

XXXI. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King
“The Tenth Commandment: Pray Persistently”

Matthew 7:7-11

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October 3, 2010 – Morning Sermon

Our study on the Sermon on the Mount now carries us to Matthew 7. We’re going to look at a couple of text in this study. Matthew 7:7-11 says **7** “*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!*”

The grass withers and the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever, by His grace and mercy may this Word be taught and preached today.

I want to tell you a story but before I tell you a story I want to make a point here. Of the six sermons of Jesus that are recorded isn’t it interesting that we have for the second time in this three chapter sermon Jesus has talked about prayer again, and really it’s the third time. He talked about the prayer of hypocrites, then He gave us the model prayer where He says to pray this way starting with “Our Father...” Now He’s circled back around and He’s talking to us about prayer but it’s very important to understand that this passage on prayer is the tenth commandment from the Sermon on the Mount and that needs to be in its setting so I would like to do a moment of review because I want to make sure we know the flow of the context here and because we’re at the end of a third of five sections in the Sermon on the Mount. We are at the conclusion of a third section so I think it’s important to understand that section and how it fits into overall.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the glorious truth that the Gospel takes you right where you are and never leaves you right where you are. The Gospel changes you. That Gospel salvation and transformation is described in the beatitudes which we studied. Then you have been saved for a Gospel ministry and Jesus says “Now here’s your Gospel ministry” which is in the second section and you are to be salt and light. Now how can the salt be salty and the light shine and not be hidden?

Then He gives us in the third section ten commandments. The same Jesus who met Moses on Mount Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments now tells us how that Law is embraced by the Gospel and then used by the Gospel to first bring us to Christ to trust in Him for our perfect righteousness and then to lead us with a changed life for Christ. The Law has no power but how does it direct us as the power of the Gospel moves us? That’s what we call the ten commandments from the Sermon on the Mount. It is the Gospel Law that is leading us. The Gospel blessings we have already understood.

Now what are the Gospel imperatives, the Gospel commands in our life? It’s very important to understand how He sets these ten commandments us to give us two tablets of them – five and five. We are on the tenth one today but let’s take a minute and go back to Matthew 5. This whole section was started off this way in Matthew 5:20; *For I*

tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. He's not telling us that your righteousness earns you heaven. He is telling us that those who have been saved by Christ, whose blood washes away our sin, whose righteousness is perfect to clothe us to take us to heaven, have a changed life. It's not a changed life that earns heaven. It's their changed life that marks them out on the way to heaven. Their changed life because of their relationship to Me is totally different than a religionist's changed life. You can get more religious than the Pharisees or Scribes but My people who are saved by the blood through grace their righteousness is deeper, wider, more beautiful, more attractive, more everything. They have an exceeding righteousness.

So He gave us five commandments to kind of prime the pump for it and He's using the Ten Commandments and how the Gospel changes them, where you don't just murder people but you commit life. You don't just, not tell a lie but we speak the truth in love. We don't just say 'no' to adultery but we say 'yes' to marriage and Biblical sexuality within marriage and the joy of what God provides for that. We don't just say 'no' to vengeance. We say 'yes' to relationships. We not only take the slap on one cheek but we'll turn the other cheek for affection to the one that slapped and to pursue them. So He keeps developing this for us.

He continues to develop it for us by telling us how you love and pray for your enemies and when you're doing this exceeding righteousness I want you to go beyond that. Here is where Jesus is taking us in this third section. Our Gospel relationship with God the Father through His Son, our Savior is designed to give us a new life that rejects sin, a hatred for sin so that we are repelled by it. We want to reject sin and passionately embrace godliness, not to earn our way to heaven but to honor the One who has purchased us and is bringing us to heaven. God, please allow me to be nauseated by sin, to be repelled and repulsed by sin. Give me an increasing hunger and appetite and passion for godliness, I want to be like You. I want that to be at work in my life.

Why does Jesus give you this new life in Christ? He has given you the gift of eternal life to be with Him but why a new life now to go there? Here's why. As you're repelled by sin and embrace godliness, I want you to be attracted to sinners, not attracted to sin but attracted to sinners. I don't want you to judge their hearts but I want you to go after their life. I'll take care of the judgment of the heart because you can't see the heart anyway. I don't want you to inspect motives but I want you to go after people. I don't want you to get vengeance, I want you to turn the cheek of affection. I want you who have been saved as sinners by grace, to be attracted to sinners. Look how much grander this is when the Gospel takes the Law to heights we've never seen before. By the way, I not only want that Gospel to bring you to Me with passion and after sinners with passion so that with lost ones your sharing Christ and saved ones you're encouraging in Christ, but I want sinners to be attracted to Me by looking at you. I want you to be attracted to sinners and I want you to be so attractive that you will draw others to Me.

That's how He ends that first section. How does He end that first section? Let's look back at that first tablet of the Law back in Matthew 5. He ends it like this. Matthew 5:48 says "*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" You want godliness and godliness attracts people (sinners) to Christ because godliness comes with graciousness, but that exceeding righteousness needs to be practiced in a gloriously

different way. There is to be no arrogance of the hypocrite and religionist but a humility and a boldness of those who have a relationship with Me.

So He brings us to a second tablet of this Law and He introduces it in Matthew 6:1 which says "*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*"

Those of us who are saved by grace and on our way to heaven, we don't practice this exceeding righteousness to get the applause of people, we don't practice it to get the acclaim of people, we don't pray, fast, give or do mercy ministry to be seen, but on the contrary we want to have a righteousness that's practiced with boldness, humility and is drawing people. It is an attractiveness to Christ and to God the Father through Christ who is at work within us. So we don't want to be a hypocrite or an idolater or a worrier or The Judge.

Notice how I said The Judge. We all have to be judges of sin, make judgment calls in life and some are magistrates and some are judges of law and elders have to make judgments all the time yet the matters of the heart we ultimately leave up to the Lord God for He is The Judge of the issues of eternity and where people are in their relationship with Him. We do introduce people to the judge who can become their Father through His Son Jesus Christ and that whole section is wrapped up in Matthew 7:12. So what are the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament and how is that embraced with the Gospel in Jesus Christ? It's fulfilled in Christ and then it tells us that this leads us to whatever you wish that others would do to you, you do also to them for this is the Law and the Prophets. So you and I that have been given grace become vessels of grace. You and I who have received truth become instruments of truth. You and I who have been loved become statements of love. That's where God has called us.

Now do you see why the tenth commandment in this is what it is? Do you see why the tenth commandment is prayer? Who is sufficient for this? If a guy jumps in front of me on Hwy 280, I'm ready for him. Turning cheeks is tough for me. This is a challenge. I'm ready to grab his legs and make a wish and God called me to love him. God calls me to draw him. When something like this happens what is it God calls me to do? How can I live this way? How do I know to live this way? How do I know how to respond? How do I know how to relate to this person? Here's an unbeliever. Here's a believer. Here's a believer that's walking away. How do I know how to do that?

There was a young boy who grew up in a Christian home and this young boy had a dad and mom who prayed for him and took him to church regularly. That young boy who grew up in that Christian home had grandparents who prayed for him at 5:30 every single morning. They prayed for him to be saved every single morning. That boy went the other direction into ungodliness, violence, immorality, self centeredness, and self absorption. He was compliant to his parents but it all burst forth when he went away to college and out from their eye sight and reach. But the grandparents kept praying at 5:30 every morning. Those parents kept praying day after day after day. He came to Christ when he was 21 years old. They kept praying for 21 years every day.

Then what happened? The boy as a man came to Christ but his father went to the far country. The father who had taught Sunday school classes and yet led youth group that had prayed for him, now went to the pig trough in the far country. The father became an immoral and ungodly person. He became to a whole other degree what the young boy had been before he was converted. The father divorced his wife, who was the

mother of the young boy. He left not only the boy but his sisters and just went away to a far country. What is it that that young boy who is now a young man and a Christian, needed to do? What would be the most important thing for him to do?

I'll answer that question is a few moments after we go back to the text for this study. I'll answer the question by coming back to this tenth commandment. When He gives this unbelievable new life that we get the privilege to lead on the way to being with Jesus, He ends up with this commandment which is now I want you to pray all the time. I want you to pray continually and persistently. Here is the way I'll teach you. First of all He gives us three inviting prayer commands. The first inviting prayer command is ask. The second one is seek and the third one is knock. Notice how they are active, intentional and they increase in their intensity. You ask, seek and knock. One man said to me, "Harry every salesman learns this one."

I want to try and illustrate this using my home life. This happens every morning of my life. One might be thinking, "Are you putting yourself up as a paragon of asking, seeking and knocking?" No. Here is another illustration. I have a reasonably good memory except I have hard time remembering where my Bible is, my car keys, my pen and my wallet. So every morning has this in it. "Honey have you seen my wallet? Honey have you seen my car keys? Honey, have you seen my Bible? Honey have you seen that list of the things that I'm supposed to do today?" I do asking, asking and asking.

By the way, ask, seek and knock are in a tense that means present tense but continuing. Translating this would mean ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, knock and keep knocking. I do that every morning when I keep asking. If my wife doesn't know where it is she'll say, "Well, honey why don't we look for it." To translate that would mean let's seek after it. "It's probably in one of your messy piles somewhere." So we'll start seeking and we'll seek and seek and seek. So how does the knock come in? Well, I keep asking and seeking and finally she says "Will you just knock it off?" That's where that one usually comes in. "Just find it and go on."

So ask, seek and knock. Those are the three inviting commands to describe our prayer life but again notice the level of intensity increasing where we ask, we seek and we knock. Not only does the level of intensity increase but notice also that it is an ongoing ask – ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, knock and keep knocking. This was happening for 21 years for the soul of a boy at 5:30 every morning. They kept asking, seeking and knocking.

Those three inviting commands have three intriguing promises. As you keep asking the promise is you will receive. As you keep seeking the promise is you will find. As you keep knocking the promise is it will be opened. Did you know that there are two parables in your Bible that Jesus taught that come from this sermon about ask, seek and knock? One of them we read in the text where a widow was being taken advantage of and she goes to the judge and he says "I haven't got room for you on the docket." So she just keeps coming back and asking, seeking and knocking. Finally this unrighteous judge says "I don't fear God and I don't like you and I could care less about this but you're about to give me a black eye. I'm tired of hearing about you so let's give this woman justice so I don't have to see her again." When her case didn't win her persistence did, even overcoming an unrighteous judge.

I have great news for you. When you and I pray we don't talk to an unrighteous judge but we talk to a Righteous Judge. I have even better news for you. The Judge is your Father. He loves you and delights in being able to give you justice. One might say "But I want grace." He can give you grace with justice because His Son made a way for Him to be just and give us grace. He has all of those gifts that we need – salvation, eternal life – all those things we need. That's the One whom we ask, seek and receive to and from. He says that everyone who ask will receive, everyone who seeks will find and everyone who knocks it will be open and He even repeats this promise. Who gets this promise? It is for everyone who is asking, seeking to receive. It says, "Whoever asks..." It's everyone who asks. "Whoever seeks..."

One might be thinking, "Harry I'm not a Christian." Then ask Him, seek Him and watch Him open the door as you knock to bring you in. One might be thinking "Harry I've been asking and seeking about a job." He says "When you ask Me for bread I won't give you a stone." Now bread and stone may look alike but one gives life and the other doesn't give anything but a bruise. One might think "That still doesn't make any sense, you're not helping me here, because I have asked for this job and I didn't get it." You thought you were asking for bread but you were asking for a stone. How do I know that? It is because He didn't give you that job, that's why. It's like sometimes we're like Lot. We see this rich valley and think "Boy I need that job or I need that or I need to own that" and we don't get it. The reason we don't get it is because you thought it was bread and actually it was a stone. God knew it was a stone. He knew that hidden in that valley was a Sodom and Gomorrah so He didn't give it to you because He loves you.

Someone else asked me "If God is God and I ask, seek and knock then why doesn't He just give it to Me?" I said, "What you are wanting is the answer and He's going to give the right answer, the right way because He's your Father and He's smarter than you are. He loves you more than you can know. You are wanting the answer but He is wanting the relationship." He says, "Keep coming, son, keep coming. Don't just ask Me for wisdom once but keep on coming. Don't just ask about your daily bread once but keep coming. Don't just come to Me about that sin but keep coming for the forgiveness of your sins and then the cleansing so you can walk with Me. Keep coming, son. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking and everyone receives."

So those who come to Him as their Father through the Son, then He gives those good and perfect gifts and then He gives this amazing little insight. He has given three inviting commands and three intriguing promises and He now gives us this one very intimate illustration. Matthew 7:9-10 says **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?* Fathers want to give good gifts and the son may be asking for something that is not accurate but the father knows what to give. This is not saying the Father is bound to give what you ask but the Father is bound to give what He knows what you need when you ask, seek and knock because He's your Father.

Now look at Matthew 7:11 which says *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father (who is not evil but good, gracious and righteous) who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!* So earthly fathers who are sinners know how to make provision for their children but those who are seeking first His Kingdom, the good things are added and He knows what the good things are. That's why we go to Him asking, seeking knocking and then saying,

“Not my will be done Father, but Your Will. You are my Father.” So where does this lead us?

I want to give you three takeaways for life here from this matter of prayer. As I prayed over this sermon for today, I realize that this will call for a change in your life. Prayer will no longer be a piece of our life but this text is asking you to make prayer a way of life. This isn't saying the least you can do is pray. I do that all the time when someone comes to me and says “Harry I need this” and I say “Well I don't have it but the least I can do is pray for you.” That isn't the least I can do. Now that may not be all I should do but it's not the least I can do. That's the best I can do. It's not the only thing I should do but it's the best thing I should do. I am asking you today to make this change in your life that prayer becomes a primary dynamic in your life. Love your times of prayer. Love the moments of prayer. Love the calls to prayer. Love the concerts to prayer but make prayer the reflex response of your life. We have not because we ask not. When we do ask we ask wrongly because we haven't learned His ways. So how do I do this?

Number one is to be persistent in prayer. That is the first takeaway. If you by God's grace are able to make this change then this change in life will lead to a life of change for you. This will lead to a changed life. You won't be the same if prayer becomes a way of life. In other words, our Christian life isn't to pray for our work as a Christian but the work of a Christian is to pray. This is what we do and it's not all we do. This is crucial and foundational to what we do. So first of all be persistent. Ask and keep asking with intensity, seek and knock. There's an intensity to this. So be persistently intense in your prayer life.

You sent me from here to a place called Charlotte, North Carolina to plant a church that was supposed to plant a presbytery. When I left South Florida to go there I had a good friend of mine who was also from Charlotte but he didn't go to Charlotte to plant the church he went from South Florida to San Diego to plant a church. In fact, he had originally been on staff with our pastor here, Lynn Downing, at his church in Lake Osborne, Florida. His name was Don Seltzer. He was a good friend of mine and I had gotten to know him. He was a brilliant guy and he was going to an unbelievably challenging place. We took some of the money we had in this little church we had to give to Don to go plant a church in San Diego as we're trying to plant the church in Charlotte but we were excited because we knew you couldn't out give the Lord.

Don got out there and wrote us a prayer letter back saying “Christ Covenant thanks for praying for us. You would not believe how much it costs to live in San Diego.” I knew what was coming in the next paragraph which was “Can you send more money?” I was just overwhelmed by that. I told him “We just don't have anything right now the least we can do is pray for you.” We began to regularly pray for Don Seltzer in San Diego. We got a letter back just a couple of months later that was full of newspaper articles that basically told what had happened. Before Don got the church started he went around visiting the sister churches in the area to let them know he was there to plant a PCA church and he would say “I'm not here to take your members but I'm just here to compliment what you're doing. I'd like to get to know you and get you to pray for me.”

Don went into this one church called the San Diegito Bible Church. He listened to the sermon and then when the pastor finished the pastor resigned and then the assistant pastor came up and resigned too. Don looked at his wife and said “We need to go. This

is not a good day to talk to this pastor.” This pastor caught Don on the way out and said “God is calling me on but please come back.” Don said “I’m not a prospective church member I’m a pastor in the PCA and I have come to plant a church in the area. I just came to meet you, worship with you and tell you we love you as brothers and sisters and we want to win this place for Christ with you.” The guy said “Praise the Lord, I’m leaving but I’m glad you’re here. So are you with the Presbyterian Church in America?” Don said, “Yes.” He said, “Is that the denomination with Francis Schaeffer, R. C. Sproul and D. James Kennedy?” Don said, “Yes.” He said, “Well, thanks for coming and we will pray for your new church.” Two weeks later Don got a phone call from this church and they said “Pastor Seltzer before you get your church started could you come and help us for a couple of Sundays?” Don said, “Sure.”

Long story short, three months later the church wrote a letter to Don and said “Thank you for your ministry in our midst. We would like to be your new core group for this new church. Would you be our pastor? We will be your core group.” They brought three million dollars worth of church property on the El Camino Real which is the most expensive street in all of the United States. Prayer is not the least you can do. You have those people who need to know Jesus then start praying. Keep praying and then start seeking, then start knocking and stay at it before the Lord. You don’t have an unrighteous judge but a Father which leads me to the second takeaway.

This Father wants to be your encourager. He wants you to have confident prayer. If your earthly father did that what about Me? What will I do? So He encourages us toward that consistent prayer to call upon Him. In fact, we are told in another passage of Scripture that this Jesus who is ready to receive us is One who is absolutely committed to calling upon us. This same thing is used in Luke 11. This is a second parable that comes out of this Sermon on the Mount on ask, seek and knock. Luke 11:5-10 says **5** *And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; 7 and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. 9 And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*

He takes this same sermon text and creates another parable to show us about a man who has a friend who won’t get up but the man keeps asking, seeking and knocking. Now if this man’s prayer to that friend is answered how much more is your Father ready to answer your prayer. Harry is He ready to answer my prayer when I call upon Him, when I ask and seek? Yes and He’ll answer it rightly. He will answer it at the right time. I know He will because He has already met the need of my salvation. He gave His Son for me. He has given me the Holy Spirit, the Word, His church to nurture me and grow me, my children and my grandchildren, the privilege to be among people like you. He has given me the opportunity to reach people who are lost and dying. He uses someone like me for them to come to life. Why will I not keep asking, seeking and knocking to Him? Why will I not come to Him? Why do I think the answer is in this puny brain instead of the throne of grace with power? If I only understood who He was and only

understood His love for me would I not keep asking, seeking and knocking? Therefore I will give trusting prayer because this is my Father.

You sent us up to Charlotte and we planted a church. You said to plant a presbytery so we not only sent some money and prayers for Don Seltzer but we decided to plant another church in Charlotte. I called on my youth pastor that had been with me in Miami, Gary Fox, and I said come on up here. Gary comes up and gets a Bible study going and it gets bigger than his house. The next thing is we need more money. We're out of money and we just sold a trailer to give you some money. My house is full. We don't have any money but we'll start praying. Two months later I received a phone call from a man who said, "I'm an elder at this church and we have been listening to this radio program you do and we don't have a pastor. Would you come over and preach for us one Sunday night?" So I had the privilege to do that. After the sermon they came up to me and said "We're kind of an independent Bible Church but we'd like to talk to you about being a PCA church." I said, "Sure let's talk about it." We prayed about it and long story short they became a PCA church and then they said, "We don't have a pastor. We have a million dollars worth of building and land, 75 people but no pastor." I said, "There's one down here with a core group five miles away looking for some people and some land and a building." God provided and thus was born Grace Presbyterian Church. We just kept praying.

So there's that little boy, a young man now who is a Christian and I won't leave this one hanging for you. What in the world do you do when the daddy who prayed for you now becomes far worse than you ever were apart from Christ? So he and his sisters began to reach out and do a number of things but the one thing they said was this, "Let's pray." So for 14 years young man prayed. He would pray "Lord, I don't know whether he's saved and has walked away, if so go get him. Lord, I don't know whether he was saved and was running a game, if so get him." Then I'd tell God how to do this because I'm that boy. That was my earthly daddy so I'm calling upon my heavenly Father and I'd say, "God, if you get a hold of my daddy and he either gets saved or gets back with you let me start telling you some things that are going to happen." I know God wasn't up there saying "Harry that's a great idea, I never thought of that but me and the Father were drawing near for my earthly father and God answer prayer. My father came back to the Lord and I had the privilege to remarry my dad and mom. We were in the same church together for 11 years serving Christ and then to stand beside his grave and know he was right with God when he left here was great. I love my momma and how she reached out to him. I love my sisters for what they did but I'm convinced it was regular, persistence, asking, seeking and knocking and God answered.

I want you to leave here today praying. You might say Harry I'm not a Christian. I have your prayer. It is ask, seek, and knock. Jesus I know I'm a sinner and I ask You to be my Savior. I seek You who first sought me. I knock and He's the Door. He just opened up for you. Come.

Pastor, I am a believer. Let's start asking the Lord to give us wisdom. Let me know how to live, what to do and trust You. Let me walk confidently in You. Persistently, confidently, with trust, ask, seek, and knock. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege this Lord's Day of knowing what You are doing in our lives and asking that You would do great things. God, today I pray that there are people who have made that prayer of Jesus I know I'm a sinner, save me. Jesus thank You, your ready to answer. Truly, truly he who believes in Me has eternal life. Father, we have a nation that's in need and friends who are lost. We have challenges in our jobs and all of those things and there are things we need to do in relationship to that but the number one thing is that You make us a house of prayer, I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.