



Ask, Seek, Knock
Red Letter City
Sunday, July 31, 2016
Courage Church, Detroit, MI

The sermon on the mount is the most radical sermon in history.

It just is.

It calls people out in their brokenness. It calls them out in their sin.

Jesus talks about all the hardest to talk about issues.

For every circumstance that our culture is facing, it seems like Jesus one way or another addresses it here.

and he is not afraid to boldly and bluntly call something a sin... which is something that we have gotten a little soft about in our society. But Jesus was never afraid to call out things that were evil.

but in the midst of calling us all out *in our sins*, he ultimately lives on the side of grace. Because for every wrong that you and I have ever done, Jesus did something right.

He died for you. He died for me.

He died for our sins. He lived a perfect life and died the horrific death that you and I deserved to die, but because of His grace, and because of His love... he took our place. and if you hear nothing else today... hear that.

without Jesus there is no hope. and with Jesus we can live lives not only filled with hope, but also free from worry, and free from guilt. And I know that that sounds like a dream... an impossible facade of some utopian existence. But it is what Jesus promises us.

But we don't always walk in the things that we are promised, do we?

But could you imagine living your whole life broke, in debt, and always feeling like you are in bondage... never even knowing that you are the heir of a King? Never even knowing that someone has promised you something and you aren't even claiming it?

That is how so many people live. And because they live that way, they do all sorts of things to try and get what they want, like we talked about last week. They try to control their own lives, and ultimately they try to control other people's lives.

But Jesus says "that is not the way you go about getting things..." and then he says: Let me show you how you DO go about it. And it so simple.

So if you would open your bibles with me to Matthew 7:7-12 -

"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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 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!

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Lets Pray

The first question that you are probably asking if you have been with us for a good amount of the series we are doing on the sermon on the mount is:

When Jesus says: Ask, Seek, and Knock...

is he talking about asking God for things? Like, is God my 401k fund, or my financial security... Is he my new house, and my BMW? Is this saying that

anything we can ever ask of God, he will automatically do it for us, if we ask?

Or is Jesus talking about asking people for things?

Because if you grew up in the church you probably grew up being taught this passage as a “prayer” passage... completely isolated from the rest of the sermon that Jesus drops it right in the middle of.

But now that we have seen the way that everything in the sermon on the mount seems to have to do with how we usher in the Kingdom of Heaven right here into our world, and what the lives of people in this kingdom look like...

I would hope that you would, by now, begin to start asking questions like that:

Could it be that this passage is about how we relate to others?

And I believe the answer to the question of if “ask seek and knock” means that Jesus is going to give you a BMW... that answer is no.

But I do believe the answer to the question of “Is this talking about asking God, or about asking other people...” the answer is BOTH.

Jesus had just got done explaining that the way you DON'T get things from people is by guilt and manipulation and things like that... and then he says: just ask. And then he goes into this section that is obviously about prayer and how we approach God, and then he goes right from there into the golden rule, which clear as day has to do with people.

Ask. Seek. and knock is the way that you should approach God, and it is the way that you should approach people.

But what Jesus says in the middle of it all I believe pulls the whole thing together:

“which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 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!”

We have had so many babies born in our church in the last few months... some first time Mothers and Fathers, and others who are on second and third children...

but there is something that changes in your heart the moment that you are holding that child. You anticipate it the whole pregnancy... you know it will change you... but there is just no way to prepare for what it will actually do to you the moment you finally are holding that child.

For me, that moment, all three times that I have been there, completely changed me. I wasn't thinking about anything besides each of those three little girls as I held them for the first time.

And Jesus says that even that amazing, euphoric feeling that can't be described in human terms as anything other than love...

in comparison to how much God loves and provides for his children, is evil.

But there is something else we have to understand about the way this verse is sandwiched between ask, seek, and knock, and the golden rule.

What this should do is it should cause you to look at how it is that you view God. And then compare that to how you view people... because until you have a clear view of who it is you are asking, you are going to struggle to know how to ask.

Do you view God as a Father that would give you a stone when you asked him for some bread? Do you view him as someone who would give you a snake when you asked for some fish?

Because if that is your view of God... this cold, heartless man who sets out to do evil to you... That is going to have all kinds of implications on the way that you view the people that the bible says are created in His image.

If you are convinced that God is out to get you... and that everything bad that ever happens to you is because he hates you or because he is just ignoring you...

that is going to cause you to have a hard time trusting people.

Your view of God will directly affect and impact the way you view people and the way that you treat people... AND, on the flip side... the way you view and treat people is a direct reflection of the way that you both view God, and the way you are ultimately treating him.

The two can not be separated. A few verses to back that up:

James 3:9-12 says:

With (the same tongue) we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

No spring puts forth fresh water and salt water. It is one or the other.

If you use your mouth to curse people, you are cursing God. James says it this way in verse 4:11 -

“Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.”

1 John 4:20-21

“If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

Even when it comes all the way down to the final judgment which Jesus speaks about in Matthew 25, he directly connects the way that you treated other people with the way that you treated God. You may say “I love you God! I was at every worship service... I was on my face at the altar every Sunday!” but if your love toward others didn’t reflect the love of God, God WILL SAY TO YOU “whatever you did or did not do unto the least of these... you did that to me!”

The greatest commandment that Jesus gave us (Matt. 22) is to love God with everything in us... and to love our neighbor the exact same way.

So the answer to the question is clear... Matthew 7:7-12 is about how we talk to God, and it is about how we talk to people. It is not just about prayer, it is about how you bring the Kingdom of heaven to earth through the way that you interact with one another.

So lets start there...with **Approaching People:**

Because we can spiritualize anything. But once these words take on flesh and blood and turn into tangible action, and into tangible ways that we treat each other and talk to each other and help each other out...

that is how the gospel becomes unstoppable.

As we have been journeying through the sermon on the mount together, what we have discovered is that there seems to be a thread to what Jesus says. Maybe, it is not 20 different sections like most English bibles break it up into, but maybe there is a flow to it that really ties together, in a way that chapters and verses can not separate.

For example, we read “do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth” and we think that is a section by itself. And then from there Jesus does another section on how we should not be anxious, and that is another section by itself... and then Jesus talks about how we should not judge others, lest we be judged... and that is another section.

But what we have discovered as we have been studying these passages, is that all of these go together. These sections are all about the same topic, and that topic is control.

What Jesus is saying at first, is most people are controlled by money... So he tells them that you can't serve two gods.. either mammon is your god, or Jesus is your God and you give up control of your life to him. He starts with money, because money is the thing that has the strongest hold on most people. It is the one thing that most people have the hardest time letting go.

But then Jesus goes into this issue of anxiety. And he asks us, "why are you worried about tomorrow?"

Again, he is reminding us that if we give him control of our lives, then he will make sure that we are taken care of. But if you haven't mastered the first thing... if you still think you are in control of your money...

then what will happen is, you, trying to control one area of your life will eventually lead to you trying to be in control of all areas of your life. And that is literally the only thing that causes anxiety.

The feeling that you are not in control.

We think that we should be in control.
But we know that we are NOT.

And the cure for that in a Spiritual sense, is to acknowledge, "no, I am not in control... but the God of the universe who holds the whole world in his hands IS IN CONTROL, and he has my best interests at heart.

but for many people, that is very hard, so they do everything they can to create the illusion in their own life that they are in control.

And then in Matthew 7, when Jesus starts talking about "judge not, lest you be judged..." everybody thinks that Jesus shifts gears when he starts talking about judging, but really he is still continuing the same line of thinking.

Because after you have gotten used to being in control of your life... what will happen is, eventually someone is going to come along who is going to do something that threatens that control. And in that moment, the only way for you to remain in control of your life is to try and control them... and so what people tend to do is they use judgment toward people as a way to control them into doing what they want.

Sometimes that judgment can be subtle, or even be masked as something good. That is why Jesus says "Don't throw your pearls before swine, lest they turn around and attack you."

and we explained that in detail last week, but essentially what Jesus is saying is that if we get someone to do what we want them to do, even if that thing is accept Jesus... but if we get them to do it through manipulation and judgment, eventually they are going to realize that they were force fed something, and they will be the most likely ones to eventually turn on you. Because you can't make friends for yourself by ways of manipulation.

If the only way that you can ever get anybody to do anything is the times that you heap a judgment on them to guilt them into doing it, then there is something very very wrong.

Because you will never truly make a disciple that way.

you may have a momentary convert... but people converted in that way are the ones who are most likely going to in the end turn on you... just like Jesus talks about the pigs turning around and attacking you.

So Jesus says, "Okay... now that you know how NOT to get things from people... let me show you how you are actually supposed to talk to people."

and he says "ask. seek. knock."

Don't use guilt.

Don't use manipulation.

Just ask.

And if people say no... that is okay. At least you got the real answer out of them, instead of a fake one that only did what you asked because you asked them in a way that made them feel like they didn't have an option.

Now... in healthy communities, there are three things regarding this concept to note:

1. It is okay, and sometimes necessary, to say no when asked to do something.
2. No should NOT be our default response.
3. We should NOT be afraid to ask.

Even when we think that someone might say no.

Its like this:

When we do a baby dedication here, we ask everyone in our church community if they commit to that child and supporting those parents as they try their best to raise that child in a Godly environment.

and we ask you all if you will be there for that child.

But don't say you will, if you won't. Jesus just got done teaching, "let your yes be yes, and your no by no!"

I ask that. I say "do you commit to doing that?" Because ultimately what that child needs is a community who will look out for him, because his parents are not going to always have both of their eyes on him.

and what those parents are going to need, is support, and encouragement when they feel overwhelmed.

and sometimes a break.

But I can say this, as a parent, ITS VERY DIFFICULT to ask for a break.

But if we are afraid to ask anybody for anything then we are robbing them of the opportunity to play a crucial role in community life with us, and we are robbing ourselves of the very thing that we desperately need in that moment.

So we ask. And they can say NO. Or they can say YES. and either way, we are still in community together.

We don't manipulate. Manipulation... or trying to get something by judgment, would look like this: "Man, nobody ever watches my kids... we never have a date night... it sucks."

Ask seek and knock looks like this:

Hey, would you be willing to watch my kids later this week so I can take my wife on a date?

Here is another example... because I joke around a lot, but I really have a hard time SERIOUSLY asking for help... even if I SERIOUSLY need it.

When we put our kitchen in, and hooked up our stove... for months we have had this gas smell in there. And I remember thinking to myself, I need to tell one of my friends who could actually take a look and see what was going on with this gas... but I don't want to make them feel like I am always asking for things so I decided to wait it out for a while.

But of course the smell didn't go away, it only seemed to get stronger. And I started noticing that I was getting these headaches and becoming a bit more irritable when I was in the house... and finally I just kind of casually mentioned it to Ben... I kind of just put it out there that maybe the next time he is over he can look at it...

And Ben was like: "Dude! You can't just live in that. We have to figure out what that is right away. And he came right away."

Because he knew that its not okay to ignore problems like that.

And he was kind of irritated that I didn't just ask when when it first came up. Because what would have happened if it just kept making us more and more sick?

Strong communities want to help each other. They don't want one of their friends and their entire family to be taking in gas from a gas line 24/7.

But think about what Jesus says about the stones and the bread. If you think that God is going to give you a stone every time you ask for bread... then of course you aren't going to ask other people who are made in the image of God, for anything.

Because your image of God is of a guy who gives you a stone when you ask him for bread.

You see? Jesus is showing us something. If we manipulate people to get them to do what we want, that actually says something about the way that we view God.

Then Jesus gets into this center section about asking God for things, which most people use as a claim that the entire passage is only about prayer... but that makes no sense because it is sandwiched between the part of asking, seeking, and knocking... and the golden rule... which is Matthew 7:12.

Remember, just because your bible creates a new section for something, does not mean that that was the way Jesus actually intended it to be.

Really, to me, Matthew 7:12 seems more like the final recap verse of the entire sermon... and from there Jesus begins his conclusion... but it most definitely ties in with asking, seeking, and knocking.

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

What kind of Kingdom are you creating for other people?

The keyword here that shows that this verse is not starting a new section as much as it is wrapping up a previous one... is the word “so.”

It is the Greek word “*oun*” and it means: “then, therefore, accordingly, consequently, **these things being so**”

It is a connecting word.

It is a word that connects everything we read in verse 7-11, to verse 12.

If these things in verses 7-11 are so... if God loves you so much that he would never even think of giving you a snake when you asked for a fish, or a rock when you asked for some bread, then why would you not treat others the way that you want to be treated?

Why not love people right where they are?
Because that is exactly the way that Jesus met you.

We complicate the gospel because we forget that our lives are a reflection of Jesus.

and we also forget that the things in our hearts are reflective of the things that are in other peoples hearts. We all want the same things just in different packages... we all have the same felt needs.

The greatest commandment can be summed up in loving God, and doing the golden rule.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Now, lets talk about asking, seeking, and knocking as a way for approaching God. Because it certainly is the way to get God’s attention as well:

Approaching God:

The word “ask” is used in the New Testament 71 times.

I think that we have gotten so used to trying to do things on our own, that we avoid doing things like asking, even when it comes to God. It is easier

to not ask, and then not be let down if we don't get what we ask for... than it is to ask and then three weeks down the road feel like God ignored what you asked of him and start to feel like he doesn't care, or can't hear you at all.

But the way that "ask, seek, and knock" are all written in the Greek are in a progressive tense. So what it actually is saying is:

ask and keep on asking.

Seek and keep on seeking.

Knock and keep on knocking.

Proverbs 8:17 says "those who seek me **diligently** find me."

These words that we read in the center of this passage in Matthew 7 show us that we can go to God with our needs. Lets look at it one more time:

"which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 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!"

Again, we get the image of God as our heavenly Father, and we get this image of how to come to him in prayer. Now, remember the first thing that Jesus taught us about how to approach God in prayer was the Lord's prayer...

and it starts with:

Our Father, who art in heaven. And we talked about how the word for Father literally means "supplier" - the one who provides all of my needs... and the word for heaven is the word *ouranos* (uw ron ase) and actually translates as "air."

So we read that first line of the Lord's Prayer like this:

Our Father, or our supplier, who is as close to me as the air that I breathe.

how much more will your **supplier** who is as close to you as the air that you breathe give good things to those who ask him!
God is close. He is ever present in our lives and he wants to meet us in the messes that we have created in our lives, and he wants to hang out with us when we are on top of the world.

Jesus makes it very clear in the Lord's Prayer, that no matter what your earthly Father was like... even if he did give you a stone when what you needed was bread...

This Father... Jesus' Father... your heavenly Father... will supply all of your needs.

And throughout the entire bible, we get imagery of a God who views all of us as his children.

The prophet Isaiah (59:15-16) gives us more parental imagery for just how much God loves us and how much he will not abandon us in times of need:

“Can a woman forget her nursing child,
that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.
Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;”

He won't forget you. It is woven throughout the whole bible. God is on your side, and has your best interests at heart.

But remember this... Paul says in Colossians (1:18) and in Ephesians (4:15-16) that we are the body of Christ. Which means that we have a roll to play in the things that God wants to do in our world.

Yes, God meets needs... but a lot of the time (not all of the time) He meets them through people.

Jesus says that WE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD! We are the ones who he uses to meet the needs of the people and the ones whose lives should shine so brightly that it shows people to Jesus.

That is one of the reasons why it is so important that we treat people with respect, with dignity... with love... because we represent Jesus. We are the ones that he uses to meet the needs in the world. He works through people!

and if someone who is supposed to be a Christian turns away from people who have needs that that person could tangibly meet... When Jesus looks at that person, it is not someone he recognizes as being his child... because that is not what Jesus looks like.

I told this to the students at four days... we were talking about what happens when you bury your talents... and we talked about all of the things that we watch go by us knowing we could help... but don't do anything about.

That is what it means to bury your talent.

Like the statistic that says that if every church in the nation would have ONE family that would choose to adopt or at least foster ONE child, then there would be no more orphans in our entire nation. One kid per church. Even if we estimate the average church size at 50 people, you are telling me that between every set of 50 *Christians*, there is not one person who is willing to take in a kid?

This is a problem.

Sometimes there are problems that you should ask, seek, and knock until you have found a way to help!

because I think so often people look at the church, and they look at the God... and then they look at the shape of the world and they think... "how could you believe in a loving God when our world is so broken." because there are all of these needs. There are all of these hurting and broken people. People who sleep on the streets when others sleep in beds.

People who are raising their children without clean drinking water... and other children who are raising themselves, without parents. And they look

at the injustices in our world and they think that if God is even up there, then He has, in some evil, mysterious way,

decided to hold out on people.

But if you look at how off balance our world is... how some people have everything and others have nothing... it is NOT hard to see that God has not in any way withheld the resources necessary to meet the needs in our world.

The problem comes in when people who are created in his image don't live their lives the way that he tells them too. They, in their own free will hold onto what they have while they watch others suffer, and they blame God for it.

People ask, and they don't answer. People seek, and they run away. People knock, and they slam the door in their face.

“whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.”

Let me say this as we begin to close... Because I have mostly spoken to Christians today... because so much of what Jesus is talking about here is how you cultivate communities and the way you properly add people to those communities by showing them what Jesus looks like...

not through guilt. But through a healthy relationship in which your yes's are yes, and your no's are no... and when you need something you ask and because you are in relationship with people who love you... they do whatever they can for you... because the goal is always to look like Jesus.

But if you are in this place today and every experience you ever had with someone who claimed to represent Jesus... was the opposite of what Jesus describes here... when you ask for bread they give you a stone...

when what you needed was to be fed but what you got was rocks thrown at you...

if that is what the church has made Jesus to look like to you then I am so sorry, and want to repent on behalf of the skewed views so many have held for so long.

That is not Jesus.

Jesus says that no matter what your past looks like... there is no condemnation in Him... He says that whoever seeks will find... whoever knocks, the door will be open to him...

and he wants to meet you here in this place today. And it is true what people say... all you need to do is ask, and seek, and knock...

Jesus can't wait to meet you.