

Good morning, we are continuing our consideration of this section in Christ's sermon that concerns the blessing of prayer and the Golden Rule. In reading this section I can't help but think of how brazen, or how light hearted people are with the teaching that closes this little section, that there is a path to life and a path to destruction. Just think of two songs that have carried over into other generations for their popularity, who remembers Billy Joel's "Only the good die young"? Great tune, horrible content. Here is what he says in one of the verses, "They say there's a heaven for those who will wait. Some say it's better but I say it ain't. I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints. The sinners are much more fun. You know that only the good die young. I tell ya, Only the good die young. Only the good die young." (<http://performingsongwriter.com/only-good-die-young/>) Of course there is also, Highway to Hell by AC/DC, which is a song that absolutely agrees with Jesus' teaching that people would rather tackle the easy road now. So what else can we learn from this section? Well, I think it would be helpful to recap where we were last week just for a moment, so that we can continue to build our understanding of this passage.

Review: Last week we considered the mastery of Christ's teaching. We saw how unified his teaching was not only with the Old Testament but with a life pattern that exemplified the life we would have expected, not just needed, from God's Messiah. Jesus is not simply teaching some theory. He is teaching us from the wealth of experiences He has as a man, and through the power of being God. That lesson is communicated through natural revelation and special revelation; what I can learn about God and man and my responsibilities to both, and what God teaches me specifically through some specific means. Then we made this connection, that prayer is not only a tool that sustains us through the storms of life, but prayer becomes my navigating tool through the hardships. Since God wants us to prove His sustaining hand to us, and God wants to give us the ability to speak of His sustaining grace from a point of experience, not just theory, God leads us into storms so that we can PROVE God and His word. It is a lesson for us and others, but He does so only by providing the unbreakable and effectual tethers of prayer, His Word, and Himself as our Father. Let's now consider the main point of the sermon, which if we are following from last week will be point number 2. Point number 1, the mastery of Christ's teaching, point number 2, the substance of Christ's teaching.

.II. The Substance of Christ's Teaching. Jesus communicates 3 imperatives and follows each with three absolutes. Ask, seek, and knock. These are all in the imperative mood in Greek. The imperative mood was the common means of saying something as a command. The way this sequence falls almost gives us a sense of movement. It resonates with me as it is a common occurrence in our house to hear the phrase, anyone seen my keys? It is followed up by differing levels of urgency depending upon the appointments that seem to be in the balance. These three commands are not set against the backdrop of mindless religiosity, which is how prayer is often viewed. They are coupled with the promise of success. **Ask, seek, knock, because you will succeed.**

But why do we succeed with this tool? Important here is one of the most amazing truths in the entire Bible, and that is to **know God as Father**. It is a truth that is not spoken of often in the O.T., especially in light of the frequency with which the N.T. does speak of God as Father. It is a truth that underscores a **familiar relationship** with none other than God. We are not just some distant relationship with Him. God gives us the nearness of being our Father. Just think about the way a good relationship with your parents informs how you act with them. The image of children jumping into arms, wrestling and testing their strength, or a score of other activities that seem to naturally be pointed towards dad, these are all intended with this image. Now I realize that this is a hard thing for some people because their father figures were either non existent, or so broken that they could wish they had never known their fathers. Jesus, by use of this illustration of provision, makes clear that all the good that is intended in a calling like fatherhood is perfectly expressed by our Heavenly Father towards those who are part of His family. He is not some impersonal force. He is not someone we will never see. The natural revelation of fatherhood, that is what we can understand in nature from fatherhood, and the special revelation surrounding the ideas of fatherhood, all teach us of the hope of a deep, present, and tangible relationship. God supplies that to His children. We will see Him as we are seen, Paul tells us. We may have trouble seeing Him in the midst of storms, like a child who is holding their mother's hand in a crowd cannot see her mother's face fully, but the child rests in the fact that their mother holds them safely. **Prayer, for those who follow Christ, is a beckoning to the one who oversees and leads the family. It is a beckoning to our Father in heaven. It is His nature to answer and provide. It is His duty to answer and provide.** The theology is underscored by Paul with Timothy. **2 Timothy 2:10-13 (ESV): 11 The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.** God will answer the prayers of His children because it is His nature to do so. He cannot stop being our Father. This is such a mercy my friends! But if I may underscore this again, I am assuming by this that we understand that He cannot be our Father if we are on the broad path to destruction, as **Matthew** highlights in his teaching in **verse 12-14**.

But what does that mean for us? Is any prayer that which God will answer and provide for? Well this is where God being Father is really informing. Remember that Jesus was that our Heavenly Father gives "**good things**" to those who ask (**verse 11**). I can expect from God any answer that is good. I have to ask the question, **what fits under the category of good?** Well this

section is informed by the fact that everything Jesus teaches upholds the moral, ethical, and didactic structure of the Law and Prophets. I cannot ask for something contrary to what He has already revealed as contrary to who He is as a Holy being. Further, I know that as a father, and as my creator, that He has hardwired certain perspectives and abilities in my being. **Asking for things that are pertinent to our created design, and His moral order fit the structure that moves God.** I am informed as to what is good as well in the way that Jesus focuses our attention towards others in the Golden Rule, and by the fact that there is a right and wrong path. So can I ask for a Ferrari and believe that God is going to give it to me? Can I ask for a plane and think God will be pleased to provide that? The answer lies in why you are asking for it in the first place. How will you use it? What is its intended purpose, and what is its place in your heart. Has God created you to function within that realm? Is it an idol, or is it an instrument through which you can praise God? James puts it like this, **James 4:2-3 (ESV): You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.** When we function the way God has designed us to function, which includes asking for things in harmony with that design, **God is pleased to answer that request, especially when it comprehends the ultimate mandate of the Christian to go and make disciples.** There are people here who race cars and try to be a witness in that realm. To state the obvious, you have to have a race car to race cars. It is not out of the sphere of an honorable request to ask God for the car you need to enjoy racing, and to have the opportunity to share the gospel! Several years ago we had a missionary come through who lives in Alaska. He had a plane that served him as a tool to aid people and bring them the gospel. Here is the question that has sprung to my mind and I pondered this, **when was the last time that I prayed an ostentatious prayer to God that met a design in my person, the supply of blessing for other, and the need to make disciples? When was the last time you prayed something like that?**

But I need to show you **how Matthew proves this teaching from Jesus to us.** First we know that Jesus was marked by prayer. So we know that Jesus is praying for the ministry that God has placed before Him. He is asking for the wisdom and power, in accordance to His responsibility as the Jesus Christ, and to serve the requests that people will have. Now consider this quick synopsis of the passages surrounding this sermon. **Matthew 8:1-17** Jesus heals a case of leprosy, a paralyzed man, Peter's mother-in-law, and those are just the highlights, **Matthew 8:16** just says, they brought many who were oppressed by demons, and He healed the sick. Matthew doesn't stop recounting Christ's work of healing those who came to Him until the end of **chapter 9.**

But the text gives us another layer that helps us understand the person and work of Christ. **First,** Matthew intimates what John declares in John 1. Jesus is the **Word of God** and so His **words have distinct authority** and must be heeded, **Matthew 7:29-29.** **Second** Jesus has authority over **disease,** **Matthew 8:1-17.** Matthew then **pauses** and presents the question we must all ask in the form of a story, are we willing to follow Christ more than the need to be comfortable? **Matthew 8:18-22.** **Third** Jesus has authority over **creation,** **Matthew 8:23-27.** **Fourth,** Jesus has authority over **evil spirits,** **Matthew 8:28-34.** Matthew **pauses** to show how the locals responded to Jesus Christ, they saw His authority, but they didn't want that kind of power around them, so they begged Him to leave their region. **Fifth,** Jesus has authority over **sin,** **Matthew 9:1-8.** Jesus teaches His authority over sin by challenging those around Him with a question, "**which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or rise and walk? But that you may know. That the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins...rise and walk.**" Matthew **pauses** with the miracles and immediately follows with a story about those who followed Christ and those who did not. First He challenges the Pharisees for not following Him, and then He challenges the disciples of John for being old wine skins. **Sixth,** Jesus has authority over death. He then heals a blind man who recognized His authority as the rightful heir to David's throne, and He heals a mute man and Matthew concludes his this theme of Christ's authority by recapitulating Christ's work of healing and preaching, and then presenting this command towards His followers, to pray for laborers in His harvest, (**Matthew 9:35-38**) Here is the question that permeates this whole sermon, what is Jesus showing with this teaching of power and authority and prayer? He is showing us that if He can answer all these needs that I have, and desire, **what I really need, and what I really should desire is Him, and to love what He loves. Dear friends, what are you doing with Jesus?** Do you love what He loves? His expression of the Golden Rule is summarized in **John 3:16.** Do you love what He loves? This passage shows us that He was a friend of sinners, not a lover of sin. Do you love what He loves? Paul tells us that Jesus loves His Bride, the Church. What is that Church? It is what every believer has been made part of when we were born again to a living hope. Look, you can't be part of every church and really display your love in a sacrificial way, so how are you expression you love for Christ in sacrificing for an loving the people that make up this place? Matthew proves the teaching of Christ in prayer and the Golden Rule by recounting how He gladly answers prayer, and ultimately in seeing Christ give His life a ransom for many on the cross.

But I need to raise one more issue, how do Christians deal with unanswered prayer? Here are some biblical answers. **Luke 18:6** and **James 5,** we are to be steadfast knowing that God will answer in His time. But we must also remember what we spoke about last week. When we deal with prayers that aren't being answered in regard to suffering that we are experiencing, we cannot ignore that God is ultimately in control of those things, and will use them for our crafting and His glory. **John 9** a man born blind, **Exodus 4:11** God tells Moses that He creates the mute and the blind and the deaf. Paul tells us in **2 Corinthians 11** that God used a thorn in the flesh, some physical hardship, that kept Paul humble and dependent upon Christ's strength. My friends, the suffering that Christians bear, seen most significantly in God's patience with answered prayer, or refusal of

answering that prayer, can only mean that God wants something good to come to pass through that suffering. Suffering is a mantle, a calling, for the Christian, that allows us to prove God's power in every area of life. He will always answer according to the work He wants to accomplish in us. So that question becomes again, will I follow Jesus, especially knowing that it will cost me? In a moment we will participate in the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a declaration of Jesus embracing suffering so that we might know God as Father. What will we embrace that others might know the same from our life and voice? **Romans 8:18**, the sufferings of this present life cannot be compared to the glories that will be revealed in heaven. Amen.