

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

www.ffbic.org

SERMON: *Ask, Seek, Knock*
SERIES: *Whoever Hears These Words*
SCRIPTURES: *Matthew 7:7-12*
SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*
DATE: *9 - 15 - 2019*

**Credit to Scot McKnight for valuable insights regarding this message!*

Well good morning, it is so great to worship with you.

Our current series is called “Whoever hears these words.” We’re studying the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Maybe last week you didn’t really like what Jesus said. He had some really tough words for us didn’t he? Do not judge...seemed to be one of the messages that kind hits us between the eyes. Jesus never lets us off easy, does he? He has our best intention at heart. I think you’ll today’s message much more...maybe...Jesus said...

⁷ “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ 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 good gifts to those who ask him!

¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Now this is the kind of stuff we like to read about in Scripture, isn't it? This is the kind of passage that is good for bumper stickers or hanging on walls.

Ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened. But it brings up a really good question, and some misunderstanding about what exactly Jesus is teaching in this passage.

I. Does God give you everything you want, especially if you just keep asking him for it?

Like, is Jesus saying, if you really want a new car...just ask God for it and if you keep asking eventually you get it. If you really want a new house, a better job, a different spouse... God will give it to you...

Because it almost sounds like that's what Jesus is saying. But that's not exactly what Jesus is saying.

So really important concept to understand when it comes to reading passages in your Bible. Something called...

1. Hermeneutics

Which is kind of a fancy word for "how to understand what read in the Bible." Sometimes people will say, "Can't we just read the Bible and do what it says?" Sometimes yes, but other times no. There's a little more explanation involved.

For example **Deuteronomy 21:18** says...

¹⁸ If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother...Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you.

Now it would not be wise to just take that one section, read it and do what it says. Some of you are thinking, is that even in the Bible. And it brings up all kinds of questions or at least it should. When we read passages like that it's good to take time to understand what the author was intending to teach.

Think about it this way. Cause we do similar with the way we communicate sometimes.

You've heard someone say, **"The early bird gets the worm."** Or **"He hesitates has lost."** You know what that means right? It means jump in, don't wait, you'll miss the opportunity! And depending on the situation, there is wisdom in that saying.

But you've also heard the phrase, **"The second mouse gets the cheese."** Or perhaps, more common, **"Think before you speak."** This means, don't rush into something. Take your time. Be thoughtful. Depending on the situation there is wisdom in that saying.

So it's helpful when we read Jesus words here, to know what else Jesus has to say about "our requests to God". Sometimes those other passages help us to get a clearer, fuller and more accurate understanding of what Jesus means.

For example, there are instances where Jesus disciples did not get what they want from God. In **Matthew 17:14-21**, there's a story where Jesus disciples seem to have asked God to heal a young boy of demon-possession. And it does not happen!

Or think about the Garden of Gethsemane, the night that Jesus is arrested. Do you remember what Jesus asks God for in the Garden?

"Father if it is possible may this cup be removed from me. But not my will, your will be done."

Jesus asks God to remove the cup of “death on a Roman cross.” And Jesus does not get what he asks God for. I know this example creates a tension even a paradox in our minds.

Or in the book of James we read...

James 4:3 - ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

So when it comes to our understanding of Scripture, we must be careful not to build an entire theology around one statement, one paragraph in Scripture, instead we should read and evaluate what we read with an awareness of the fuller perspective of Scripture.

Based on other parts of Scripture, Jesus is probably not teaching “God gives you everything you want, especially if you just keep asking.”

Two principles, I think this passage is teaching.

2. Jesus is highlighting the interactive relationship between humans and God.

Have you ever wondered, does prayer really make a difference? Does God change the course of human history because we pray or don't pray? How much do we (humans) have an influence on God and the way He acts in the world?

Jesus reminds us in the passage that our relationship with God involves, give and take. Asking, seeking and knocking are words that imply a sense of relational interaction. Speaking and listening. Acting and responding.

Asking is how we learn and explore and discover new things.

It's a recognition that we don't have all of the answers and we're looking to someone else for help.

Asking God, shows an awareness of our dependence on God. We need help, assistance, guidance. You can't do it yourself.

Jesus says, "ask" because asking is rooted in a belief that God can and may choose to respond based upon our requests!

Seeking also has this relational aspect to it. It shows our desire to know God and assumption that we can learn new things about Him and His world.

That as we seek Him, we are able to join in on what God is doing. That God responds to our seeking and makes himself more fully known.

Our seeking has an impact on how much we know and connect with God.

Knocking shows a level of persistence, grit, perseverance. And that's kingdom of heaven quality that God seems to admire. Perseverance in relationship with Him.

You find examples of this all over Scripture. There is something about human persistence that God admires. There's a fascinating story later on in **Matthew 15**. A Canaanite woman, one of those pagans, comes searching for Jesus. She has heard that Jesus can heal the sick. And her daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession. Now it's interesting to note right off, that she is a Canaanite and she is a woman and Jesus is a Jewish Rabbi. She knows, very well, that she is not welcome in his presence. But this lady has some grit and perseverance. And so comes to Jesus anyway. The Disciples, immediately notice her and they know she is not welcome. And so they say to Jesus, "send her away."

Jesus says to her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel...the Jews." Which almost seems kind of rude of Jesus. But many scholars suggest Jesus is kind of testing the woman though. A test of this woman's grit and perseverance. And this woman, ignores Jesus remark and falls at his feet. "Lord have mercy on me."

Jesus kind of gives her another test, "should I give the childrens food to the dogs." He almost insults her. But this woman will just not give up. And with incredible determination she comes back one more time. She knocks once more. She says, "Yes, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table."

And it's almost like Jesus is blown away. His very own disciples, many of the Jews would not have this kind of persistence. And he turns to this woman with admiration. Remarkable toughness. He says "oh woman of great faith! Your request is granted."

When our daughter Adalyn was younger, she had this determined persistence. I remember one night, Jenny and I were weaning her off of her binkie. It was time for her to leave that babyish crutch behind. And she was determined to not let that happen. And she was screaming and crying relentlessly. And this is when she was young and she had trouble using correct grammar, but in midst of her pitiful sobs she kept saying "My want my binkie".

And Jenny was doing her best trying to calm her down. And I thought, I have a way with words. I'll just shmooze this little girl into a relaxed sleep. So I started rubbing her back and said, "Daddy loves you. You are such a sweetie pie. You are such a cute little girl."

She looked right at me with eyes of disgust, this sweet little girl, looked at me and screamed at the top of her lungs "My not cute girl!! My not sweetie pie! My want my binkie!"

And though that was an unpleasant night in and of itself, I gotta tell ya there is something to admire about the persistence of a 2 year old. I want her to hang on to so many things in her life with that kind of courage and grit.

And that's a kingdom of heaven character trait. It's something that we need in life and something that only grows by practice. And so in our interactive give and take with the master he trains us in knocking, and knocking, and knocking on closed doors that just seem never to open.

Jesus is highlighting the interactive relationship we enter with him when we choose to follow Him.

You and I, our words, our prayers matter, and they make a difference, in some way they have an influence on God. Notice I did not say, we control God or that God does everything we tell him or that God is limited by our prayers. But certainly part of what this passage is teaching is that God responds to our prayers. You and I have an interactive relationship with God.

What you'll notice, in this interactive relationship is that God doesn't just give you what you want, but you become who He intends for you to be in persistence and knocking. In seeking and in asking. You become who God intends for you to be in dynamic personal interaction with him.

3. Jesus is highlighting God's goodness.

We talk a little bit about this last week. That so often we picture God as cruel, disinterested, cold, judgmental.

The problem is it just leads to the incomplete, inaccurate picture of God. Jesus is trying to remind us, that's not what our God is like.

⁹ “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ 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 good gifts to those who ask him!

It is better to give than to receive...(Acts 20:35)...

Don't you love giving good gifts to your children or to your family and friends? And you get experience joy and laughter and contentment.

Sometimes those gifts are tangible items other times, you give the gift of time and attention.

I started thinking about the gift of time and attention. And just how valuable that is. Was kinda picturing a single mom trying to make ends meet but night after night she faithfully takes time to go for a bike ride with her son. Night after night giving the gift of her time and then one night, she takes the training wheels off, and he's got it! And he just rides freely and gloriously. Wow what a gift. That mom stands back and admires and she enjoy her son's bike ride more than he does.

Night after night you, sit and laboriously sound out letters and words as your kids learn to read, but then one night they got it. Wow what a gift.

You just marvel and cheer and post everywhere on Facebook and Instagram.

And Jesus says, if you know how to give good gifts, how much more your father in heaven.

James 1:17 - ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...

Jesus says you need to know and you need to remember, because your likely to forget, God just loves giving good gifts to his children. Sometimes His gifts are tangible and sometimes they're not. But His desire is for you to experience the fullness and wholeness of life.

When you are with family and friends and you laugh until your belly hurts. Do you what that is? That's God gift of laughter and family you were created to enjoy.

When you're able to take a week off work and head to the ocean, and walk on beach, watch the sunrise, you marvel at the seashells. (That's God's gift of nature and He just loves giving that to you to enjoy.)

When you overcome and experience freedom from a certain temptation (maybe it's with your diet or language or temper or whatever) that has been ruling your life. (And finally you experience victory, freedom...wow that's God's good gift.)

When you open up your heart and forgive someone (wow, that's God's gift).

When you choose to take a step of faith and courageously publicly get baptized in obedience to Jesus. I think he just stands back and marvels at your courage and your persistence. By the way, if you've been thinking about doing that. At the end of this month. You can do that. October 27, our next baptism service. Take God up on his gift of courage and what might happen if you publicly profess your faith. It's one of His good gifts to you.

When you meet with God's people on Sunday morning and you're able to shake a hand, give someone a hug, or sit in Sunday school and share about the ups and downs of your week, without feeling judged, that's the gift of relationship that God created you to have!

God's heart just melts, he loves those things. And this kind of brings us back around to the question we started with this morning. If God enjoys giving us good gifts...

II. Why don't I get everything I want?

1. Who gets to determine whether a gift is good?

¹¹ 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 good gifts to those who ask him!

Part of the tension we feel here, is because we often think we know better than God, what is good for us.

But the reality is, in the dynamic, give and take relationship that we experience with God...God sometimes determines that what you want or what you think will be good for you, isn't.

If it were up to my daughter, most meals would consist of cupcakes and ice cream. These are both good things. But we know that how much and how often you eat cake and ice cream matter.

For Adalyn to experience the joy of the physical body she has been given by her creator, she has to give that body good fuel. What she thinks is good fuel is not always good fuel.

We know, that vegetables are good fuel for your physical body. It's just the way our physical bodies were made.

So, she asks for ice cream. Sometimes she gets ice cream because she asked for it and we love seeing the joy on her face as tastes glorious, rich, delicious flavors of ice cream. But sometimes she doesn't get ice cream, because we know that too much isn't good for her.

And the truth is when it really comes down to it, we are not most interested in just giving Ady what she wants so that she will be happy today. We are most interested in teaching her to have a healthy physical body, so that she experiences the fullness and abundance of life and wholeness, not just today, but tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that.

And so, it is good and right to approach our father in Heaven with our requests, even our desires. All the while with a recognition that Jesus is not most interested in making you happy each moment of each day. That's not the end goal. The end goal is for you to become transformed into a Kingdom of Heaven person. A person who experiences the fullness, wholeness and abundance of life that you were created to experience.

And in your dynamic give and take relationship with God you may not get all of the things you want. It's about what's leading you to become that kind of person God created you to be. Because it's only as you get closer to that, that you experience true life.

2. What you ask for, changes.

Remember Jesus' sermon is in the context of "learning to become a Kingdom of Heaven kind of person." As that process unfolds in your life, as you grow into a Kingdom person you begin to discover that your desires, intentions, motivations begin to change. The very things you value begin to change.

When you're younger at Christmas or Birthdays and you can just tell which packages have clothes in them. You kind of moan and groan about it. But as you get older, doesn't that change. I'll just tell you, there is nothing better than soft, clean, right out of the package pair of socks!

And the same is true, as you grow into a kingdom of heaven person. Your heart, intentions, motivations, change...what you ask for changes.

Instead of asking God to give you a bigger house, you begin to find that what you really want is something, much more valuable, much more important. What you're really after is contentment, isn't it? That's what you used to think the bigger house would give you. But all along what you were created for is not a bigger house, it's contentment. What you're really after is heart of generous giving.

Don't ask God to sort out your frustrating co-worker. Because you used to think the co-worker that was the problem, but instead what you're really after is a heart of compassion and forgiveness to those who hurt you and wrong you.

See how that happens...as you become a Kingdom person, you ask, seek and knock for different things.

NT Wright says it like this, **"...for most of us, the problem is not that we are too eager to ask for the wrong things. The problem is that we are not eager enough to ask for the right things."** (McKnight 300)

Ask God to give you a pure heart, free from lust.

Ask God to give you a patient and gentle tongue with your children.

Ask God to give you a heart of mercy and compassion for people who are different from you, speak different than you, look different from you.

And it kind of leads to the last verse of this section. Jesus finishes this section with a very familiar verse. **"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."** It's often called the Golden rule.

3. The Golden Rule

Back when I was in high school one of the guys I played soccer with, had his own way of interpreting the gold rule. He said, “According to the Bible, you should me 5 dollars. Because you’d want me to give you \$5. And you should do unto me what you would have me to do unto you.” (This is why I said earlier that Hermenuetics is so important.

Because that actually misses the whole point of the Golden rule. You see the Golden rule is intended to help us stop focusing on ourselves and instead focus on others. We read part of the this passage from James earlier about asking God for things...here’s the larger passage...

James 4:1-3 - What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

When you are a Kingdom of this world kind of person...you’re asking, seeking, and knocking comes from a selfish heart. “What can I get for myself?” But as a Kingdom of heaven person, your focus changes.

Did you know, you will find no better example in all of Scripture, in all of humanity than the Master Teacher himself.

Father if is possible remove this cup. But not my will, your will be done.

The son of man came not to be served, but to serve.

You should have the same mind as Christ, who being in very nature God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, becoming a servant.

Now that I your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

This is why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. This is why Jesus touched lepers. This is why Jesus healed the blind man and the cripple, even on the Sabbath. This why Jesus loved outsiders, scandalous, unwelcome. This is why He went to the cross.

There is no greater love, than a man would laid down his life for a friend.

What Jesus cared most about, what the Messiah wanted most of all, was you. And he had a grit and determination that he would do anything possible for you. He would become human, so that you would know, that you would have a model for what humans were created for. He would die on a cross, for you.