

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes November 8, 2006

Matthew 7:7-14

- 7: "Ask, and it will be given you;
seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you.
- 8: For every one who asks receives,
and he who seeks finds,
and to him who knocks it will be opened.
- 9: Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?
10: Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?
11: If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!
- 12: So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them;
for this is the law and the prophets.
- 13: "Enter by the narrow gate;
for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction,
and those who enter by it are many.
- 14: For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life,
and those who find it are few.

Discussion Notes:

Introduction:

Context:

- Familiar verses on prayer ... but as with other verses in the Sermon, can be abused if taken out of context;
 - Found elsewhere in the Gospels, and in different contexts; therefore, often interpreted separate from any direct connection with the Sermon.
 - However, Matthew intentionally placed these in this context: either because, being present he preserved a more correct history than Luke, or intended these texts to be understood in the flow of the sermon, which is how this has traditionally been understood.
- Scriptural context:
 - Called disciples
 - Sermon on the Mount: Central / core instructions on discipleship, with some very challenging demands!
 - What are these key challenges so far?
 - The Beatitudes
 - They ARE salt & light of the world
 - Their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes & Pharisees
 - Following the law requires more radical living:
 - Not just don't murder but be not angry with brother;
 - Not just don't commit adultery but do not lust or divorce;
 - Their word is to be one of honor;
 - They are not to retaliate;

- They are to love even their enemies
 - They are to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect;
 - They are to practice sincere piety: alms, prayer, fasting.
 - They are to be radically detached from all anxiety!
 - Don't judge others; look to your own holiness!
- He has drawn their attention back to themselves; so now the question arises:
 - How are they to do this? !!!**
 - Anyone honestly looking at themselves in relation to fulfilling these commands would utter the same words of the centurion, in the next chapter: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof ..."
 - This is why many Christian traditions have relegated these expectations to the "pre-resurrection dispensation"; now in Christ we're just saved by faith alone, our works of holiness are of no consequence because with our depraved wills and sinfulness we can do nothing pleasing to God.
 - But Jesus doesn't say this to his audience; he doesn't ever tell his disciples that any of his teachings could be ignored once he died & resurrected.
- Rather, in these verses were studying today, Jesus gives three practical pieces of advice:
 - 1) Turn to God our Father for help;
 - 2) Love others as you would be loved;
 - 3) Stay the course, don't give up, and don't give in.

I: Turn to God our Father for help.

7: *Ask, and it will be given you;
seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you.*

8: *For every one who asks receives,
and he who seeks finds,
and to him who knocks it will be opened.*

9: *Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?*

10: *Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?*

11: *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

- Very Familiar verses; many know from music...
- In Luke, connected with Jesus' teaching on prayer & the Lord's Prayer.
 - So, often rightly used as basic instructions on confidence in prayer ...
 - If you ask, God will answer!
 - If you seek, God will help you find;
 - If you knock (ask entrance), God will open.
- But wait! Why have I done all these things, and not received, found, or entered?!
- Always my practice, before I preach or teach, to walk or drive with my first draft...
 - Does what I am going to preach / teach make sense with the people I see around me?
 - Those buying a car? Those waiting in line at the bank or the employment office?
- Saint James dealt with this very question in his epistle, 4:2-4:
 - 1st: "You do not have, because you do not ask.*
 - 2nd: You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*
 - Unfaithful creatures! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?
Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."*
- This is precisely why the context of these verses on prayer are essential:
 - Jesus is not saying that we can just ask, seek, & knock about anything we want, and expect God to grant our wishes as if he is a genie in a bottle.
 - The subject matter is for meeting the challenges of becoming a true disciple of Christ.
- Which assumes sonship:
 - The example Jesus uses of how our heavenly Father responds to us was not how we

- might respond to the requests of a perfect stranger or an antagonist or an enemy; rather he uses the example of a father responding to his son;
- Our prayers must begin with help in our sonship:
 - In prayer, we must begin asking for the grace to live the beatitudes:
 - 3: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
 - 4: *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*
 - 5: *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*
 - 6: *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*
 - 7: *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*
 - 8: *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*
 - 9: *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*
 - 10: *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
 - 11: *"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*
 - Then, as we progress by grace to grow in these qualities, virtues, we continue following his lead to ask help with those other qualities of our sonship he mentioned: salt & light, handling anger, bitterness, lust, honesty, judging, acts of piety, etc., and especially detachment: Lord help me to ask, to seek, and to knock only on the doors that you want for my life.
 - This is important to understand in the other verses where Jesus promises that he will answer prayer:
 - John 14:13-14:
 - "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it."*
 - John 15:7
 - "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you."*
 - John 16:23
 - "In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name."*
 - These, again, are not promises that God is a genie in a lamp, but rather in the context of John 14-17, these assume that the disciples are praying as faithful disciples.

II: Love others as you would be loved

12: *So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.*

- Earlier in the sermon Jesus said some strong words about the Law: Mt 5:17-20
 - "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*
- Then he proceeded to give even more stringent understandings of these laws ...
 - 5:21-22: *"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire."*
 - 5:27-28: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*
- **Again the question: How can I do this?!!!**
- Jesus says that all of these great laws are essentially built upon first examining our actions towards others:

- Do we do to others **as** they have done to us? (retaliation)
- Do we do to others **because** they have done to us? (vengeance)
- Do we do to others **before** they do to us? (pre-emptive strike)
- Rather, we must begin by asking, **how do we wish to be treated?** This requires reflection before we encounter, act;
- Then, in imitation of God (“while we were yet sinners . . .”), we must act in love, mercy, forgiveness, kindness, etc.
- All the teachings of Jesus make sense as extensions of this Golden Rule.

III: Discipleship will never be easy or get easier: Stay the course, don’t give up, and don’t give in.

*13: "Enter by the narrow gate;
for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction,
and those who enter by it are many.*

*14: For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life,
and those who find it are few.*

- The world has easier answers than almost everything Jesus is teaching his disciples;
- One of the reasons people take so many of the things Jesus said out of context, to soften his demands.
- And his disciples will be told this be all who refuse to follow Him; especially by the devil!
- This is, essentially, why they will be persecuted. . .
 - 10: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
 - 11: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*
- As a result, he is warning them that they may end up walking this path alone.
- Today’s Gospel reading from Luke 14:25-33
 - 25: Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them,*
 - 26: "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*
 - 27: Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*
 - 28: For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?*
 - 29: Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,*
 - 30: saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.'*
 - 31: Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?*
 - 32: And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace.*
 - 33: So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*
- Therefore, Jesus is warning his disciples that from then on, following him will involve a narrowing of their lives (detachment) and a hard life (sacrifice) but this is the only way to have life.
- Therefore, they & we, must stay the course, must not give up, must not get distracted, & we must not give in.
- How? By daily, constantly, asking, seeking, knocking at His door, for his grace & love.