

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 12 November 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **Ask, Seek, Knock**

### **Matthew 7:7-12**

In Winchester, England, there is a very ancient hospital (in the *medieval* sense of the word, meaning a “house of hospitality”); and this hospital is still in operation, after nearly 900 years. According to the story, sometime in the 1120’s, a nobleman named Henry of Blois was walking through the fields near Winchester, along the River Itchen; and while he was walking, he came upon a poor peasant girl. Seeing that he was a wealthy nobleman, the girl pleaded with him to help her people, who were starving. Struck by the great need of this young woman, he continued to walk along the river; and soon he came upon the ruins of an ancient building, which had been destroyed by the Danes years earlier. He vowed, right then and there, that upon those ruins he would build an almshouse, where any hungry person might receive bread, every single day. True to his word, he built an almshouse, which was finished building in 1136; and he called it The Hospital of Saint Cross. For centuries, hungry, starving people from all around the area went there to receive bread. To this very day, anyone is welcome, on any day of the week, to go to the Hospital of Saint Cross, and to knock at the portal; and to anyone who knocks and asks, free bread will be given. Very few people avail of the offer these days; but it is always there.

Well, my friends, I am here to tell you that there is a “hospital” where any hungry soul may receive “bread,” at any time; and this place has been in operation for 2,000 years. One needn’t travel any distance to get to this hospital, because this place of hospitality is not a physical location, but a divine *Person*: and His name is the Ancient of Days—God the Father. The Person who *distributes* the Bread at this hospital is the second Person of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ; and the *Bread itself* is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “*Verily, Verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am the bread of life....if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*” Jesus Christ *is* salvation. Believing on Him is like eating heavenly bread, which nourishes your soul, and gives you eternal life with God. All that is needed, on your part, is to *ask* Him for the “bread” of eternal life; and He will surely give it to you!

However, the Father gives us much more than the gift of eternal life. To those who have become part of His royal household by faith, He is constantly there to grant their requests. No good thing will be denied to the children of the Kingdom, when they humbly ask Him for it, in faith, and in accordance with His will. That is what we will be talking about this morning. The title of this message is **Ask, Seek, Knock**.

**Read Matthew 7:7-11.**

#### **I. Our responsibility toward God (vv. 7-11)**

In last week’s message, we learned that Christians have a responsibility **toward other believers**; and that responsibility is to “*judge not, that ye be not judged.*” We then examined the Christian’s responsibility **toward himself**: and that responsibility is to *judge yourself* against the Scriptures every single day, so that you can pull the “beam” of sin out of your own eye. We then saw the Christian’s responsibility **toward the wicked**: and that responsibility is not to waste time distributing truth to those who only mock, and scorn, and trample the Gospel underfoot. Rather, we should focus our efforts on those who are *giving ear* to the truth.

Well, here in **verses 7-11**, we come to **our responsibility toward God**; and that responsibility can be summed up in three simple words: **“ask,” “seek,”** and **“knock.”** Each of these words—**“ask,” “seek,”** and **“knock”**—is an *imperative* verb. This means that what Jesus is saying is not merely a “suggestion,” for those who feel like trying it out: rather, it is a *command* from our King! Since our King *commands* us to **“ask,” “seek,”** and **“knock,”** we’d better examine these words closely, and see exactly what He expects us to do!

First, the Lord commands us to **“ask.”** This word **“ask”** is translated from the word *aiteite*, which is used to describe someone who is *approaching a superior* with a request. This implies that we must make our request with a spirit of *humble submission*. Yet, at the same time, we needn’t *fear* to approach God with our requests, because God is our loving Father; and Christ is our elder Brother, and our merciful High Priest. In **Hebrews 4**, Paul says, **“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”** Jesus knows our struggles, because He, too, lived in this sin-cursed world, and was faced with all the temptations with which we are faced. As Man, He actually *understands* our struggles, and sympathises with us: and as God, He has *all the power* to help us through our struggles. Therefore, we may approach Him with *confidence*.

Christian, are *you* obeying this command to *ask* God for help in time of need? Sad to say, many Christians *are not* obeying this command. Some do not obey this command because they don’t believe that God *would* listen to them (either because they *doubt* God’s love, or because they know that there is hidden, unconfessed sin in their lives). Some do not ask because they don’t really believe that God *could* help them (since their problems are so big). Still others don’t ask because *they don’t even see their need* to ask God for help. They are trusting in their *own* wisdom, and feel that they have their lives under control; thus, the thought of asking God for help rarely enters their minds. Brethren, may *none* of these forms of unbelief be true of us! All the grace that we need is available in Christ; but we *must ask*. You must *ask* Him for power to overcome the lustful desires that war against your heart and mind. You must *ask* Him for wisdom to navigate through the treacherous shoals in your life. You must *ask* Him for holy boldness, so that you might witness effectively to the lost. You must *ask* Him for bodily healing, so that you might have the strength to serve Him. You must *ask* Him for comfort when you are hurting. We must *ask* Him to provide your material needs (even during times of prosperity, when you *think* you’re “doing O.K.”). You must *ask!*

Secondly, we must **“seek.”** Jesus says, **“Seek, and ye shall find.”** This word **“seek”** implies that you are adding *action* to your request. It implies that you are making the effort to get up and *look* for your answer. It implies that you are *preparing* to receive God’s help, because you are looking for it, and expect it. A farmer who prays for rain, but then does nothing to *prepare* for the rain (such as going out and ploughing his field, and breaking up the soil) shows, by his inaction, that he doesn’t really believe that God will answer his prayer. However, a farmer who goes out to the field, and breaks up the hard ground, believes that God will answer. So it is with us, in our spiritual harvest. We should be spending much time *praying* for souls to be saved; but in the meantime, we should be preparing for rain, and preparing for the harvest. Go out and knock on doors, and hand out tracts, and build relationships with lost folks, and invite them to your home, and invite them to church, and share the Gospel with them; and as you do so, ask God to give the increase, and patiently wait for the harvest. The Apostle James wrote, **“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”** Let’s take a look at a Scripture which demonstrates this truth.

### Read Luke 13:6-9.

In this parable, **the owner** of the vineyard represents God the Father; **the "dresser"** of the vineyard represents the Lord Jesus Christ; **the fig tree** represents Israel; and **the three years of toil** represents the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. Christ laboured over Israel for three long years, and offered Himself to them as Messiah and King; but they would not receive Him. The Father saw no spiritual fruit forthcoming from Israel, and was thus ready to "remove" the nation from their place of privilege and blessing. Yet, Jesus pleaded with the Father to give Israel a little more time. Not only that, but He offered to "dig about" the fig tree, and to "dung it." He didn't merely *pray* for more time for Israel to repent; He was prepared to expend *more labour* over them! He *asked* for more time; and as He asked, He *acted*. This is called *seeking*.

So it is in our prayers. We must pray; but as we pray, we must be prepared to *labour* in preparation for God's answer. I can think of times in my life when I literally had to pray for the Lord to *extend* my life. When I was direly ill with Crohn's Disease years ago, there were times when I seriously wondered how much longer I had to live. I prayed fervently for God to turn my health around, and to let me live; and I prayed specifically that He would allow me to live so that *I could serve Him* as a missionary church-planter. However, I also knew that if I really believed that God would answer my prayer, I must *keep preparing* for the ministry, by finishing my studies at Bible college, and by starting the deputation process. As it turned out, God *did* turn my health around, and *did* grant me the honour of being a church-planter here in Ireland. However, it didn't come by default: I had to *ask*, again and again.

This brings me to the third command that Jesus gave. Jesus commands us not only to "ask," and to "seek": He also commands us to "**knock**." The word "**knock**" implies *perseverance*. It means that you keep asking, and asking, and asking, like one who is pounding on a door. It may *seem* that God is not going to open the door; but you keep knocking, anyway. You don't half-heartedly pray for a day or two, and then say "Oh well. I knew God wouldn't answer. Guess I'll stop praying." No, you are *persistent*. You storm the gates of Heaven with your petition. This is not *presumption*: it is *obedience*. Jesus *commands* us to "knock."

Now, *to whom* are these commands and these promises given? It is given to the children of the Kingdom—those who are saved. Jesus was speaking to those who had already taken up the cross, and were following Him. However, that being said, there *is* a certain application for the lost, here. In order to *become* a child of the Kingdom in the first place, you must *ask* for the free gift of salvation. Jesus said, "**I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.**" Jesus also said, "**I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.**" When a sinner realises that the pleasures of this world are not satisfying his soul, and that he is spiritually dying, and that he needs the Bread of Life, all he needs to do is come to the Door of Jesus Christ, and knock on the Door, and ask for the Bread of salvation: and he will receive it! My friend, if *you* have not received God's gift of salvation, it is being offered to you today. Jesus will gladly give you His living Bread; and He will receive you as a member of His royal family, too boot! The Bible says, "**Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**" If you have never asked Jesus to save you, please do so today! God's Word promises, "**For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved**"!

With this in mind, I will return my address to those of you who know the Lord. Christian, these promises are to *you*. You have a loving Father; and His thoughts toward you are **“thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”** If you ask for bread, He won’t give you a stone; and if you ask for a fish, He won’t give you a serpent. Even when it *seems* that the Father is sending evil into your life, those trials are for your good, to bring about the end that *He* knows is best for you. His grace is always available! However, don’t *ever* take His grace for granted. Don’t *ever* forget what it cost the Father in order to make that privilege of “asking” available to you. Many lost people look at “free bread” in this world as an *entitlement*--as something that they *deserve*, simply because they exist. Many a drunkard thinks, “*Of course* that rescue mission on the corner will always be there to give me free food”; but they never stop to think of the sacrifice that was involved in providing that food. Similarly, we, as Christians, can *forget* what it took for the Bread and the Water of life to be made available to us, for the asking. Let’s see what it took.

**Read Exodus 17:5-7.**

**Read Numbers 20:2-13.**

Why was God so upset with Moses for *striking* the rock at Meribah, as he had done years earlier, at Horeb? Because by striking the rock for a *second* time, Moses was messing up a profound spiritual picture! You see, the Bible says, in **1 Corinthians 10**, that the **“spiritual rock”** that followed Israel was *Christ*! This means that the rock at Horeb was a picture of *Christ*; and Moses’ smiting of the rock was a picture of how *Christ* would be smitten on the cross for our sins. What does the pouring out of the *water* from the rock mean, then? It is a picture of the Holy Spirit, who came to *live inside* believers after Christ’s death and resurrection. Six months before His crucifixion, Jesus promised, **“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”** This promise was fulfilled fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection from the grave, when the Holy Spirit came to indwell the believers at Pentecost; and to this day, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside *every soul* who believes on Christ. Because Christ paid for our sins, the Holy Spirit is now available to *all* who believe on Him!

Do you see why God commanded Moses to smite the rock only *once*? God gave us this picture in order to show us that His Son would suffer for our sins only *once*. In His *one* sacrifice on the cross, Christ purchased the gift of eternal life. He does *not* need to be sacrificed again, and again, and again in the “holy eucharist,” because He already paid for our sins in full 2,000 years ago. To say that Christ will ever suffer again for our sins is to deny the finished work of Jesus on the cross!

Yet, what do these events at Horeb and Meribah have to do with “asking, seeking, and knocking”? Plenty! You see, if Moses had simply *spoken* to the rock at Meribah, as he was supposed to do, it would have been a beautiful picture of the **privilege of prayer**. Prayer is simply *speaking* to God, and asking Him for your petitions. If you ask Him for the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit in your life, He will give it to you. However, as we pray, we must never forget *why* this privilege is available to us. It is available because Christ was *once smitten* for our sins. Having died once, and given us the gift of the Spirit, we may now draw nigh to God with confidence, and bring our requests to Him.

Now, are there any prerequisite *conditions* for asking, seeking, and knocking? Yes, there are!

First of all, if you want God to hear and answer our prayers, **you *must* stay cleansed from sin!** The priests of the Old Testament always had to wash their hands before they went into the Holy Place; and likewise, if *we* would go into the Holy Place of communion with God, and approach to the altar of incense, and send up the “incense” of our prayers to God, with the assurance that He is listening, then we must *first* go to the “laver” for cleansing!

**Read Psalm 66:18.**

Folks, even on our best day, we are still nothing but sinners saved by grace. We don't *deserve* the privilege of approaching the Father. As Jesus pointed out, **“If ye, being *evil*, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good gifts to them that ask him?”** We must never forget that we *are* evil; and therefore, we must be *cleansed* from evil before we approach Him. Just as it would be in a properly-functioning earthly family, so it is in *God's* family. For example, in my house, there are times when we have special treats for our kids. Some of these treats come at regular times—such as on Friday evenings, when we have ice cream during our family time. Other times, we spontaneously surprise our children with an unexpected treat. However, it is a standing rule that special things can be *forfeited* if a child have bad behaviour. There have even been times when we had a special outing planned: but at the last minute, one of the children was denied the privilege of going on that outing, due to disobedience or a bad attitude. So it is in our relationship with God! When you are living in rebellion, there *will* be a strain in your relationship with the Father, and He *will* withhold His ear from hearing your prayers.

Christian, don't allow the guilt of sin to keep you from approaching Him. Don't believe the devil's lie that “You can't pray, and you can't get right, and you can't ever serve the Lord, because you have too much sin in your past.” God promises *immediate* forgiveness and cleansing, if you will but ask. The Apostle John wrote, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** That is a promise! As long as you regard iniquity in your heart, God is not obligated to hear your prayers; but the moment you ask for cleansing, He *will* pardon, and He *will* hear your prayers!

Secondly, if you want God to hear and answer your prayers, **you *must* have pure motives** for your requests—which also means that **you *must* pray according to His will.**

**Read 1 John 5:14-15.**

**Read James 4:1-3.**

Many Christians are not even *asking* God for help in their lives, because they are so carnally-minded, that God is scarcely in their thoughts. They fail to consider that the reason why things are falling apart in their lives is that they have shoved God to the side. They fail to consider that the reason why they are in bondage is that they have made fleshly, selfish decisions. Many Christians are guilty of murder. They are not *physically* killing others; but they are killing others in their *hearts*, by holding grudges and anger against them. Some Christians *do* ask God for things; but they are asking for things that they can consume upon their lusts. They are not praying according to *His* will, but according to their *own* will. They pray, “God, please give me this good job”; but they have no thought of using that increased income for God's glory. Some Christians pray, “God, please give me this 213-centimeter T.V. and surround-sound system, with 800 channels; and I promise I'll go to church. Well, actually, I might not always go to church; but I might tune in to the God Channel now and then.”

Brethren, God doesn't "wheel and deal." If you want Him to hear you, you must come to Him with *a pure heart*. If your heart be not right, then you must *get it right!* By the way, when God is on the throne of your heart, your prayer requests will begin to change radically. God will put into your heart the desires that *He* wants you to have; and your prayer life will change accordingly. You will find yourself praying for *souls to be saved*. You will find yourself praying for *power to live for Him*. You will find yourself praying for *ways that you can give of yourself to others*. When you pray for *God's* will to be done, and not your will, God will *always* answer your prayer—because *your* desire and *His* desire are the same. Thirdly, if you want God to hear and answer your prayers, **you must ask in faith.**

### Read James 1:5-8.

In the year 1877, **George Müller** (the founder of a Christian orphanage in Bristol, which rescued thousands of children from the streets) was travelling on the *S.S. Sardinian* to Ontario, Canada, to preach at a conference. As they were approaching the shores of Newfoundland, there was an extremely thick fog, which showed no sign of ending any time soon. The fog had persisted for twenty-two hours; and all that time, the captain, Joseph Dutton, had been on the bridge, watching carefully. Of course, he had to slow the ship down significantly, for safety reasons. Finally, George Müller tapped the captain on the shoulder and said, "Captain, I have come to tell you that I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon." The captain told him that this was impossible, on account of the thick fog; but Müller replied, "Very well, if your ship can't take me, God will find some other means of locomotion to take me. I have never broken an engagement in fifty-seven years." The captain told Müller, "I would willingly help you; but how can I?" Müller answered, "Let us go down to the chart-room and pray."

Feeling silly (and annoyed), the captain went down into the chart room with Müller. Müller knelt down and prayed this simple prayer: "O Lord, if it is consistent with Thy will, please remove this fog in five minutes. You know the engagement you made for me in Quebec Saturday. I believe it is your will." After he had finished praying, the captain was about to pray; but Müller put his hand on the captain's shoulder, and ordered him *not* to pray. "First," he said, "*you* do not believe He will; and second, *I* believe that He has; and there is no need whatever for you to pray about it." Müller then went on to say, "Captain. I have known my Lord for forty-seven years, and there has never been a single day that I have failed to gain an audience with the King. Get up, captain, and open the door, and you will find the fog is gone." The captain got up, and looked outside; and to his astonishment, the fog was completely gone, as if it had never been there at all! Shortly after this, the captain himself became a Christian; and he had a great faith in God, like Müller's. (His friends called him "Holy Joe"!)

Does God really answer prayers in that way? Yes, He does! More times than I can remember, my boys and I have gone into Athlone to street preach, even though it was pouring-down rain. Yet, all the way into town, we prayed that God would hold back the rain for one hour, so that we could preach the Gospel. As we parked the car, it was still raining; but, then, as we were getting the equipment out of the boot, the rain stopped, and the sun came out; and it remained dry for one hour. But then, as we were putting the equipment back into the car, it began to pour down rain again, and rained for the rest of the day. Coincidence? Not on your life! God honours our *faith*. Even on the few occasions when God *didn't* totally clear up the rain, He still used the situation for His glory. For example, lost folks have been impressed, more than once, by the fact that we were preaching in the rain; and they felt compelled to ask us questions about the Bible. God was glorified; and that was what we prayed for! Folks, when you pray with unwavering faith, according to His will, He *will* answer you!

Now, there is one more way that you must pray: **you must pray persistently.**

### Read Luke 18:1-8.

Christian, have there been times when you stopped praying about something, because it seemed that God was not answering your prayers? If so, let this parable sink in! Christ commands us to pray persistently, just as the woman in this parable did. God *may* answer our requests instantly; but there are times when He wants us to knock for a while, while He builds our faith. Sometimes there are *delays* (which God sovereignly permits), as the angels that are on assignment for us wage fierce battles with the devil's angels. What happens if we *stop* praying during those times of intense angelic battles? Most likely, our prayers will go unanswered. When it comes to praying for the lost, oftentimes people's hearts are very hard; and God must slowly crush their pride and self-reliance, so that they may finally see their need of the Saviour. However, it doesn't happen overnight. That is why we must *pray persistently*.

Folks, do we really believe this? We may *say* that we believe in asking, seeking, and knocking; but the attendance (or *non-attendance*) at prayer meetings reveals what we really believe. How much more might God do through us if we *prayed persistently*, both in our private prayer closets, and in corporate prayer meetings? We *must* ask, seek, and knock!

## II. Our responsibility toward the world (v. 12)

(Read verse 12 again.) We have seen our responsibility toward believers; toward ourselves; toward the wicked; and toward God. Now, in **verse 12**, we see our responsibility toward **everyone**. Our responsibility toward everyone is that **we should imitate the Father's goodness toward them**. Whatever *we* would like others to do to us, we should do to them.

Now, this is a concept that even unbelievers often admire. Even the lost world refers to this command as "The Golden Rule." They say, "How much better the world would be if everyone followed the Golden Rule!" However, what they fail to understand is that *you cannot separate your relationship with others from your relationship with God*. You'll notice that Jesus begins this statement with the word "**therefore**." The word "**therefore**" links what Jesus is saying to what He *just said*. And what *did* Jesus just say? Jesus just got done saying that **God** delights to answer *our* prayers, even though *we* are evil and undeserving: "**therefore**," *we* should be ready to do good to *others* in our lives, even though *they* may not deserve it. Because God is gracious to us, we should be gracious to others.

So, what does this mean in practical, everyday life? It means that every time I am tempted to withhold good from that unlovely person because "he doesn't deserve it," I must remember that *God* has shown *me* infinite goodness, even though *I* don't deserve it! *That* is what motivates me to treat others as I would want them to treat me. A lost person cannot grasp this motivation, because he has never experienced redemption; but we who are children of the Kingdom *can and should* understand it. The entire Law is summed up in the royal precept, "**Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**": and this royal love expresses itself by treating others as you would want them to treat you. Do *you* want to be lied to? No? Then don't lie to others! Do you want others to steal from *you*? Then don't steal from others. Do you want others to lust after *your* spouse? Then don't lust after someone else's spouse. Do you want others to be patient with *you*? Then be patient with them. Do you want others to use harsh, cutting, sarcastic, criticising words with *you*? Then don't use harsh, cutting, sarcastic, criticising words with them. Imitate the goodness of your Father in Heaven!

**Conclusion:** In closing, I would ask: “Have you been to the “hospital” of the Lord Jesus Christ, to receive the living Bread of salvation?” If not, I urge you to do so today! You need only knock at the door in faith, and ask for God’s gift of eternal life, and He will give it to you! Christian, are you failing to ask, seek, and knock for one reason or another? Are you too self-absorbed to realise your desperate need of the Lord in your daily life? Are you weighed down by guilt and unconfessed sin, so that you shrink from asking? Is your faith so small, that you simply don’t believe that the Lord *can* answer your prayer? If so, resolve, today, to let nothing keep you from drawing near to your heavenly Father!