

The Sermon on the Mount
The Guarantee of Answered Prayer (Part 1)
Matthew 7:7-11
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Turn with me again this morning to Matthew chapter 7 as we continue to work our way through our Lord's famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. Today we come to a portion of this sermon that I think is one of the most encouraging passages in all of the New Testament. Let's read it together. Matthew chapter 7, beginning in verse 7. This is what our Lord says to us.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

Now as we begin to study this amazing set of promises to us, it's important, first of all, to make sure we understand how this section fits into its context. Because when many people read those verses, they see a break in the continuity of Jesus' sermon. So they teach these verses as completely disconnected from their context. They see no relationship at all between Jesus' command here to pray, and the promises that He gives us, and the verses that go before or the verses that follow. If that were true, and it's not true, it would be completely foreign to what we have already learned in the rest of this sermon. As we have seen as we've worked our way through it, it is masterfully constructed. The themes to this point have woven together beautifully as we would expect something coming from the mind and mouth of our Lord. And so there is no reason to assume then that these verses are merely inserted artificially into a context into which they are completely foreign. So what is the context? Let me remind you, we're looking at a larger section that begins in chapter 7 verse 1 and runs down through verse 12. That section is dealing with our relationships with others. We've already studied verses 1 to 6, and there we learn how we're to respond to the sins of others; in verses 1 to 5, how to respond to the sins of fellow disciples, fellow believers; in verse 6, how to respond to the sins of antagonistic unbelievers.

Now skip the passage that I just read for you for a moment and go down to verse 12, which ends this section. Jesus concludes this section with these words, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Here is an incredibly concise and profound saying that we refer to as the Golden Rule, and in it Jesus teaches us everything we need to know about how to respond to all of the people in all of our

relationships. So notice then, on both sides of the paragraph I just read to you a moment ago, Jesus is dealing with the theme of relationships. So it is therefore reasonable to assume that the same theme is in these verses as well. But exactly how is the theme of relationship in these verses? Well, remember Jesus has just been explaining to us that we need, as His followers, to walk a very fine line. A fine line, on the one hand, in verses 1 to 5, of being harsh and judgmental and critical with people and, on the other hand, falling into the trap of lacking entirely in discernment and not treating people wisely as we ought, in verse 6. He has explained to us that, before we can adequately deal with the sins of others, we must first get the beam out of our own eye, in verses 3 to 5. In verse 6 He's told us that there is a time when we must stop sharing the gospel with someone who becomes its avowed, declared enemy. How can we have the wisdom to make such decisions? How can we arrive at a place of such discernment to know what we ought to do to decipher the purposes and plans of God? Where do we get the power to obey once we understand what we ought to do? Well, that's how verses 7 through 11 fit into the larger context because in these verses Jesus teaches us to ask God for the wisdom and the strength that we need to live out what He's taught us in all of our relationships - wisdom and strength to carry out the commands of verses 1 to 6, as well as the command of verse 12, and the rest of the commands in this entire sermon. John Broadus writes of these verses, "To avoid the extremes pointed out in verses 1 to 5 and verse 6 is a difficult task. We all find it very hard to be at once charitable and watchful, hoping for the best, yet on our guard against the worst, judging no one, yet knowing men's characters and dealing with them accordingly." That's really hard to do, isn't it? Broadus goes on, "Well may we rejoice to find that the next words are an encouragement to prayer; thus may we be enabled to perform these difficult duties and all the others in this sermon. We need our Father's wisdom. We need our Father's counsel. We need our Father's strength to carry out all of these commands." And that's where this paragraph fits into the overall scheme of the context.

Now let me remind you that, as teachers often do, Jesus repeated Himself. He traveled, as you know, throughout Galilee, preaching in all of the synagogues there and at different times and at different places. He would re-preach the same sermon, and you can see that, how it ends up in different contexts in our gospels. Sometimes He borrowed the words He used in one sermon and inserted them into another sermon at a different time, sometimes using those words identically as He used them before, and other times with a different meaning in a different context. The same thing is true with this section I just read for you. It's recorded twice in the New Testament: here in Matthew 7, the second time it's recorded is in Luke 11: 9- 13. Now, you don't have to turn to Luke 11 right now, but let me just set it up because we're going to go there in a few minutes. Luke 11, the other time these verses occur, was a different occasion. It wasn't the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount Jesus probably taught in the summer of 29 A.D. The section in Luke 11 was probably taught a few months later in the fall of 29 A.D. on a different occasion. And what's going on in Luke 11? Well, in Luke 11 Jesus was praying. Verse 1 says He was praying; one of the disciples saw Him praying and waited until Jesus was finished and asked

Him to teach him how to pray. Again now, this is several months after the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus then, in chapter 11 of Luke, verses 2 through 4, gives for a second time what we call the Lord's Prayer. He teaches His disciples yet again that pattern of prayer. He follows that in Luke 11:5-8 with a parable. You remember the familiar parable of the persistent neighbor who comes at night knocking on the door asking for bread and finally the guy gets up and gives him bread. He ends that section with the exact words that we just read here in Matthew 7:7-11. But in Luke 11 the emphasis is entirely on the issue of prayer, from verse 1 of Luke 11 down through verse 13. It's all about prayer, generally. But here in Matthew 7, Jesus' emphasis is not on prayer generally but on a specific reason we ought to pray. And that is, we ought to pray for wisdom in our relationships. Leon Morris writes, "Jesus has set a high standard before His followers in the preceding section. How are they to reach it? Prayer is an important part of the answer." What Jesus is teaching us in this paragraph is that you and I must continually ask God to give us the wisdom we need for our relationships.

Now, let me give you a road map of where we are going as we study this section. In verses 7 and 8 we have Jesus' guarantee of answered prayer. In verses 9 through 11 we have Jesus' argument for answered prayer. So, His guarantee and His argument. So let's consider first of all this morning Jesus' guarantee of answered prayer. This passage, I think, is going to take us two weeks to work through. We're going to start this morning with the first part of it, Jesus' guarantee of answered prayer. Look at verse 7. "'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.'" Now clearly this verse is about prayer. You can see how he ends this section down in verse 11; He says God will give what is good to those who ask Him. So we're talking in this section about prayer to God. That means the three commands in verse 7 are commands to pray. We're to ask, and to seek, and to knock. Those three words are pictures. They describe prayer in three unique ways, and at the same time they picture God answering prayers in three specific and unique ways. So, let's look at these three pictures of prayer together.

The first description of prayer is in the simple word "ask." "'Ask, and it will be given to you....'" Jesus says if you need something, ask God for it. In other words, pray. Now this isn't the first time in this sermon that Jesus has dealt with the issue of prayer. Turn back to chapter 6. Do you remember in verses 5 and 6 of this chapter, Jesus says don't pray in order to be seen by others? Instead "'...pray...in secret [so that] your Father who sees...in secret will reward you.'" Doesn't mean there's anything wrong with public prayer; it means wherever we pray and whatever circumstance we pray, we don't pray to be seen by people, we pray to be seen and heard by God. In verses 7 and 8 of chapter 6, He says when you pray don't use meaningless repetition like the pagans, thinking that somehow the number of words you say are going to earn a hearing or earn God's response. God already knows what you need. And then in verse verses 9 through 13 of chapter 6, Jesus says when you pray, here's how you ought to pray, here are the categories in which you ought to pray. The famous Lord's Prayer. Jesus now, in chapter 7, comes

back once again to this issue of prayer. You can see how important this issue was in the mind and heart of our Lord. He says in verse 7, ask. Ask. Now although these three words are essentially used synonymously - all referring to prayer - and they are repeated - I think primarily for emphasis to say you need to do this, it's possible - I think that there are slight nuances of difference in Jesus' meaning. Let's see what we can learn from them.

The Greek word for "ask" is the general Greek word for ask, just as the English word is. However, it is used frequently of a request in which someone addresses his superior and asks for help. In fact, it's often used of asking God. There in the Sermon on the Mount back in chapter 6 verse 8, "...your Father knows what you need before you ask Him," same word. So this word then implies, when it's used in this way of prayer, it implies a belief in a personal God who hears when we speak to Him. If you're going to ask God for something, it means that you believe that there is a personal God who, when you direct the thoughts of your mind to Him or when you direct the words of your mouth to Him intentionally, He actually hears. He is a real living being who hears. Isn't that the essence of faith? In Hebrews 11: 6 it says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." So implied in this word "ask" is the very idea of the belief in God's existence and that He hears. But the word "ask" also implies more. If you ask something of someone, then it acknowledges that you have an awareness of your need for something. It also acknowledges that you have an awareness that you have no way personally to meet that need, and you are humbling yourself to ask that person to help. That's the idea behind this word.

You know, it's interesting to me that in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, which we've looked at several times recently, the Pharisee never asks God for anything. He just tells God how wonderful he is. The tax collector, on the other hand, asks. Why? Because he realizes he needs something desperately. He realizes he has no way to meet that need, and he cries out to God to meet that need. He humbles himself before God and says, "God be merciful to me, the sinner."

You know, it's interesting. Can I put it like this? Prayer is a gauge of your humility before God. To whatever extent you and I don't pray, it shows that we really believe we can do just fine on our own, that we don't have needs we need to seek out from God, that we can meet our own needs, and that we're not going to humble our self to ask someone else when we can handle it just fine, thank you. On the other hand, when we are humble before God, we acknowledge that we have desperate needs, that we are unable to meet those needs, and we come to Him as our superior, pleading with Him to meet those needs. Like the tax collector, the humble person always asks of God. What is it that James says in James 4:2? "...[Y]ou have not, because you ask not." You don't have because you didn't ask. What do we do instead of asking? Well, we scheme, and we plan, and then when our schemes and plans fail, we sulk. And sometimes we even accuse God of not helping. Jesus says ask your Father for what you need.

Now have you ever asked yourself, “Why is it that, if God knows what I need, why do I need to ask Him for what I need?” I think John Calvin was right when he wrote this: “Though our Heavenly Father gives all things freely to us, yet in order to exercise our faith He commands us to pray that He may grant to our requests those blessings which flow from His undeserved goodness.” In other words, God doesn’t need us to ask for Himself. He already knows what we’re going to ask, and He knows what we need. We need to ask for ourselves because we need to express that dependence on God. God isn’t going to give us what we need until we ask Him, not because He doesn’t love us but because He loves us so much He doesn’t want us to act independently of Him. He wants us to learn how dependent we really are on Him. Why? Because that’s for our good.

Now all three of these commands here - ask, seek, and knock - are in the present tense in the Greek text. In fact, if you look in the note, the marginal note in your Bible, likely it makes some implication of that. These are not commands to do this one time. Rather these are commands to do these things in an ongoing way. We are to ask and keep on asking. We are to seek and keep on seeking. We are to knock and keep on knocking. In other words, we are to develop a habit of asking God for whatever we need, and we’re to be persistent at it.

Now, what exactly are we asking for in this passage? The focus here is not primarily on the physical needs of this life, although certainly we should pray for those things. The Lord’s Prayer teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” But that’s not the focus here. Remember the priority of the Lord’s Prayer? Jesus teaches us to pray in six categories. Only one of those categories has to do with the physical needs of this life. I think the context here in Matthew 7 reflects the same sort of emphasis. The focus is not on praying for our physical needs. Again, we are to pray for those needs. But using the ratio of the Lord’s Prayer, five out of six of every request we make of God is to be for our spiritual needs. If you want to get mathematical about it, 84% of your requests of God should be about your spiritual needs and not the physical needs of this life. Is that what your prayer life looks like? That’s what’s being urged here. Ask about the spiritual needs of life and specifically, in Matthew 7, the specific point that we’re to ask for is for wisdom to know how to relate to others. Ask. And notice what Jesus says, “...and it will be given to you.” That is, as we’ve seen throughout the Sermon, a divine passive; although the subject of the action is not stated, it’s God. Jesus means you ask, and the Father will give you what you ask. In other words, prayer is efficacious. Prayer is effective. James 5:16. “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” You know, our Lord knows that we find it very hard to pray. If you’re honest with yourself, most believers struggle faithfully praying. We have a hard time praying in reality realizing that when we speak in our minds to God or when we speak with our mouths to God we’re actually talking to a living Person who hears and responds. And so He encourages us with this promise, and God will give you what you need.

Notice the second word for prayer here is “seek.” “...[S]eek, and you will find....” We are to seek and keep on seeking. By using the word “seek,” Jesus may be emphasizing a greater intensity than merely asking. He may be saying something like this: “Don’t merely ask God, but intensely pursue what you need from God.” That’s possible, and there are several scholars and commentators who take that position. I think it’s more likely that Jesus in this word “seek” is referring to the fact that often we don’t even know what to ask God for. And that’s okay. We can come seeking God’s help, expressing our ignorance and our dependence on Him, even if we don’t know what to ask. I don’t know about you, but I often find myself at a loss for what to ask. “Lord, I don’t know what You ought to do in this situation. I just want You to act. I want You to do what is best.” And here’s the amazing thing: when we come to God like that He never leads us astray. “...[S]eek,” our Lord says, “and you will find,” even if you don’t know exactly what it is you’re seeking. If you come to God seeking His wisdom, seeking His help, seeking His intervention, you will find that need met in ways that you wouldn’t have planned and sometimes even meeting needs you didn’t know you had. In other words, God is going to give you exactly what you need.

There’s a third way of looking at praying, and it’s to knock. Jesus says, “...knock, and it will be opened to you.” Now that picture is obviously very familiar to us all. We stand in front of a closed door, and we knock for the person inside to open. What does Jesus mean here? Again, knocking is just another way to describe prayer. It’s possible, as some people have said, that Jesus is here referring to those times when we feel like God is inaccessible, when the heavens are like brass, and we’re on the outside, we feel like, trying to get in. I think there’s a more obvious meaning. Turn with me to the other time Jesus used these words. Luke 11. Again you’ll notice the disciples’ request for instruction in prayer in verse 1. You have the pattern of prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, in verses 2 through 4. And immediately following His teaching them again the pattern of prayer in the Lord’s Prayer, He follows with a parable in verse 5.

Then He said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him....’”

Now it’s hard for us to fully appreciate this context because this is outside of our own culture, but go back with me for a moment and imagine what it’s like. You’re living in a culture where travel is very difficult. In fact, there are often problems that you run into, maybe swollen creeks that you can’t cross, maybe other difficulties along the way - a wheel breaks off the wagon, the animal becomes sick. Whatever it is, there were countless problems to the journey, and so you could set the time you were going to leave but setting the time you were going to arrive was a different story. And so here’s someone who planned to come and visit this person and they arrive late; they arrive at midnight. And this person, you in this case, in the parable as Jesus is telling, you have nothing to set before your friend. No food to offer him. He’s just come from a journey,

and he has nothing to eat. There wasn't a McDonald's to stop at on the way, heaven help him. But there was no way to get any food, and so he arrives at your house hungry. And you have nothing. This was before refrigeration. Most of the people in that day would have bought their food on a daily basis from the market there locally. You have nothing to feed them. You couldn't run down to the 7-Eleven; there were no 24 hour markets open; there was no Kroger. All the people who were selling their wares were at home in bed. Your only hope was to go next door to your neighbor and hope that he had something. And so that's what happens.

And here's the response you get, verse 7. Jesus says imagine that "...from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'"" Again, you have to put yourself back in the cultural context; this isn't a cold heartless neighbor. Jesus was speaking primarily to people who were poor. Most poor people in those days lived in single room homes. They locked the door for the night; the pallets are spread across the floor in sort of a patchwork pattern that, you know, requires quite some dexterity to get through. And this person would have to light the lamp somehow, light the lamp, find the food, cross over all of his family on the way to the door, unlock the door, which was a noisy process. In other words, the whole house would have been awakened by this. And so he says no. Verse 8. Jesus says, "'I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.'" Notice the word "persistence" in your marginal note there. Literally, the Greek word is "shamelessness." He's absolutely shameless. He comes at midnight knocking on your door and says, "I have a need." And because of that shamelessness and persistence in knocking, even though the guy won't get up because he's his friend, he gets up to help him. Now, notice what comes next. Verse 9. "'...ask...seek...knock, and it will be opened to you.'" Here's what Jesus is saying: He's saying, like the neighbor in the parable, God will open the door and meet your need even if you're asking at the most ridiculous hour. But here's the really important part to get: unlike the neighbor in the parable, God won't do so grudgingly because He is far more generous and far more gracious. He is not just a human friend or neighbor, He is our Father. So of course He would respond to our need.

Now go back to Matthew 7. Jesus commands us to pray in this passage, and He links those commands to amazing promises. He says if you will pray, God will not only hear your prayer, God will answer your prayer, and He will give you what you need. And Jesus gives us His personal guarantee. Notice again verse 7. "'...[I]t will be given to you...you will find...it will be opened to you.'" And notice verse 8. "'For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.'" Jesus essentially repeats what He already said in verse 7, but He adds an element. Did you notice it? A very important element in verse 8: "'For everyone....'" That's the focus. Jesus wants us to know that His guarantee of answered prayer is for every single one of His genuine followers, without exception. "'For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.'" And just to make

sure we really got it, Jesus repeats this same guarantee six times in two short verses. Why? Calvin writes, “Nothing is better adapted to excite us to prayer than the full conviction that we will be heard.” Martin Luther put it this way,

Jesus knows that we are timid and shy, that we feel unworthy and unfit to present our needs to God. We think that God is so great and we are so tiny that we dare not to pray. That is why Christ wants to lure us away from such timid thoughts, to remove our doubts, and to have us go ahead confidently and boldly.

Jesus guarantees answered prayer, but this is not all Jesus has to teach about prayer.

There are some very important counterbalancing biblical truths that we have to understand, because here in this passage these promises are completely without any caveats, any conditions, any qualifications. But Jesus here is not teaching the “name it and claim it” theology of the heretical Word of Faith movement that you turn on your television and see. You just “name it and claim it;” you just tell God what to do and He’s going to do it. It’s not what He’s teaching at all. God is no cosmic genie who must grant your wishes because you demand it of Him. God is not some celestial slot machine; if you just pull the handle of prayer often enough, then you’ll have to get what you asked for. Here’s how one author puts it,

The promises of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are not unconditional. The moment’s thought will convince us of this. It is absurd to suppose that the promise “Ask, and it shall be given to you...” is an absolute pledge with no strings attached; that “...knock, and it will be opened to you” is an open sesame to every closed door without exception; and that by waving of a prayer wand any wish will be granted and every dream will come true. The idea is ridiculous. It would turn prayer into magic, the person who prays into a magician like Aladdin, and God into our servant who appears instantly to do our bidding like Aladdin’s genie every time we rub our little prayer lamp.

That’s not what Jesus is teaching, because in other places Jesus, either directly in His own teaching or indirectly through the writing of His apostles, lays down several very specific conditions that must be met before God will answer our prayers. You want God to answer your prayers? Then there are some conditions. This of course assumes that you are a believer in Jesus Christ.

Condition number one: Have faith in God. You have to have faith in God. Jesus puts it this way in Mark 11. By the way, I’m just going to give you this list and cite the references. You can go back and study them at your leisure. Mark 11:24, Jesus says, “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.” Jesus says, “Listen. If you’re going to have prayer answered, you have to have faith in God.” But what exactly is “faith”? This is so abused. Let me give you a brief definition. Faith essentially consists, in this context, of two things: confidence in God’s revealed Word; secondly, confidence in God’s power to do anything. That’s faith. Confidence in God’s revealed Word and confidence

in God's power to do anything, including the things that you ask Him that He hasn't said in His Word. Now that doesn't mean that He will do those things. You know, I hear well-meaning Christians say things like this, you know, a friend gets cancer and they say, "You know, I just have faith that my friend's going to be healed." That's not faith, because nowhere does God tell you your friend is going to be healed. Faith is in God's revealed Word, so what you can have faith in is that God will use this for good in your friend's life because God said He would do that. You can have faith that God will use this spiritually in his life because God said He would do that. And you can have faith in God's power to heal him if God chooses to heal him. That's faith. But it's not faith to say, "I just believe God's going to heal him." Where is it written? Where has God promised you that? And then, when it doesn't happen, what happens, unfortunately, is people become embittered against God because they were convinced God told them this person was going to be healed. Where did God tell you that? That's not faith. Faith is believing that God will do what He said in His Word He would do and believing that He can do whatever He wants to do, including anything I ask Him, if that's what He chooses. You have to have faith in God.

Secondly, you have to ask for the right reasons. James 4: 3. "You ask and you do not receive...." Why? "...because you ask with wrong motives...." Literally, the Greek text says "you ask badly." How do we ask badly? "...so that you may spend it on your pleasures." In other words, we ask God for things and don't get them because we're asking for our selfish desires and pleasures to be met. It's not about God. It's not about His kingdom. It's not about the things that matter. It's just for something we want for our own pleasure. If we expect to receive anything from God, we must ask for the right reasons. What are the right reasons? Well, go back to the Lord's Prayer. It has to be for God's glory: "Hallowed be Your name." It has to be for the advance of God's kingdom: "Your kingdom come." And it has to be for God's revealed will to be embraced: "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Thirdly, if you're going to have prayer answered, you have to ask according to God's revealed will. In other words, your prayers have to be according to what God has revealed in His Word. 1 John 5:14, John writes, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." That doesn't mean He doesn't ordinarily hear us. It means He hears us, in this occasion, in order to answer and to act and to do what we ask Him to do. And that's if we ask anything according to His will, according to what He's revealed in His Word that He's going to do. For example, this morning the elders and I were praying for this day and for our gathering, as we always do, and I was praying, and it occurred to me that this is according to God's will. I was asking the Lord to use this corporate time to use the teaching of His Word to build us all up in our faith. Well, I was praying that and I know that's according to His will. I know He heard me and He's doing that. Why? Because He says in the Scripture this is what He intends to do. When we gather together, He intends to use the people who are leaders in the church to teach the Word for the building up of the saints to do the work of service. So I can

pray that, knowing that I was praying according to God's will. What about your sanctification? 1 Thessalonians 4. "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification...." When you ask God to make you more like Jesus Christ, when you ask Him in that context to make you sexually pure, God will respond. God will answer because it's in accordance with His will. John Blanchard writes, "Prayer is not asking God for what we want; it's asking God for what He wants."

Fourthly, if we're going to have prayer answered, it must be in a spirit of forgiveness toward others. We must have this spirit in which we are willing to forgive others. Mark 11:25. This occurs in a number of places in the New Testament. Mark 11:25. "'Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.'" Broken human relationships, where it's in our power to help resolve the situation, hinder our prayers. Husbands, Peter couldn't be any clearer in his letter when he says that husbands who don't live with their wives in an understanding way will have their prayers hindered. You're not listening to your wife; God's not listening to you. It's just that simple. Our relationships matter. We must they must be right and, specifically, we must have a spirit of forgiveness toward others.

Number five: We must ask in Jesus name. We have a habit as believers - we all do, I do as well - of ending our prayers by saying "in Jesus' name." Nothing wrong with that, but that's not specifically what this is about. Listen to our Lord in John 14:13.

"Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."

Wow. What a promise. So what does it mean to ask in Jesus name? Doesn't mean to tack it on to the end of your prayer, but again there's nothing wrong with that. It means that you're praying with a couple of attitudes in mind. It means, first of all, that you are praying in harmony with all that Jesus is doing. In other words, you're praying in keeping with His agenda and what He's revealed about Himself. And secondly, it means you're praying on the basis of His merits, not your own. When you say "in Jesus' name," you're saying, "Lord, I believe that what I just prayed is keeping with what Jesus wants, and I'm asking You this, not on the basis of who I am, but on the basis of Who He is. I come to You in His authority and not my own because I don't deserve to be heard, but He does and I am in Him." That's coming in His name.

Number six: You must live in obedience to Christ. I'm not talking about perfect obedience but a pattern of obedience. There must be a willingness to obey Christ for your prayers to be heard. John 15: 7. "'If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.'" 1 John 3:22. "...[W]hatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight."

And finally, the final condition the New Testament places on answered prayer is we must ask in line with God's sovereign will. You remember Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, Luke 22:42.

“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” Again, we don’t always have to say “Lord willing” or “if this is what You want,” but we always ought to pray with that attitude and disposition. By the way, this is completely contrary to what Benny Hinn, the false teacher, says. I read a quote this week, in which Benny Hinn says,

Listen. When you’re praying, don’t ever say or think “if it’s Your will” because to do so is to question your faith, and you won’t get what you’re asking. It’s not real faith if you say “if You will,” or you think “if You will.”

The only thing I can figure is he’s never read the New Testament. Alec Motyer writes; you know, listen, there’s a lot of insight in this. Listen to Alec Motyer. He says,

If it were the case that whatever we ask God was pledged to give, then I for one would never pray again because I would not have sufficient confidence in my own wisdom to ask God for anything. It would impose an intolerable burden on frail human wisdom if, by His prayer promises, God was pledged to give whatever we ask, whenever we ask, and in exactly the terms we ask. How could we bear that burden?

Isn’t that true? Can you imagine if your words were like the Word of Faith movement, and you just name it and speak it and it happens? How frightening is that? But it’s not like that at all. If we ask for things that are for our spiritual good, God gives them to us. If, on the other hand, we ask for those things which are not good, either not good in and of themselves or not good for us or not good for us at that time, then our Father denies them. Now you understand this. If you’re a parent or have ever been a parent, you spent your life doing this. Your children came with requests. You love them. You want to be generous with them. You want to reflect the heart of God to them, but as an older, mature adult you realize that that thing they’re asking may make them think well of you but it may not be best for them. And so you deny that request. This is how God is because He’s looking out for us. The fact that God sometimes doesn’t do what we ask is actually an expression of His grace. You know, I read several quotes this week, and I was thinking back on my own life. I am so glad that God didn’t always give me what I asked for. But at the time, I thought I desperately needed it. I’m so glad God slammed doors in my face and has brought me to where I am.

So there are limitations on the promise of God’s answering believing prayer on Jesus’ guarantee of prayer. But turn back to Matthew 7 for a moment because in Matthew 7 our Lord’s purpose is not to lay out the limitations, although those are in the background. Instead, here His intention is to encourage us to pray. He says,

“Ask,” notice, “and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

Now why is this so important here? Because in the sermon, Jesus has made impossible demands of us. He has said, “I want you to be perfect as your Father is perfect. I want you to be more righteous than the Scribes and Pharisees. I want you to be a beggar in spirit. I want you to have

sincerity in all of your outward spiritual activities. I want you to have purity not only in your body but in your mind. I want you to love others so much that you never even get angry with them. I want you to live a life of honesty and integrity that doesn't require oaths, doesn't require signatures." You start looking at what Jesus has demanded of us in this sermon, and it is absolutely impossible. Jesus sets a standard that in our own strength is impossible for us to achieve. Listen, this sermon doesn't drive a person who really understands it to morality. It drives them to the cross, because you look at the standard that Christ sets and you say, "If that's the standard for standing in God's presence, I have no hope. I'm done." And it drives you to say, "Lord, don't look at my righteousness, look at Jesus' righteousness. Forgive my failure to do these things because of what Jesus did in His death on the cross for me and for us who are in Christ." It drives us to prayer. Jesus says, "Listen. You better ask, and you better seek, and you better knock, not for your sinful and fleshly desires to be met, but for your spiritual life." Ken Hughes writes, "This famous text is not a carte blanche for our material desires. Rather, it tells us how to pray for the character of the kingdom in our lives." Listen again to what Jesus says here. When we ask for the kingdom realities described in the context here to be accomplished in us and in our hearts and in our lives, God will do it. He will give them to us. When we seek for God's wisdom and God's strength to carry out the commands that are in this sermon, we will find those things to be a reality. When we knock at God's door, He always hears and He always opens and He always gives us from His vast supplies whatever we need spiritually. Is that how you think of God? Is that how you think of prayer? "You have not, because you ask not." Let's pray together.

Our Father, forgive us for having such a great God, such a wonderful Father, and for thinking so poorly of You. Father, help us to learn from the words of our Lord. Help us to humble ourselves and to legitimately see our need, that we can't meet our own need, and to humble ourselves to cry out to You to meet the need. Father, may our focus not be on our physical needs of this life, but, like the prayer You taught us and Your Son to pray, may our focus be on our spiritual needs, on the spiritual realities of life. May that be the preoccupation of our prayers. And thank You, oh Father, that You hear, and You don't just hear but You will give these things to us. We will find these things as You allow them to be found. You will open the door and provide us our needs, our spiritual needs, out of the vast treasures of Your own Person. Father, help us to ask and keep on asking. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.