Jesus on Asking and Receiving

Text: Matthew 7:7-12

Introduction: This morning we come to another well-known verse in the Bible.

Last week we looked at Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that you be not judged." We saw that followers of Jesus are clear-eyed about sin while extending God's mercy and grace to others.

This morning we come to Matthew 7:12, "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them." Or more popularly stated, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." We call this The Golden Rule.

But where does The Golden Rule come from? As we look at Matthew 7, we see that it doesn't appear in the Bible in isolation. It has a context. It's surrounded by other verses. And I think we'll see this morning that Jesus' teaching about how we treat other people in verse 12 is connected to what He says about our relationship with God in verses 7-11.

So, what does Jesus' teaching about asking, seeking, and knocking have to do with the Golden Rule? And what does God's goodness toward us have to do with the way we treat other people? Let's explore that context this morning.

We're in Matthew 7. Go ahead and turn there in your Bible if you haven't already. You can find it on page 762 in the black pew Bible in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, we invite you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read Matthew 7:7-12…Pray)

Our focus throughout this sermon series has been on discipleship. Christians are followers of Jesus. And in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us what it looks like for us to live our lives as Christians.

There are a lot of ideas out there about who Christians are and what Christians are supposed to do. Some of them true. Some of them misguided. Some of them just outright false. But there is no better place for us to go to learn how to live the Christian life than to Jesus Himself.

And here in Matthew 7:7-12, Jesus teaches us that **followers of Jesus receive God's goodness and extend His goodness to others.**

So, let's see first that…

I. Followers of Jesus receive God's goodness (Matt. 7:7-11).

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

A. With these words, Jesus teaches us that when we pray, God hears and answers our prayers.

1. **Jesus doesn't specify here in Matthew 7 that He is talking about prayer. He doesn't use the word "prayer." But that seems to be the most natural reading of what He says. When we pray, we ask God. We seek God and His intervention. We knock on heaven's door.**
2. **In addition, there is a parallel passage in Luke 11. There Jesus says something very similar to Matthew 7, and He explicitly connects it to prayer. There the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. He responded with a version of the model prayer. Then a parable concerning persistence in prayer. And then teaching that is very similar to our text this morning.**
3. **So, Jesus is teaching us that when we pray, God hears and answers our prayers.**
4. **I want you to just stop for a moment and think about that. What a wonderful truth for us to contemplate this morning! Our God. The Creator of everything. The sovereign Lord of the universe. The one who holds the whole world in His hands. The one who is omnipotent. All strength and power are His. The one who is omniscient. He knows all things, including what is good and right in every circumstance. This God. He invites you to ask. And it will be given to you. To seek. And you will find. To knock. And it will be opened to you.**
5. **Isn't that good news this morning? When we pray, this God hears and answers our prayers.**

6. **Now, it is true that some have taken this great promise from our great God and have so distorted it. So misused it. So perverted it. That they have developed a whole name-it-claim-it theology from it. That whatever you ask in faith, God is obligated to give it to you.**

B. **That is not what Jesus is teaching here. In fact, Jesus places some very clear qualifications on this wonderful truth that God hears and answers our prayers.**

1. **Qualification number one is that you must ask.**

   a. **"Ask, and it will be given to you," Jesus says.**
   b. **James says, "You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:2).**
   c. **We've already studied the model prayer in Matthew 6. And there we're taught to ask God for stuff. We pray for the advancement of God's kingdom. We pray for His daily provision. We pray for forgiveness. And we pray for protection.**
   d. **Jesus teaches us that we have to ask. We have to come to God in prayer and ask. Why? Because God wants us to understand our dependence on Him. That we are not sufficient in and of ourselves. We need God.**
   e. **So, I wonder this morning, in what ways do you need to experience the goodness of God in your life? Have you asked Him?**
   f. **Many of you know that I do a little bit of special education advocacy in the community. And one of the skills that we are always trying to figure out a way to teach kids is self-advocacy. This can be challenging for all students, but sometimes it is especially challenging for students with disabilities. They need help, but they don't always want to say that they need help. If they would communicate that they need help, there's usually someone who is willing and able to help them. But they have to communicate it.**
   g. **The illustration isn't perfect, because unlike teachers and school personnel, God already knows exactly what we need. But He wants us to ask because He wants us to understand our dependence on Him.**
   h. **So, qualification number one is that you must ask.**

2. **Qualification number two is that you must ask persistently.**

   a. **These verbs here—ask, seek, knock—are present imperatives. That means they are commands. But it also means that they are ongoing commands. Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking.**
   b. **In the parallel passage in Luke 11, Jesus talks about a friend who comes at midnight and asks a man for three loaves of bread. The friend is initially told to go away because it's late and everyone in the man's house is in bed. But the friend is persistent. And eventually, the man gets up and gives the friend what he needs. It's after telling that parable in Luke 11 that Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Lk. 11:9).**
   c. **Also in Luke, is one of my favorite parables in the Bible. It's found in Luke 18. It's the parable of the persistent widow. There was a widow who kept coming to the judge asking for justice. For a while he refused. But eventually, because the woman kept asking, he finally gave her what she wanted. And Jesus used this parable to teach the importance of being persistent in prayer.**
   d. **The point is that when we pray, it's not enough that we ask. We must persistently ask. What are you praying for in your life and in the lives of those you love, persistently?**

e. **Do you know what my most persistent prayer is? The salvation of my children. I want that more than anything else in the world. I need to be more faithful in prayer generally. But when it comes to praying for the salvation of my children, that is my most consistent prayer. Every single day. Usually multiple times a day. With Ashley. With the kids. On my own. I want nothing in this world more than for my kids to turn from their sin and place their trust in Jesus. So, I pray for it. Persistently.**
f. **Qualification number 1, we must ask. Qualification number 2, we must ask persistently. And…**

3. **Qualification number three is that you must ask expectantly.**

   a. **Jesus says, "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" (vs. 7-8).**
   b. **What is the purpose of asking? To receive. What is the purpose of seeking? To find. What is the purpose of knocking? To have the door opened. It doesn't make a lot of sense to ask, seek, and knock without expectation that you will receive, find, and have it opened.**
   c. **Now think about who it is that you are asking. God. The God of the universe. We come to Him expectantly. Because He's God.**
   d. **And not only is He God, but Jesus tells us here that when we ask God, we receive. When we seek, we find. When we knock, it is opened to us. So, pray expectantly.**
   e. **I struggle with this one in my own prayer life. Sometimes I'll ask for something from God in prayer because it's a good thing and I know that I should pray for it, but I don't REALLY expect to receive. I wonder if you have that same struggle in your life as well.**
   f. **Listen to what Jesus says… (Read vs. 9-11)**
   g. **Do you hear that? If you are in Christ, God is your Father. He loves you. He cares about you. He cares about your needs. He is concerned with every detail of your life.**
   h. **As a dad, I want my kids to ask me for things expectantly. Not because they're always going to receive whatever they ask for. But because I love them. And I want them to know and believe that I love them. That if they ask me for a good thing, they will receive it. Because I love to give good gifts to my children.**
   i. **So, qualification number 1, you have to ask. Number 2, ask persistently. Number 3, ask expectantly. And…**

4. **Qualification number 4, realize that God doesn't give bad gifts.**

   a. **He won't give you a stone. He won't give you a serpent.**
   b. **Look again at the text. (Read vs. 9-10)**
   c. **Kent Hughes says that "the illustration is deliberately absurd. In the Galilean setting for the giving of the Sermon on the Mount, the people were familiar with the flat stones by the shore that looked exactly like their round, flat cakes of bread and with fish (more likely eels) that looked very much like snakes" (Hughes, 241).**
   d. **Now, imagine giving your son a stone instead of bread. Or a snake instead of a fish. No one would be so ignorant or cruel.**
   e. **Last Sunday at our CPR training, Susan Schubel had this bag of strange candy that she had gotten from one of her students. And she was passing around the candy for people to try. The candy had a little bit of a funky taste to it that some people found really off-putting. Well, my daughter Addie decided that she was going to bring some home to trick her brothers. So, when she got home, they were out in the front yard playing. And what did she say to**

them? "Hey guys, what some candy?" And of course, how does a 6-year-old and a 8-year-old respond to that question? Yes, of course we want some candy. So, Addie gleefully gave them each a piece. They popped it in their mouths. And almost immediately, their faces squinched up, and they were looking for a place to spit out the candy. The point is that while a malevolent big sister might give you something bad, God will not.

f. And this is good news because sometimes we actually ask for things that are bad for us. Have you ever had a situation in your life where you prayed and asked God for something, didn't receive it, and then later you were thankful you didn't receive it?

g. See, my sons thought they wanted the candy. They lacked understanding. They lacked perspective. They didn't really want the candy. They just thought they did.

h. The same thing is true in our lives, isn't it? We can't see the full picture like God can. We think we want something. But we don't know that it's actually bad for us. The good news is that God does know. And He doesn't give bad gifts.

i. Can you imagine the pressure we would feel in prayer if God always gave us what we ask for? That would actually be terrible. If God was just a genie granting us our every wish. We would ask for and receive so much stuff that is actually bad for us. Thank God we have a good Father who won't give us a stone. Who won't give us a serpent. He loves us. And He won't give us what is bad for us.

j. Which brings us to the final qualification…

5. Qualification number 5, realize that God only gives good gifts.

a. (Read vs. 11)

b. God only gives good gifts. Our good Father knows our every need. He loves us. He cares for us. And He delights to give us good gifts.

c. My kids love to tell me what they want for their birthday or Christmas. And sometimes they'll give me this long never-ending list that I have to try to sort through to figure out what to actually give them. Sometimes there are things on the list that I know as their dad they won't actually want once they get it. Other times there are things that aren't on the list that I know they would really enjoy. So, the list is good. I'm glad they make it. I'm glad they bring it to me because they know I love them and want to give them good gifts. But I don't just follow the list exactly. I use my knowledge and understanding as their dad to give them good gifts that they will actually enjoy.

d. Goshen, God is such a better Father than I am. Unlike me, His knowledge and understanding is infinite. He knows what is good for you infinitely better than I ever could for my children. I might make a mistake and give my kids something that is actually not good. God will never do that. He will always give you what is good.

So, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. Followers of Jesus receive God's goodness. And…

II. Followers of Jesus extend God's goodness (Matt. 7:12).

(Read vs. 12)

A. This principle is often referred to as The Golden Rule.

1. Quarles points out that this name, "Golden Rule," dates to at least as early as the end of the Middle Ages (Quarles, 306).

2. He writes, "Contrary to popular opinion, this name was not inspired by the preciousness of this important principle. This name relates to accounts claiming that the Emperor Alexander Severus had Matt. 7:12 inscribed in gold on the wall of his throne room" (Quarles, 306).

3. **You and I may not have a throne room to inscribe it on, but we would do well to inscribe it on our hearts.**
4. **(Read vs. 12)**

B. **Notice the word "so" at the beginning of verse 12. In some translations it's "therefore."**

1. **This connects verse 12 with what comes before it.**
2. **Because God the Father selflessly gives to meet the needs of His children, disciples should also seek to treat others the way they want to be treated (Quarles, 306).**
3. **But it also connects verse 12 to everything we've seen since Matthew 5:17. There Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).**
4. **And here He says… (Read vs. 12)**
5. **This is the kind of righteousness that Jesus requires of His followers.**
6. **This is similar to Matthew 22 where Jesus was asked, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" To which Jesus responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:36-40).**
7. **I love what Sinclair Ferguson writes about Matthew 7:12. He says, "Jesus' statement is…simplifying. Here he gives us a summary of the law and the prophets. He does not mean that because we know this text, we can ignore all others. Rather, he is suggesting that this counsel gives us in a nutshell the principle that is expounded and illustrated in a thousand and more ways in the rest of Scripture ('the law and the prophets' being representative of the whole Old Testament). For Jesus, the word of God is not an impossible complex of rules and regulations placed on men's shoulders as a heavy burden. Rather, it is the outworking of this principle of love. Grasp this, and everything falls into place. That is his point. The Christian life is indeed demanding, but in essence, its principle is simple. It is knowing the grace of God working so powerfully in your heart that you are freed from the mastery of sin and self over your life. You can now serve others and bring blessing to them as the Lord has brought blessing to you. This is the kind of clear-sightedness that arises from living in the light of the judgement of God your Father" (Ferguson, 138).**

Conclusion: In other words, **followers of Jesus receive God's goodness and extend His goodness to others.**

There's one more thing that I want to draw your attention to as we close.

Chuck Quarles argues that the appeal in Matthew 7:7 is an appeal to our gracious God for entrance into the kingdom (Quarles, 299). If that is true, the instruction to "ask, seek, and knock" is really an evangelistic invitation. Jesus invited His hearers to ask for entrance into God's kingdom.

Ask for God's kingdom, and it will be given to you. Seek God's kingdom, and you will find it. Knock on the gate of the kingdom, 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.

Goshen, this is the good news of the gospel! No one who seeks entrance to the kingdom through Jesus will be denied. All will be granted access.

Maybe you're here this morning and you're not yet a follower of Jesus. You've not yet entered into God's kingdom. It's only because you haven't asked. It's only because you haven't sought. It's only because you haven't knocked.

Would you ask Him today? Would you seek Him today? Would you knock on heaven's gate today?

For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.