

Ask, and It Shall Be Given

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"
—Matt. 7:7

THESE are wonderful words we have read together this morning, living thoughts from the lips of the Lord Jesus.

The 7th chapter of Matthew is the last of 3 recording what is commonly called the "Sermon on the Mount", a singular discourse, its beauty unmatched in any other literature—in fact no other teaching anywhere is comparable with it.

It requires but little imagination to reconstruct that scene. At this time, there followed him great multitudes of people (Matt. 4:25). Seeing them, he ascends a convenient hillside and with his disciples gathered around him, he speaks from nature's platform. The occasion was doubtless marked by peace and serenity . . . and—

"He opened his mouth and taught them."

They were gathered to him for various reasons, but in the main it was the power of his words. And in general—

"The people were very attentive to hear him."

He spake astonishing things with authority, a **divine** authority—

"Never man spake like this man."

His teaching was altogether foreign to accepted rules—quite contrary to the tuition which is calculated to fit one for worldly success — even **antagonistic** to the common spirit, the spirit which animates the natural man.

It was on a new plane altogether, one which rested, not on man's wisdom, but on the lofty principles of the divine estimate of things.

Lofty as was the tone of this teaching, it has been described as a "revelation of Christ's own character . . . his life translated into language," and we know how literally true this is for the principles he here enunciates were the controlling force of his life.

There are 2 thoughts from this:

1. Would that our teaching could be a reflex of our own walk and conversation.
2. If we would only narrowly observe and apply the findings of the Master in these 3 chapters, we would not be far from the Kingdom of God

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"Blessed are the poor in spirit—they that mourn—the meek—they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness—the merciful—the pure in heart—the peacemakers."

These 7 elements of the character beautiful—and godly—are wrought into the fabric of the Lord's message and serve both as an introduction and a basis.

"Blessed" . . . the word as here used represents, we are told, the possession of present happiness, a **state of being**—rather than indicating the **reception** of blessing by the favoured.

The reason for their happy state is given, variously, because they have so many desirable things in prospect—

"They shall be comforted . . .

"They shall inherit the earth.

"They shall see God . . .
"They shall be called the children of God."
—and the things God has laid up for His children are so great they are beyond our present comprehension. But for now—
"Ye are the salt of the earth."

If ever words implied responsibility they are these.

Christ's followers were to exercise a sweetening and purifying influence in a world that was otherwise almost entirely corrupt

In the face of a universal degenerate trend, they are to constitute an arresting and freshening power. So much different therefore (from the surrounding and daily contacted **kosmos**) is the direction of their life and walk, that the contrast is apparent and the subtle influence works . . . or else, "the salt has lost its savour"—only a useless, displeasing, insipidity is left, and it is due to be "cast out."

The force of the figure can be equally applied to the church apostate or the individual believer of worldly trend.

Are we going with the world, or are we combating its destroying inroads, its insidious putrefaction by the saline properties of the Word: not only taught, but self-observed; not only inculcated, but lived, one's-self. . .

"Except your righteousness shall exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (v.20).

Profession — even an outward performance—is empty and vain, of itself.

In the remainder of ch. 5, he lays down the Royal Law, which we paraphrase thus:

"It was said by them of old time that thou shalt not do this or that serious act . . . very good . .

"But I say unto you that **much more** is required of you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is Heaven."

This follows through in a series of precepts from the warning (v. 22)—

"He that is angry with his brother without a cause is in danger of the judgment."

To verse 44—

"I say unto you, love your enemies."

"LOVE YOUR ENEMIES"

It is forbidden that we agree with their way, or metaphorically pat them on the back and say, "You are all right." But, we are to hold no vengeful feelings, and are to be **ready to do good to them**, as to all, desiring their personal welfare . . . so imitating God, Who is "not willing that any should perish."

It is a state of the heart and mind that is enjoined—for "as a man thinketh, so is he."

Purity of mind, with self- abnegation and genial beneficence of character, are laid down as necessary attributes of the "children" of a gracious God, those striving towards God-likeness—

"Be ye therefore PERFECT, even as your Father who is in heaven, is PERFECT."

Impossible?—No. If we seek it now, it will become a fact in the great consummation. If we do not, it will not come to us

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"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven."

The drift of this is so plain, its scriptural logic cannot be avoided.

If the satisfaction of publicity is what we are seeking, that is all we will get, like the hypocrites here mentioned. "Verily I say unto you, they HAVE their reward"—and if we have it now, we cannot receive it later.

We want to be among those whom the Father will presently reward openly, do we not? Ostentation and display in any form is evidently very distasteful to Him, and if we are given to it, we had better "take heed."

Of course, we like our brethren to realize our readiness and good will in this matter, and we know that cheerful acts of mercy are frequently spontaneous in the generous minded . . . but . . .

Let us not sound the trumpet: Deliberate advertising betrays a woeful lack of faith . . . Our Father "seeth in secret" whatever good we do—or evil.

The principle bears directly on all our behaviour and our motives. It is a question of our faith, whether it is real or not, and where our heart is—it is a case of either a plus or a minus sign on our final account, a credit or a debit. V. 19 quotes the minus and v. 20 the plus—

Treasures where they will vanish, or—
Treasures where they will be safe.

There need only be one reason for not laying up treasures on earth: the whole system is to pass away as a vesture folded up and removed.

We are careful about many passing things while still admitting that anxious thought about temporal things is really out of place with us, and inconsistent with true faith. We could very profitably transfer more of this care to the things of the Kingdom, seeking first of all the Kingdom of God. He knows our needs and will take care of the rest.

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"Judge not, that ye be not judged."

A solemn injunction about which there has been controversy leading to wrong conceptions.

One of the highest faculties given to man is that of judging—reasoning from evidence and arriving at studied decisions from fact. The appeal of the Scriptures is to that faculty.

This very chapter tacitly accepts the ground that it is a rightful possession, and moreover, that we must exercise it in summing up other individuals (vs. 15-16)—

"Beware of false prophets . . . ye shall know them by their fruits."

This last verse cannot therefore refer to the process generally, which is frequently very sincerely and also prayerfully, undertaken. It must refer to the misuse of it in the predisposition to condemn without consideration of fact or knowledge of motive, judging unnecessarily, judging motives.

The extreme is that carping and cavilling spirit that hastens to the condemnation of others but is blind to its own faults. The context supports the view in the immediate reference to the mote and the beam.

The danger to us is perhaps the many little ways in which we can almost innocently fall into error—

1. Failure on our part to comprehend another's case.
2. Uncontrolled zeal.

3. Misleading appearances.
4. Distorted and exaggerated reports, or hidden facts.

The unlovely spirit is the one which is always inclined to sum up unfavourably, uncharitably—inwardly sitting in judgment—filling in the gaps with evil surmisings—giving no credit or quarter or benefit of doubt. On the other hand—

"Love thinketh no evil."

Love is kind — reserving judgment. Love is reluctant to condemn.

We must not, however be led away, one way or the other. Facts are stubborn things and **Truth is a fixed quantity**. The wise will not seek to avoid it, but receive it, and face it, and make way for it in their life's economy.

This also is provided for in the chapter (v. 15)—

"Beware of false prophets."

Our attention is then drawn to certain truths. A tree, quite naturally, brings forth fruit in accord with its nature, good or evil, and certain existing facts are thus accounted for.

Good and evil fruit is being produced, and we are to judge accordingly, because we have to be on our guard against the encroachment of evil. We must be able to discern, to recognize the individual tree by its fruit.

Yes, piercing discernment, keen understanding, the ability to judge righteously, is doubtless earnestly desired by every brother and sister here, and in particular by the brethren in the problems that come before them. The answer is in vs. 7-8:

*"Ask, and it shall be given;
"Seek, and ye shall find;
"Knock, and it shall be opened.*

By the questions in vs. 9-11, we are called upon to consider our case. The conclusion is, of course, our Father in Heaven will give good things to those who ask Him.

It matters, necessarily, **what** we ask of Him, and the purpose of it. Whims and fancies and trivialities are out of the question—temporal gifts are secondary, though not excluded—**the requests for spiritual gifts are more in keeping with our position, and there are some we should earnestly seek.**

Solomon's example is a good one. He just asked for wisdom to carry on. We are reminded of the statement by James—

"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, Who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth (or censureth) not."

There is an addition—

*"Let him ask **in faith.**"*

You will note the condition is not: "If he is intellectual, or educated, or has natural capacity"—as if it were predicated on natural lines. No. SPIRITUAL WISDOM IS OPEN TO ALL.

The wisdom possible to the lowliest of God's servants would by comparison reduce "the wisdom of this world" to foolishness.

Summarised, it is the ability to walk the narrow path to Life. It is from above, it is exclusive, it is positively outside the range of the wisdom and knowledge so regarded by the great of the earth.

We, ourselves can be without it. It is not acquired by the technique of passing so many facts through the head, but is received by the assimilation of the SPIRIT of the Word.

The expression common among us—"prayerfully studied"—as applied to that Word, is the answer. The wisdom is there. If we ask and seek and knock, we **shall** receive—it says so.

The chapter finishes rather sadly, but we need the warning, for we could spend a lot of effort building a house on sand. That many will do it is evident (v. 22)—

"MANY will say to me in that day, Have we not in thy Name done many wonderful works?"

What had they done? Much, they felt. Probably, like Israel, they had put in a lot of time and effort going about to establish their own righteousness.

He does not even stop to parley with them. He simply says—

"I never knew you."

They never did belong to the fold, though it was not necessarily apparent in their day. But think of their hopeless position when they stand before the all-discerning eye of the righteous judge —

"Depart from me."

Now transfer the thought to ourselves and imagine it being said to us—the tragic, hopeless, bitter finality of it!

The danger of it is too great— **we cannot risk it**—that is, by any slackness on the one hand, or any misdirected effort on the other — we must continually check up ourselves by the aid of the true Light. We are admonished by the Apostle Paul to particularly do so at this time—

"Let a man examine himself."

This time around the table of the Lord is one of the most important factors in our lives. To some it would seem to be the most important.

It is now, at these meetings, we receive impressions, form ideas and foster impulses, of one certain kind and in one direction, that are a real force in our walk before God.

It must be so.

The solemn obligations of the mind to Godward, in the presence of these significant items on the table, must, if sincerely met, carry an influence of such power, that we are enabled to maintain our course, and that in spite of contrary winds, cross-currents and the like.

Exhortation is just contributory, to remind us of those obligations—induce a state of mind in which we do examine ourselves in relation to the matter and make sure our heart is right.

It is manifest from Scripture (and particularly from Paul's words so often read) that to approach in any other way is worse than useless—**it is fraught with dreadful consequences.**

But we, beloved brethren and sisters, will draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, to receive the blessing that comes with a joyful, thankful, acceptable partaking.

—G.G. Sr., 1941
