

“Life Improvements --- Mountaintop Makeover ---A.S.K. Ask --- Seek --- Knock”

Habakkuk 2:1-4 & Matthew 7:6-12

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you”

Matthew 7:7

Habakkuk 2:1-4

I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. ² Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. ³ For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. ⁴ Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

Matthew 7:7-12

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰ Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! ¹² “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. ⁱ

Last week we studied the first six verses of chapter seven in the Gospel of Matthew. We looked at the difference of having a critical spirit and a Christ-like spirit. We learned that a critical spirit is filled with self-righteousness. A self-righteous, critical spirit is one where we play God by justifying ourselves and condemning others. We heard some pretty hard words about those who are play-actors --- Jesus calls them hypocrites. We learned that it is really hard to take the speck of dust out of our neighbor’s eye when we have a weight-bearing, support beam in our own. I ended last week’s sermon with a challenge. Does anyone remember the challenge in the “so what” section of the sermon? The “so what” for last week: Are you ready to give up your critical spirit? I asked you to think about who you are critical of, who you’ve been judging. Are we a people of unclean lips? Are we play-acting? Are we trying to take the speck of dust out of someone else’s eye while we have a log in our own?

I guess I’m asking to see if anyone was listening. But more importantly, I am wondering if anyone was able to develop a Christ-like spirit this past week?

You see, that is why Jesus continued His teaching about not judging and being critical of others with these words found in verses seven through twelve. It is almost impossible to be critical or judge others when we are asking, seeking and knocking before our heavenly Father.

PRAY WITH PERSISTANCE

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” Matthew 7:7 is a really a famous verse. Many people have this passage memorized. For some of us, this has been a comforting passage, and for others, it’s a troubling passage. Some have walked away from God because of this passage. This text taken out of context can be very harmful. Some have taken this text as

a “carte blanche” for material blessings. In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, I believe Jesus is teaching us how to pray so that we develop the character of the Kingdom of God --- the character of the Beatitudes in our lives. Remember that the Sermon on the Mount is a message that desires to transform our character to become more and more like Christ. When Jesus tells those that are gathered around Him to ask, seek and knock, he is not talking about getting special material blessings. He is encouraging those that follow Him to try to become like Him. That is what Christian means --- little Christ. How do we become more and more like Christ? A.S.K.: Ask! Seek! Knock!

These three words: ask, seek and knock are active verbs that call us to action. In the original Greek language these three words are “present imperatives.” An imperative is forceful and demanding, it is used for giving orders, for issuing a command. An imperative denotes a priority and is necessary and unavoidable. In the Greek language there are two kinds of “imperatives.” The first is an “aorist imperative” and the second is “present imperatives.” An “aorist imperative” gives one definite command such as “shut the door” or “pick up the newspaper.” These words “ask, seek, and knock” are not “aorist imperatives, they are “present imperatives.” Jesus just doesn’t want us to ask, seek and knock one time and be done. A “present imperative” commands continuous action --- “keep on shutting the door” or “keep on picking up the newspaper.”

What Jesus is really saying in this verse is an unavoidable, necessary command to ***“keep on asking and it will be given to you, to keep on seeking and you will find, keep on knocking and it the door will be opened for you.”*** Jesus is teaching us to have persistence in our prayer to become more and more like Him. This is a prayer for our spiritual growth! Do we ask, seek, and knock to have a pure mind and heart? Do we continue to ask, seek and knock to develop a forgiving spirit? Do we continue to ask, seek and knock to remove our angry, negative, judgmental, critical spirit? Do we keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking to be more loving like I Corinthians 13 teaches us? This was the “so what” homework question for last week! How did we do with becoming more loving this past week? Jesus follows up His teaching of judging with another teaching: persist in prayer by keeping on keeping on! Don’t stop: ***A.S.K. Keep on asking and it will be given to us, keep on seeking and we will find, keep on knocking and the doors will be opened for us.***

Point one for today: Pray with persistence!

PRAY WITH PROMISE

We can pray with persistence because we have a loving Father in heaven who loves us. Jesus demonstrates this truth in verses nine through eleven. *“Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”*

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we begin with the famous words, “Our Father.” Notice, we don’t say, “My Father.” The idea of addressing God as Father comes from Jesus addressing His heavenly Father as “Abba.” The Jewish people never addressed God as “Abba.” In the Hebrew culture and language “Abba” is the first words a child usually learns. “Abba” means “daddy.” “Abba” --- dada --- daddy”

signifies a relationship of trust and love. I have a friend—she’s my age—and when she calls her Dad, she greets him by saying, “Hi, Daddy!” My friend has a relationship of trust and love with her Father.

We have been given the promise of adoption. Listen to these words from Romans 8:14-17: ¹⁴ *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.* ¹⁵ *For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!”* ¹⁶ *it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,* ¹⁷ *and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.* What Jesus is teaching from the mountaintop is that God is “Our Father.” Because God is our Father, God will never give us anything that is evil. Because God is our Father, God will never make a mistake. God knows the difference between good and evil. We are children of God—adopted children, and joint heirs with Christ! Just think of that! Can you rest in the promise of knowing that we are in the hands of a loving Father? “Don’t judge or you will be judged.” Instead, our loving Father removes his righteous robe of judgment and trades it for His, “Greatest Dad in the World” tee shirt! We have been given a promise, friends! We are children of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ! Now, there’s a promise to trust in. When we pray, pray with the promise that “Our Father” loves to hear from us.

Point 2: Pray with promise!

PRAY WITH PURPOSE

“In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” The purpose of all this teaching on prayer is so we would become more and more like Christ. The purpose of this closing prayer is that we learn how to treat others. The “Golden Rule” in verse twelve is sometimes called the “Mt. Everest --- the topmost peak of social ethics.” This teaching is one of the most often quoted passages in the Bible. ***“Do to others as you would have them do to you!”*** Jesus sums up the second half of the Great Commandment --- *“love your neighbor as yourself.”* What Jesus is teaching in this long section of chapter seven about judging, specks and logs, asking, seeking and knocking is pretty simple; yet it is so very difficult to accomplish without “Our Father’s” help!

First, we pray with persistence, we keep on asking, we keep on seeking, and we keep on knocking! Second, we pray with promise. Our “Daddy” is God and he digs our chili and loves to hear us ask, seek and knock! Finally, we are reminded that’s it’s not about me, myself and I. I am to figure out what I want from others—and then I am to go do it for others! Wow, that’s radical! ***“Do to others as you would have them do to you!”***

So What?

Pray with persistence! Pray with promise! Pray with purpose!

I have been sharing with you about a book that is shaking my world. The book is called, *“The Hole in Our Gospel”* by Richard Stearns, President of World Vision. It is a compelling book that is challenging my discipleship. The book is filled with stories of those less fortunate than us. As I have read the book, and pause to thank God for all I have been given, I am convicted over and over again about doing unto others what I would have them do unto me --- about loving my neighbor as myself.

For the past several months, we have been sharing with you about one of the missions of our Mission and Evangelism Commission. We have been asking, seeking, and knocking to collect enough donations to purchase one, clean, water well for a village in Ethiopia. It costs \$2,500 to put one clean water well in one village. Imagine that! Our Mission and Evangelism Commission has pledged \$1,000 to the project; we need to raise another \$1,500. On this first Sunday in June when we are preparing our hearts and minds to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, there are close to 1.2 billion people in our world who do not have clean water. There are another 5 million people who die of water-related illnesses, and a child dies every fifteen seconds of a waterborne disease.ⁱⁱ Friends, these are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and they are the “so what” for this morning.

This morning I am going to put a basket up here on our prayer table with a picture of a village with a clean water well. I am going to challenge us to “do to others as you would have them do to you.” It is my prayer that we will meet our goal of \$1,500--we will surpass it. I will start by putting \$20.00 in the basket— \$10 from Jac and \$10 from me. The basket will stay up here on Sunday mornings until we can do for Ethiopia what we’d like done for ourselves. We like clean water. We can turn on a faucet in several areas of our homes—and there it is! Clean water. In the villages in Ethiopia, the women and children walk five miles to the river to get 20 gallons of river water. They then walk five miles home with the water jug on top of their head. Friends, can you imagine walking to the outlet mall, filling a jug with 20 gallons of water and hiking back over here? And that’s just round one for the day. Let’s do that four times today—in the hot sun. There’s a story in Max Lucado’s latest book, “Out Live Your Life,” that tells about nine year old, Caleb. Caleb heard the story about the children who lack clean water. Caleb took his \$20 that he was saving for a new DS game, and donated it to the well. He then challenged his family, church staff, and church members to do the same. (That’s where I got this idea! Blame the nine year old!) Guess what? Caleb raised enough money to dig not one, but two wells!ⁱⁱⁱ

The call of the Sermon on the Mount is for us to have a “Mountaintop Makeover” and for us to become more and more like Christ. If Jesus were here in the flesh this morning, would he ask us to help build a well in Ethiopia? “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.” That’s the “so what” for us today! Prayer: God, I pray with persistence that in time, we will be able to dig a well in Ethiopia. I pray with the promise that you are my “Daddy” as well as the Ethiopians, and I pray with the specific purpose of doing for them what I would hope they would do for me if I didn’t have any water...to brush my teeth, to take a shower, to wash my hands, to water my grass, to wash my car, to wash my clothes, to clean my dishes, to cook with or to drink. Amen.

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ⁱ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Richard Stearns, *The Hole In Our Gospel*, Thomas Nelson Publishing, Nashville, Tn. 2010

ⁱⁱⁱ Max Lucado, *Out Live Your Life*, Thomas Nelson Publishing, TN. 2010