

Matthew 7C

- We're engaged in a verse-by-verse study through the Gospel of Matthew
 - We've reached Chapter 7, near the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a sermon on true righteousness
 - In this chapter, Jesus is preparing His disciples to face an unrighteous world, to remain strong and united
 - And in vs.1-6, Jesus began by teaching that we must resist the temptation to judge another's righteousness
 - Judging is deciding for someone else what they must do to be approved by God, and it was a favorite pastime in Israel during Jesus' day
 - But Jesus says it's wrong
 - His teaching on judging was divided into two parts...in vs.1-5, Jesus told us we shouldn't judge other believers in the Body of Christ
 - Surely, everyone makes mistakes – including you
 - And just as surely, all have received Christ's righteousness by faith, just as you did too
 - So rather than judge others, model righteousness for them and allow the Holy Spirit to convict and guide others as He wills
 - And then last week, we studied the second part of that teaching in v.6, as Jesus provocatively added that neither should we judge unbelievers
 - Unbelievers are enslaved to sin, and they lack an internal spiritual compass to direct them into godliness
 - So judging their behavior is pointless, since they are spiritually incapable of putting our advice to good use
 - Therefore, don't become preoccupied with their bad behavior
 - Jesus says, do not throw your pearls (of wisdom) before swine
 - Don't try to "fix" their sin problem by treating the symptoms, instead of curing the disease
 - Sin is merely the symptom of a heart of unbelief

- Of course, there's nothing wrong with offering advice when asked, giving godly counsel and even lending a hand in various ways
 - But don't think becoming someone's life coach is making them righteous or pleasing to God
 - No amount of good advice can make someone righteous, unless and until they place their faith in Jesus Christ
 - So rather than judge the unbeliever's righteousness, preach the Gospel so they might become righteous by faith
- That leaves us at v.7, and if you glance over the passage that starts from that point, you may assume Jesus has changed topics abruptly
 - But as I said last week, this opening section of Matthew 7 is not merely a series of isolated statements
 - Each part is connected to a central idea that Jesus summarizes in v.12, with something often called, "the Golden Rule"
 - So tonight, our task is the same as always...to understand what Jesus is saying in these verses in the context of what He's already said

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

Matt. 7:8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Matt. 7:9 "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?

Matt. 7:10 "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?"

Matt. 7:11 "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!

- Jesus uses another illustration, and this one centers around asking, seeking and knocking
 - In v.11, we learn that the One being asked and sought after is our Father in Heaven
 - And therefore, the ones doing the asking and seeking are His children, those who by faith in Jesus Christ have been born-again

- In fact, Jesus compares our process of seeking things from our Father in Heaven to the way our children seek things from us
 - Also notice that in this passage, Jesus addresses believers in the second person plural “you” (or y’all in Texas)
 - And in Greek, the verbs “asking”, “seeking” and “knocking” are conjugated in the present tense
 - Which indicates a continuous action, a never-ceasing dependence on the Father
 - So Jesus is illustrating believers continuously seeking something from the Father
 - Now at this point, it’s tempting to jump to a conclusion concerning Jesus’ main point
 - And it’s a particularly easy jump in this case, since all the details seem to lead us there
 - We see Jesus talking about asking the Father, and the Father giving us something in return, and we assume Jesus is teaching a lesson on prayer
 - That we should bring all our needs to the Father in prayer and He will answer our prayers, giving us what we ask Him for
 - As logical as that assumption may be on its face, it’s wrong
 - In fact, you can only come to that conclusion if you divorce this passage from the immediate context of Chapter 7 and from the rest of Scripture
 - So just as we did last week, let’s take a moment to first consider why Jesus *can’t* be talking about prayer here
- First, the immediate context of Matthew 7 is simply not on the topic of prayer
 - We know vs.1-6 were on the subject of judging, becoming preoccupied with fixing other peoples’ behavior problems
 - That doesn’t lead naturally into a discussion of prayer, of asking the Father for our daily needs, *etc.*
 - Now glance down to v.12, where Jesus summarizes this section

- We'll get to that verse soon enough, but even just reading it quickly we can see Jesus is wrapping up a point
 - The verse even begins with "In everything, therefore..."
 - The word "therefore" indicates that Jesus is making an application from what He has just taught above
- Yet as we read His summary in v.12, it makes no sense whatsoever coming out of a teaching on prayer
 - Consider how nonsensical this sounds...
 - "Ask the Father and He'll give you good gifts, therefore in everything treat people the way you want to be treated...?"
 - That's called a *non sequitur* (a conclusion that does not logically follow from the previous argument)
 - And Jesus was not prone to speaking in *non sequiturs*
- Secondly, assuming Jesus is teaching a lesson on general prayer contradicts other Scripture
 - You may remember that only a short time earlier in this very same sermon, Jesus addressed the topic of prayer
 - In Chapter 6, Jesus gave us a model of prayer we call the "Our Father"
 - So, for Jesus to come back to the topic of prayer now, in the middle of a discussion on judging, just doesn't make sense
 - It makes Jesus look like He's got ADHD, as if He's forgotten something on prayer and he's forced to back up again
 - More importantly, if we look at what Jesus taught in the previous chapter, we find a very different focus
 - In Matthew 6, Jesus said that our prayers should go this way

Matt. 6:9 "Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

Matt. 6:10 'Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

- The focus of our prayer life should be seeking for the Father's will, not our own desires
- Jesus Himself followed this pattern in His prayer time with the Father
- On the night He prayed in the Garden before He died, He said this

[Luke 22:42](#) saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

- Yet now in Matthew 7, Jesus is supposedly telling us to ask the Father for whatever we want in prayer, and it will be given to us?
 - In fact, notice Jesus says *everyone* who asks receives, and *everyone* who seeks finds
 - There are no exceptions to this ask-and-receive promise
 - Moreover, whatever we ask, we *will* receive
 - And we will receive it not sometimes, but *every time*, Jesus says
- Now this is an incredible promise in the context of prayer, isn't it?
 - Any request of the Father will be answered positively, 100% of the time
 - And it will be done for 100% of those who ask Him
 - And it will always result in something good being given
- Friends, the Bible simply does NOT teach that God answers every prayer affirmatively or that whatever we ask of the Father we will receive
 - Such a notion contradicts Scripture and it's self-evidently NOT the way God works
 - For example, have you asked the Father to heal someone you know and yet, in His providence, He determined not to heal them?

- Have you asked the Father to receive a job or a promotion or a new house or a spouse or something else you dearly desired... and yet He refused?
- Those moments serve as proof to us that the Lord's will be done, not our own
- Therefore, whatever Jesus is promising here, it can't be a general statement about how God answers prayers
 - Nevertheless, many false teachers have taken this passage out of context to support their brand of false teaching
 - For example, prosperity liars tell you that if you ask for wealth, you're guaranteed to receive it because Jesus said so
 - Of course, we don't see all Christians living in splendor the world over, do we?
- False healing gospels claim you may ask for physical healing of some kind
 - And that if you ask for healing, you will be healed every time, because Jesus said so here in Matthew 7
 - They conveniently ignore the fact that no one is healed 100% of the time
- Household salvation heretics maintain that Jesus is promising salvation itself for everyone you love
 - So if you ask Jesus to save an unbelieving family member, it will be done for you because Jesus said so
 - And on and on...
- All of these teachings run contrary to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 and elsewhere
 - God doesn't give us what we want, because that would not be good for us in most cases
 - The Bible does teach us to pray without ceasing and that God hears our prayers
 - But our prayer life is supposed to be focused on God's will being done, not our will

- So we cannot ask God for whatever we want and think that because of Jesus' teaching here in Matthew 7, we will receive it
- Therefore, the context of Matthew 7, the overall teaching of the Bible and our own experience confirm Jesus was not talking about prayer in this passage
 - So what was Jesus promising? Notice that Jesus never names the "it" in these statements
 - Jesus says ask and *it* will be provided, seek and *it* will be found...
 - That is, when we pray for a *certain* something, a specific thing, then the Father will give us that specific thing 100% of the time
 - Jesus says that in doing so, the Father is doing exactly what we do for our children, even though we are evil
 - We give our children good things when they ask for it
 - The key here is "good things"
 - We don't give our children everything they ask for, because we know many things they want are wrong for them
 - But when they ask us for good things, then we delight to meet their request
 - In Jesus' example, the child asks for bread or fish, which were the basic staples of everyday life
 - These were the meat and potatoes of Jesus' day
 - Naturally, if a child wanted more good food, Jesus says an earthly father wouldn't respond with an evil gift
 - Likewise today, if your child asked you for good things, you would give them those good things 100% of the time
 - If your child asked to eat more spinach or more green beans, you would say "yes" every time
 - Or if a young child asked if they can do more homework or if they can go to bed a little early to get more sleep, you would say "yes"
 - It's your teenager asking if they can give up playing video games, social media and Netflix so they can spend more time reading the Bible, you would faint...and then say "yes"

- It's your young lady or young man asking you if they could work to earn the money for their car instead of you buying it for them...you would say "certainly"
- If you ask your parents for good things, you will get a "yes" 100% of the time...because what parent wouldn't say "yes" to those requests?
 - We do this, even though we are sinful and prone to making mistakes
 - And Jesus says our Father in Heaven is an even better parent than we could ever be
 - So He too gives us good things every time we ask
- But in this case, we still need to understand what is this certain good thing that Jesus says we will receive 100% of the time?
 - The answer must come out of the context of this chapter
 - Well, what was Jesus talking about in the preceding verses?
 - In the preceding verse, Jesus mentioned holy things, which was godly insight on how to live righteously
 - Those pearls of wisdom that we shouldn't offer to unbelievers
 - And before that, in vs.1-5, Jesus was talking about the same thing... unsolicited advice on righteousness offered to our brothers and sisters
 - So the context leading into v.7, is on judging unrighteous behavior
 - We can't promote righteous behavior by placing ourselves in God's place and judging others and offering advice
 - Instead, Jesus says focus on yourself, take the log out of your own eye, concern yourself with your own behavior and your own witness
 - That's the context...
 - Now that's a challenge worth considering for a moment...correcting our own behavior
 - After all, it's fun to talk about logs sticking out of eyes, but it's a lot harder to actually address that problem

- It's hard to rein in your sin nature, to live-out righteousness in a daily fashion, isn't it?
- In fact, some days, living righteously feels darn-near impossible, doesn't it?
- On the other hand, it's easy to dole out advice to others, isn't it?
 - In most cases, we can size up someone's problem pretty quickly
 - We judge them in a moment and we're quick to offer our unsolicited advice on how they should change their lives
 - But we're not actually fixing them, of course
 - And if truth be told, we can't fix ourselves either
- If handing out life advice was the solution to everyone's sin problem, then Dr. Phil would be the pope and the Bible would be found in the self-help section
 - Advice isn't a solution to another person's sin or even to our own
 - We can't talk ourselves out of our problem, we can't name it and claim it, we can't "speak" victory into our lives
 - We all know this to be true, as we deal with our own sin
 - We each know our own sin better than anyone...we know the things we do wrong and we know what we should change
 - We even know that what we're doing is wrong, even as we're doing it!
 - Yet we keep on doing it, don't we?
 - And when our sin comes crashing down on our heads, how helpful are all those "Job's counselors" that tell us how to become more righteous?
 - How useful is their advice?
 - Even if their advice was accurate, it didn't compel your obedience, did it?
 - Because here's the truth...our sin problem isn't caused by a lack of information...
 - The problem is, we lack the moral strength to put that knowledge to work in controlling our flesh's desires

- Which is why judging others' bad behavior is of no advantage in the fight to become more Christ-like
- So in vs.7-11, Jesus says we shouldn't be searching on earth for answers that can only come from Heaven
 - We all need godly counsel, yes, but even more, we need the spiritual strength to put that counsel into action in combating our sinful flesh
 - And that strength comes from above
 - So Jesus says, as you contemplate taking logs out of your eye or becoming a better witness to unbelievers, turn to your Father in Heaven for help, and He will give it to you every time
 - Ask for strength to overcome your sin, and you will have it
 - Seek for righteousness, and you will find it
 - Knock on the door, and the Lord will open and come to you and make His home with you
 - The "it" here is that missing ingredient in obedience, in living-out your righteousness
 - It's the difference between being a slave to sin and living a life pleasing to God
 - It's the power to crucify your flesh and to obey the Word of God
 - It's the mind of Christ, the knowledge of what pleases Him and leads us into righteousness
 - It's the alternative to judging others...it's the solution to taking the log out of your own eye
 - In short, it's the power of the Spirit
 - We get confirmation of that interpretation when we look at this same passage as recorded by Luke

Luke 11:9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Luke 11:10 "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

Luke 11:11 "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he?"

[Luke 11:12](#) “Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?”

[Luke 11:13](#) “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

- In this same passage, Jesus says that the thing we will receive when we ask is the Holy Spirit
 - The Spirit is the “it” we’re to ask for, the thing we are to seek
 - Jesus is talking about asking the Father to give us the power by His Spirit to silence our desire to judge others
 - And the grace to overcome our own inadequacies
- And that’s a request the Lord will grant to every believer 100% of the time
 - Because that’s like asking for more spinach
 - That’s like asking for more time to read the Bible
 - The Lord delights to hear His children asking for the grace and power to combat sin...you can’t ask for a better thing
 - And if you ask for that grace, if you seek for His righteousness, then you can be sure He will give you a very good gift indeed
 - He will give you the power of His Spirit
- Now as we reach this conclusion, let’s be careful about making another misinterpretation in the process
 - Jesus isn’t talking about *receiving* the Holy Spirit
 - All believers already have the Holy Spirit solely on the basis of our faith in Jesus
 - The Bible says that at the moment of our faith, we are born-again by the Spirit, and He comes to dwell in us permanently

[Rom. 5:1](#) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

[Rom. 5:2](#) through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

[Rom. 5:3](#) And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

[Rom. 5:4](#) and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

[Rom. 5:5](#) and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

- Notice, Paul says that all those who have been justified by faith have peace with God
 - And we have been introduced into His grace
 - And we will have tribulations, which build our spiritual character, leading to an unshakable hope in what is to come
- And then Paul says that our hope will not result in disappointment, because we already have God living in us by His Spirit
 - The deposit of the Holy Spirit in each believer is our proof that God will keep His Word to us
 - It's like earnest money we put down on a house contract
 - That earnest money is proof the buyer intends to follow through with the purchase of the house
 - And the Spirit living in us is evidence that God intends to keep His promises to resurrect us and bring us into glory one day
- So when Jesus tells us to ask and we will receive the Holy Spirit, He doesn't mean we obtain the Spirit, for we already have Him
 - He means we will receive an outpouring of the Spirit's wisdom and power to deal with the sin struggles we face
 - The Lord will grant to us the specific understanding we need to avoid falling into temptation yet again
 - Peter says in 2 Peter 2:9, that the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation
 - He knows how to get us out of those predicaments, and if you ask Him, He will share that knowledge with you
 - Think about how easy it is to buy something using Amazon 1-Click; sometimes, when we know we shouldn't buy something, it

just won't work – the Internet's down or something – what's God doing in that moment?

- Yet if we persist, we'll eventually get the Internet back again – God doesn't just wipe the slate clean and make it impossible for us to sin
- One of the best examples of this is in Genesis, in the story of Lot
 - Lot was in a bad place in the city of Sodom; he shouldn't have been there, he made a bad choice to go in
 - Once he was there, he got trapped by the culture
 - When it came time for that world to be judged, God knew who were His – the believers – Lot and members of his family
 - So He went in to rescue Lot – but He had to drag him out with angels and left him outside the city, in harm's way
 - And he had to flee to the mountains to escape what was coming
 - Once he was outside the city, it was no longer as much of a temptation – he could see it with a proper perspective and could then respond to God's call to escape
 - God moves our circumstances just enough that what we couldn't do on our own, we're now able to do – but we still have to make the right choice, we still have to respond
- Paul says this to the Church

1 Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

- Paul says God will provide you with a way of escape, which is an off-ramp that takes you away from the sin you are pursuing
- He will calm our lust, stop our jealousy, anger, fear or whatever is motivating us to act in unrighteous ways
- So when your resolve is failing, turn to your Father in Heaven and ask Him to strengthen you against yourself and He will respond

- Could it be this straightforward? Could it be that our struggles with sin have persisted because we haven't asked the Father to help us deal with them?
 - Ask yourself, when you are feeling pulled into the thing you know you shouldn't do or think or say, how often have you stopped in that moment and prayed for strength to avoid the sin?
 - Could it be that we've veered into sin so often and so easily, because we've never even asked the Father to help us stop?
 - And if so, could it be we actually like our sin? We prefer it some days?
- Jesus said don't judge others, deal with your own sin problem, but He didn't say deal with it by yourself
 - Again, if that worked, we wouldn't need Jesus and His Spirit
 - We wouldn't need the Word of God or the Body of Christ
 - We could just make ourselves righteous
 - But the flesh is powerful, and even though we want to live to please the Lord, we simply lack the power to do it on our own
 - We need the Father to grant us the grace to win that battle
 - And He is inclined to help us in that way, for it is a good thing to hate our sin
 - Jesus says ask the Father to help you fight your sin, and He will give it to you by His Spirit
 - Seek to live more righteously, and you will find the way by the Spirit
 - Knock, and as Jesus said

[John 14:23](#) Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.