

## What Is the 'It' in Your Life? Matthew 7:7-12

Our series on the Sermon on the Mount continues with one of the best known sayings of Jesus:

Matthew 7:7-12

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! 12 So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Wow that is a huge statement - Listen to this quote from John Piper

When you pause to consider that God is infinitely *strong* and can do all that he pleases,

and that he is infinitely *righteous* so that he only does what is right, and that he is infinitely *good* so that everything he does is perfectly good,

and that he is infinitely *wise* so that he always knows perfectly what is right and good,

and that he is infinitely *loving* so that in all his strength and righteousness and goodness and wisdom he raises the eternal joy of his loved ones as high as it can be raised

—when you pause to consider this, then the lavish invitations of this God to ask him for good things, with the promise that he will give them, is unimaginably wonderful. (John Piper)

Over recent weeks we have been looking at the Sermon on the Mount and called the series *Counter culture – a life of faith in an upside down world*.

You could say we are entering the final lap – the final chapter - of the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount covers some diverse topics.

- Witnessing about Jesus – being salt and light.
- The relationship of the Old Testament Law to a follower of Jesus.
- Anger, murder and right relations between Christians – and others.
- Lust, flirting, marriage, adultery, divorce and remarriage.
- Loving our enemies and Giving to the needy.
- Correct attitudes in giving, fasting and prayer.
- What we do with our money.
- Anxiety.
- Judging others and dealing with conflict.

Such a diverse range of topics, but yet there's been a common element to just about everything in the Sermon in the Mount, and that is that they are tough to do. Very tough.

As we have gone through the Sermon on the Mount it seems like there's just more and more seemingly impossible demands that Jesus places on us, and there's only a couple of places in the whole Sermon on the Mount that it seems like we can come up for a breath of air. And today is one such passage!

Matthew 7:7

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

It's this wonderful statement that when we ask God for something, He will give it!

*If you could ask for anything, what would it be? Get into groups of 2-3 and talk amongst yourself.*

"Ask, and 'it' will be given to you," Promises are nice and dreams are free – but then then the question remains - what does 'it' mean?

What does the word, it, refer to when Jesus said, "Ask, and 'it' will be given to you," and what might we expect to receive? And I guess the following question is, what is the 'it' in your life? In other words, if you were to ask God for something, what would 'it' be?

This verse is hugely misunderstood and misused. On the surface it sounds as though you have complete freedom: You can have whatever your heart desires; all you have to do is ask.

There are two problems with this way of thinking:

- **First, it triggers our materialistic nature and plays on the fantasy that, if we had unlimited resources, we could have anything we wanted ... as if, in having "it"— we'd be happy.**

"Ask, and it will be given to you." If this sounds to you like God is writing you a blank cheque, where all you have to do is fill in the amount, you have got the wrong end of the stick. When it comes to making a wish list, it's easy to go overboard. Thinking of Jesus' words as 'magic wand' brings out the worst in us and leads us to think of life in terms of material wealth and of God as the ultimate Sugar Daddy, or genie-in-a-bottle ready to grant our every wish. All we have to do is ask, seek and knock persistently.

- **That's the first problem. The second problem is that if we think this way it leads to a truckload of disappointment.**

We've all asked for things that we didn't get. I think I might have mentioned this before but back in my "previous life" I work for 6 weeks as a fulltime Santa in a mall in Auckland. And as you can imagine Santa gets asked for all sort of things, but at Santa school (yes there is a Santa school) we got told, never promise anything to any kid unless you get the nod from the parent standing within ear shot. You can imagine I got asked for all sorts of things, the regular Barbie and Lego stuff, to find me a husband from women, to I want my dad back and please heal me from cancer from young children.

We have all asked for things we didn't get, birthday wishes, to asking the boss for a raise; we all know what it's like not to get what we asked for and be disappointed.

But, hey, that's life. Right! And as long as it has to do with other people, we can deal with it - they're only human. But when God lets you down, it's a different matter—especially after you've been led to believe that you can ask for anything, and when you pray persistently you can expect to receive it. When you ask God for something really important, and you ask sincerely, believing that God will come through, and he doesn't—well, that's a bitter pill to swallow: "But, Lord, you promised!"

This falls into the category of unanswered prayer—you ask God for something and, either God doesn't hear you, or God chooses not to give you what you asked for— or, a third possibility, the answer is, "Not now," which, for the moment, is as good as, "No."

Unanswered prayer is one of the aspects of faith that can be hard to explain, especially in light of our passage this morning. And it even gets worse when you pair it with what Jesus told his disciples in the [Gospel of John](#).

John 15:7; 16:23-24

"If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, you will ask whatever you desire, and it will be done for you.

...Most certainly I tell you, whatever you may ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

Until now, you have asked nothing in my name.

Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full."

So, we prayerfully ask for all sorts of things. For example, we pray for rain for the farmers suffering in a drought ... or, for no rain for that outdoor concert. If only it were that simple as rain for this or no rain for that, if that's all it was we wouldn't be so concerned if our prayers weren't answered, but it's not. Prayer is serious business, especially when it comes to praying for those matters near and dear to our hearts. For example,

- We pray for the safety of our fellow Christian in persecuted countries.
- We pray for the health and well-being of our loved ones.
- We pray for the health of marriages/families in our community.
- We pray for peace and prosperity of our world.
- We pray for our church, that we'll be effective in our mission.

Over the years I've heard a lot of explanations for unanswered prayer. I suspect you have, too. Frankly, most of them don't satisfy me.

- One of the key young men I worked with in Bangladesh, his sister who was a very godly young woman in the church a developing young leader a significant role model to young women, suddenly got ill and died within a week. So many people were praying.
- Friends of ours who were holidaying in Thailand when it was hit by the tsunami. Significant Christian leaders in NZ, having a well earned rest.

- Sharon Sheedy, a young mum of two children, part of our community here a few years ago, died with cancer. People praying all over the place.

"Ask, and it will be given to you" it says, but we need to make sure we read all the bible, not just the passages that make feel good.

If you thumb through the pages of the Bible, you'll find that people of faith don't always get what they ask for. For example,

- Moses asked to see God face-to-face, but God said no. He said, "You cannot see my face, for man may not see me and live." (Exodus 33:20)
- Jonah asked God to destroy the city of Ninevah because of its great wickedness, but God refused. He said, "Shouldn't I be concerned for Nineveh...?" (Jonah 4:11)
- More than once, the psalmist cried to the Lord for help, but God did not answer. In Psalm 13, we read, "How long, Yahweh? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalms 13:1)
- The Apostle Paul asked God for healing, but he got turned down. Paul told the Corinthians, "I begged the Lord three times that it (this thorn in the flesh) might depart from me. He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9)
- Finally, there's Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane,  
*Please remove this cup from me.  
However, not what I desire, but what you desire.*" (Mark 14:36)

So, here's the question: Given all we know about the reality of unanswered prayer, how can we understand Jesus' word when he says to us, "Ask, and it will be given to you."?

I suggest that the answer lies in the pronoun, 'it' ... that 'it' does not refer to whatever you might ask for; rather, 'it' goes back to the previous passage where Jesus said,

*"But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness;  
and all these things will be given to you as well."* (Matthew 6:33)

In this way, the passage then reads:

*"Ask, and it (the kingdom) will be given to you.  
Seek, and you will find (the kingdom).  
Knock, and it (the door of the kingdom) will be opened for you."*

**So, what is the kingdom of God?**

First, let me tell you what it's not. The kingdom of God is not the 'satisfier of human desire'—it's not a re-creation of the Garden of Eden, where all you have to do is pick the fruit of your choice and eat to your heart's content.

The kingdom is being at one with God and the whole of God's creation; for when you're at one with God and the whole of God's creation, you're able to experience life in all its abundance, even in the face of sickness and death and prayers that seem to go unheard.

- In the Kingdom of God—at least on this side of heaven—loved ones die; not only older people, but babies and children and young adults in the prime of life;
- Tragedies strike, accidents happen, storms wreak havoc on innocent victims and people get hurt;
- Businesses fold, friends move away, life is just as uncertain and, at times, as disappointing as ever.

The difference between living in the world and living in the Kingdom of God is this:

No matter what, God will be with you and will help you overcome every adversity. As Paul told the Romans,

*"...(nothing) will be able to separate us from the love of God,  
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:39)

What's more, living as part of the kingdom, you have the strength of a whole community of support; you're part of a great family of faith that stands with you when the chips are down. This is the nature of the church. In Paul's words,

*"When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.  
Or when one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it."  
(1 Corinthians 12:26)*

This is what Fiona was talking about the other day when she shared about her Dad and everything that he went through. This what happened when we said let help Julie as she returns to Nepal and people donate \$5000 on the spot. We need to be there for each other, that's where being involved in smaller groups is vital, not because of bible study, although that can be helpful, but because of the kingdom community.

You know as well as I, when the rug is pulled out from under you and you need strength and help and support, as likely as not, it's your church family that will be there for you.

Here's the upshot of it all: I don't believe Jesus ever intended for us to think that, if we believe in him, we can call the shots and order life to our own specifications. I do believe he invites us to be part of God's kingdom on earth, and all we have to do is ask, seek and knock.

So what's the 'it' in your life? When Jesus said, "*Ask, and it will be given to you.*" what's the 'it'—what do you most hope God will give you or do for you?

If it's money or power or prestige or popularity or privileges or perks—even if it's the promise of good health and a long life—you're likely to be in for a bitter disappointment.

Here's what I'd like you to take this home with you this morning: As long as the 'it' in your life has to do with the things of this world, you'll fall short. It'll never be enough. Only as you seek to live in harmony with God and the whole of God's creation will you be truly happy, for this is the promise: If you're willing to seek God's kingdom above all else, God will give you all you need for a full and abundant life. So, go ahead: Ask, and it will be given unto you ...