

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Well And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

Ask And It Shall Be Given To You

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Matthew 7:7-11

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Matthew 7:7-11. We’ve been taking a long, slow walk through the Sermon on the Mount – and while I was away last week I had the opportunity to preach 5 further messages on the Sermon on the Mount – and I must tell you, it is a blessing to be immersed in this Divine teaching. I think that we evangelicals have so emphasized the SAVING WORK of Jesus over the last 20 years that we have NEGLECTED to a great extent the SAVING WORD of Jesus. But we need that too! In a world as filled with deception and deceit as ours is, we desperately need to hear the voice of heaven – do you agree with that? In our first week in this series I quoted John Stott as saying:

“The Sermon on the Mount has a unique fascination. It seems to present the quintessence of the teaching of Jesus. It makes goodness attractive. It shames our shabby performance. It engenders dreams of a better world.”¹

I like that phrase: dreams of a better world.

¹ John Stott, *The Message Of The Sermon On The Mount* in *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 9.

There is a better world out there, do you know that? There is. And in this passage Jesus tells us something we need to understand if we are to enter into it.

I hope you have your Bible open now to Matthew 7. I'll be reading from verse 7 through to verse 11. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

“**Ask**, and it will be given to you; **seek**, and you will find; **knock**, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one 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!” (Matthew 7:7–11 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

This passage is built upon THREE OVERLAPPING COMMANDS: Ask, seek, knock. They are all present active imperatives in the original Greek meaning that they are things we must KEEP DOING. Jesus is telling his disciples that they must KEEP ASKING, they must KEEP SEEKING, they must KEEP KNOCKING and if they do, then finally they shall HAVE, they shall FIND and they shall ENTER.

Few people are better than Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones when it comes to identifying and summarizing the main point of a passage. He says here:

“Our Lord is simply at pains to emphasize one thing, that is that we are to show persistence, perseverance, importunity.”²

We don't use that word “importunity” a great deal anymore, do we? It's a good word though, it means: “persistence, especially to the point of annoyance.”³

² Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 461.

³ Definition from Oxford Languages.

I like that. If you grew up with the KJV of the Bible then you remember the parable Jesus told about the guy who had visitors show up at his house late one night after all the shops had closed. He wanted to set a meal before them but he didn't have any supplies. So he went over to his neighbour's house and asked if he could borrow some bread. The neighbour said: "Come back in the morning you knucklehead. I'm already in bed with my family!"

Do you remember the punchline of that parable? Jesus said:

I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his **importunity** he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. ⁹ And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Luke 11:8–9 KJV)

That's importunity. It is PERSISTENCE, even to the point of annoyance. That's what Jesus is calling for here.

So, if we zoom out for a second and look at the big picture here in the Sermon on the Mount, at the end of chapter Jesus was talking about being SINGULAR with respect to your allegiance, ambition and FOCUS. Now here in the early part of chapter 7 he is talking about being DOGGED in your pursuit of the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. And if you throw in the first part of chapter 7 which Scott covered last week, he is telling us to do all of that without being harsh, censorious or judgmental – that's a tall order!

Be singular. Be persistent. But don't be a jerk. That's next level! That's Jesus raising the bar again, isn't it?

So, zooming back in, here we see Jesus making one fairly straightforward point that I want to dig into fairly aggressively today. He is saying that **PERSISTENCE IN FAITH ALWAYS PAYS OFF IN THE END.**

The Principle: Persistence in faith always pays off in the end

Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking and YOU WILL receive, you will find, you will eventually enter in.

That's it – that's the BIG IDEA in the passage; and it is a BIG IDEA. It's a BIG ASK actually and thankfully, there are some encouragements embedded in this text that should motivate us to respond appropriately. Let me point those out to you.

It makes sense to persevere in faith:

First of all, according to Jesus, and in line with the Biblical worldview, it makes sense to persevere in faith because, while we may have to pass through many dangers, toils and snares, the ULTIMATE future is assured.

1. Because the ultimate future is assured

If you have your Bible in your hands just flip all the way back, to the left, to the very beginning. Look at Genesis 1. Let me give you some of the highlights. Genesis 1:1 says:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

So according to the Bible the world is not an accident. It has a Creator. It has a Lord.

I saw a news story the other day that had a fairly alarming subtitle. It said:

If a star flying past our solar system moved Neptune's orbit by just 0.1 per cent, it could eventually cause the other planets to smash into one another or get thrown out of the solar system entirely⁴

⁴ <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2327042-a-passing-star-shifting-neptunes-orbit-could-wreck-the-solar-system/>

Apparently, they've done some simulations that suggest that if a large mass object were to nudge Neptune out of its orbit just a little the whole solar system would basically explode. That sounds bad! And if the universe were a giant cosmic accident subject to random events like that, then I would be very worried indeed.

But I'm not. Because it's not. The Bible begins with the assurance that this universe has a Creator and a Lord. That's good to know.

Then drop your eyes down to verse 27 – but as you do, notice all the things you are passing over. You are passing over a description of how God carefully and thoughtfully created this world so as to support all life and human life in particular. Now verse 27:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 ESV)

There we learn that humans beings are special. They are related to God in a way that the other animals are not. We are ROYALTY. We are ruling creatures and God has plans for us.

Good to know.

Now look at chapter 2 verses 9-15:

⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Genesis 2:9–15 ESV)

So in the beginning we have a GOOD GOD who makes a GOOD WORLD who puts SPECIAL PEOPLE in it who are precious to him and he gives them all that they need to live healthy, meaningful, prosperous and bountiful lives.

Ok. That's how the Bible begins.

Now, flip all the way over the end of your Bible. Turn right. When you hit the leather flap turn back a few pages – but as you go notice what you are passing over here. You are passing over TWO MAIN STORIES. The story of our FALL away from God into sin and the story of our SALVATION – back to God, OUT OF SIN. The hero of that story, of course, is Jesus.

Now look at where the Bible ends. Park yourself at Revelation 21. Look at verses 1-4 of chapter 21:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:1–4 ESV)

What do you see there? You see the universe RESTORED. Everything is back the way it should be! The curse and stain of sin is removed, there is no more death, no more disease, no more dying, no more pain, no more tears, no more mourning – for the former things have passed away. The in between time. The time of sorrows. The valley of the shadow of death – it's all gone now! It is a memory – and all that remains is US and GOD. Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man!

Just as it was in the beginning!

Now, drop your eyes down to verses 22-26:

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (Revelation 21:22–26 ESV)

So there is light, there is health, there is community, there is industry, there is prosperity, there is ABUNDANCE! The world is GOOD again and God is there.

Now, drop your eyes one last time to chapter 22 verses 1-4:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. (Revelation 22:1–4 ESV)

The river is there! The tree of life is there! No longer will anything be accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in our midst. We will see the Lord, know the Lord, serve the Lord, worship the Lord and belong to the Lord mind, body and soul – thanks be to God!

That's the future! And the future is already written. You're reading it right now. It isn't in jeopardy. It isn't in process. Nothing about that picture is subject to alteration or change.

That is the future!

It is like the beginning only better. It is every bad thing forgotten and every good thing restored. So everything really does work out in the end. That's the Biblical worldview! And that's why the Apostle Paul could say things like:

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28 ESV)

It's true! Now, he's not saying you won't suffer, he isn't saying you won't get sick, he isn't saying you won't ever lose your job, he isn't saying that none of your children will die in car accidents and none of your spouses will die of cancer. He isn't saying ANYTHING about our experiences in the here and now – he is just stating the obvious. He is just talking like a man who has read the end of the story and he is saying – whatever you have to go through – if you keep going, if you pray, pursue and persevere then eventually, everything will work out for the good in the end, for those who are called according to his purpose.

That's what Jesus is saying here – and the Apostles believed it!

The Apostle James said:

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. (James 5:14–15 ESV)

That is very carefully worded! That is **WORDED** like you would expect it would be worded by a man who had sat under the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Notice what James **DOESN'T SAY**. He doesn't say the word “now”; he doesn't say the word “immediately”. He doesn't say: if the elders pray for you and you receive that in faith, you will be healed **NOW**. You will be healed **IMMEDIATELY!**

Nope.

He couldn't say that – he heard Jesus talking about PERSEVERANCE. He heard Jesus preaching the long game.

But he knew the future.

He knew the end and so he knew the truth. You pray that prayer in faith and you will be healed. You will be raised up. Eventually. Maybe tomorrow, maybe a month from now, or maybe on the last day – but it will happen. He will take you by the hand and raise you up to health, vitality and newness – he will do it! Because everyone who ASKS – RECEIVES. Everyone who seeks finds. Everyone who knocks eventually enters into the eternal kingdom of God – praise the Lord!

Persevering in faith makes perfect sense, because the ultimate future is assured.

And then secondly, persevering in faith makes sense as well, because the immediate present is a test.

2. Because the immediate present is a test

The Apostles understood that too. James said:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2–4 ESV)

According to James, life is like a journey that passes through many difficulties, trials and tribulations – but that's a good thing because those are the very things that allow us to develop and strengthen our faith!

That idea of life as a TESTING JOURNEY lies of course at the heart of the book Pilgrim's Progress, written by the Baptist pastor John Bunyan. There is a wonderful scene in the early part

of that story where Christian – the main character, creatively named – is fleeing the City of Destruction on his way to the Celestial City and he spends some time in the House of Interpreter. Most people who study the book believe that the House of Interpreter represents the church generally, but more specifically the ministry of the church to new believers. In the house of Interpreter, Christian is shown a variety of visions which are given to EXPLAIN the nature of life and faith. One of those visions reflects precisely what we are speaking about here. Bunyan tells the story this way. He says:

“Then the Interpreter took Christian to a pleasant place with a beautiful, stately palace. Upon the upper balcony, several people, clothed in gold, walked.

“May we go in?” Christian asked.

The Interpreter led him toward the door of the palace. A large group of men stood around the door, wanting to go in but not having the courage to go farther. Off to the side a man sat at a table with a book and an inkwell, waiting to take the name of any who entered. In the doorway stood many armored men resolved to hurt any who attempted to enter the palace.

A bold man approached the man at the table and said, “Write down my name, sir.”

With that the bold man drew his sword, donned his helmet, and fiercely fought his way through the armed men at the door. Finally he prevailed and entered the palace. Inside, a pleasant voice sang: “Come in, come in: Eternal glory you shall win.” And the man was clothed in fine garments.

“I know the meaning of that,” said Christian.⁵

I wonder if we do?

⁵ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress Updated In Today's Language* (USA: Barbour Publishing Inc., 2010), 21-22.

Christian understood that the vision was saying that if we want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven we have to fight through some difficulties – we have to PRESS THROUGH some trials and tribulations. He understood that. Jesus understood that too, he said:

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.” (Matthew 11:12 ESV)

Ever since John the Baptist announced that the Kingdom of Heaven had drawn near, Jesus says, people of faith have been fighting their way into it. They have been PRESSING THROUGH! They have been STRUGGLING! They have been FIGHTING! That’s the way it is supposed to be! That’s the way life has been designed! Who do you think EMPLOYS those men who guard the entrance? They are on the Master’s payroll. Their swords are real but dull. They aim to hurt but not to kill. They are there to deter ALL but the people of persevering faith. They are there to test your LOVE and ALLEGIANCE.

Do you see that?

I know what that means, Christian said.

Again, I wonder if we do. John Bunyan, who wrote the story, understood this very well. He said simply that the Christian life is a WAR. It is a war you might die in, but if you keep on fighting it – it is a war that you can never lose.

Why? Because fighting on IS saving faith. That’s what the Apostles said:

“For we have come to share in Christ, **if indeed** we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” (Hebrews 3:14 ESV)

The immediate present is supposed to be hard. There is supposed to be pain. There is supposed to be confusion. There is supposed to be loss. There is supposed to be delay – because it is only in

pressing through those things that faith is born and refined and displayed. So keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking. Because that is what saving faith is.

And then lastly, persevering in faith makes sense as well, because God is altogether good, loving and wise.

3. Because God is altogether good, loving and wise

Look at verses 9-11 – hopefully you have found your way back to Matthew 7. Jesus says:

Or which one 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! (Matthew 7:9–11 ESV)

That’s the ultimate grounding for this persevering faith that Jesus calling for here – the fact that God is a good, loving and wise Heavenly Father. That is the goal of our earthly Pilgrimage – HE is the goal of our earthly pilgrimage. We are on our way to the Father’s House!!

That’s the end goal of the Gospel – Jesus talked about that all the time. In John 14 he said:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:1–3 ESV)

In my Father’s House – that’s where you are going – that is the world that is out there waiting for us in Christ. Jesus is the forerunner. He goes first. He opens a way. He gets things read – and Jesus said:

“And you know the way to where I am going.” (John 14:4 ESV)

Do you remember the way? Jesus said:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 ESV)

So keep going! Jesus is the WAY – the FATHER is the destination, did you notice that? We’re going to the Father’s House! And it is good. It is good, because he is good. So keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking and everything good will be given to you at the end of this journey.

The Christian keeps going BECAUSE of WHO IS WAITING for them at the end of the journey.

D.A. Carson says here:

“The child with the kind, gentle and firm father does not fear to ask him for things, but deep down he enjoys the assurance that his father will not give him something which greater wisdom and experience assess as not in the child’s best interests.”⁶

Isn’t that good? There is such a liberty in prayer and in faith when we begin to assimilate this perspective. We ask for something and we can trust that because God is good he will give us a good and wise answer. The answer might be YES. It might be YES NOW or it might be YES LATER. Or it might be no – not because he doesn’t love us, but because he does love us and he is wise and he knows things we don’t and so he gives us something that is ULTIMATELY BETTER.

But he always hears us. He always loves us. And he is always kind.

So we pray on. We keep asking. We keep seeking. We keep knocking - because in the end, we want to see the Father.

That is faith. That is hope. That is glory – thanks be to God!

⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition Of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 110.

Let's pray together.