the power of the Holy Spirit that you may obey His commands and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be a strong witness. When we ask for the right reasons, His promise is certain. He will fill us and He will anoint us.

Teresa Anne Arries had given birth to a baby girl that she named Kim. But, from the moment she was born, Kim's body failed to produce enough white blood cells to fight off disease. Every two weeks she had to receive a painful shot of gamma globulin to help her survive. Even with that she was sick most of the time, and Teresa was up every night with a crying baby. After 16 months Teresa felt she couldn't stand it any longer. So she cried out, "Where are you, God? Why are you so cold and silent? Lord why are you giving me stone and not the bread that a loving father would give? Have you deserted me? Where is your promised peace and comfort?"

It was during this difficult time of struggle that Teresa came across the story of Abraham being asked by God to build an altar and sacrifice the life of his only son. Teresa came under conviction as she realized how she had been asking for the wrong thing. Instead of asking God for the strength to do His will she had been asking God for her own will to be done. So she built an altar

upon her own breaking heart. And, upon the altar she placed her only, beloved child as truly and sacrificially as Abraham had ever placed Isaac on the altar of Moriah.

"Oh, my Lord," she prayed. "I trust in Thee. If you are going to take my baby, take her. I can't fight You any longer. Forgive me, Lord, for my lack of trust and obedience. I don't understand why you are asking for my little girl, but I do love and trust You. Help me in the time ahead."

Immediately a profound peace filled Teresa's heart. Six weeks later she took her baby Kim to see the doctor. Kim had not been ill during all that time. With a puzzled look on his face, the doctor said, "Kim's white blood cell count is absolutely normal. This is impossible. It couldn't have changed so quickly."

But, it had, and in Teresa's heart she knew why. As Isaac had been returned to Abraham, so had Teresa's little girl been given back to her.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." The Christian life becomes so complex when we try to use our religion to guarantee that our own wills be done. But the Christian life is made simple when we become broken, realizing our own need just to trust and obey. God wants us to ask Him to help us trust and obey. Everyone who persistently asks God for the strength to trust and obey will receive. He who seeks will find and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. What a magnificent promise! It's a promise that God never fails to keep.