

Ask

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[0 : 00] Okay, thank you. Question then. What should we do now with the Sermon on the Mount? What are we meant to do now with this sermon? I mentioned just now, we began listening to Jesus' famous sermon back at the start of September, which feels a really, really long time ago to me anyway.

We've just got a couple of Sundays left in these famous words of Jesus before we get to the end and move on. Let me just pause and say, I'd really love us as a church to use this coming fortnight, if we can, to think a bit by ourselves and also talk together as well about how Jesus' teaching impacts us and might change us.

I know some of us have been here and away and ill and in crèche and all sorts over this past couple of months. I guess some of us find it hard to remember what happened last Sunday, let alone all of September.

So with the Sermon on the Mount, you might say, I'm not sure I remember that much about it. Maybe, like I think I'm going to plan and do, could you sit down this week and reread these three pages of Matthew 5 to 7, the sermon, or get someone to read them to you?

And then I'd love us to chat together, like properly chat, over coffee today, or while eating lunch, or by WhatsApp during the week, or when we bump into each other.

[1 : 27] I'd love us to talk about Jesus' words and about doing them. And how have you found it? What's been new? Is there something Jesus has taught you that's really provoked you or poked you or made you want to cry or made you think, I really want to be like that?

I'd love us to talk about that together and not feel shy or awkward about it. Maybe you say to someone here, how about this week or next, or the week after, that's fine.

We go out for a walk or we go out for a beer and we talk about doing what Jesus says really concretely in our lives. Or over a meal at home, you get Matthew 5 to 7 open and you talk with those you're eating with.

I'd also love, actually, in time for next Sunday morning, I wonder how it would be if a few of us, having thought, there's something in the sermon that's really grabbed me, something I want to believe more or do.

I wonder if you could share that with the church family next Sunday morning. I'd love to preach a little bit next Sunday, but I'd also love some time for two or three or four of us to come to the front and say, it's this from the sermon and please pray for me in this and I'm praying the church will change like this.

[2 : 40] With the time and the energy we've got, could we really use the next couple of weeks to help one another become a more Sermon on the Mount shaped bunch of people?

I say that at the front, I'd love us to do that. This morning, Kate read from 7, 1 to 12 and we're going to focus on verses 7 to 12. And I think the question, having listened to Jesus up to this point, chapter 5 and 6 and on is, what should we do now?

What should we be doing now? Let me just recap a bit before we dive into these verses. Remember what's happened. Jesus has begun his public ministry.

This is the context of the sermon. He's come into a dark world of violence and sin and death and he preaches the kingdom of heaven has come near. He's saying Jesus has come to save people like us from our sins and restore us to God and rule us and bless us.

And in his preaching, he says, repent. He commands people back then and now to turn back to God. All of us, everyone in the world, turn back to God and become disciples of Jesus and join God's kingdom family and be blessed by God forever.

[3 : 58] In the Sermon on the Mount, what happens is he gathers around himself his first few disciples and he teaches them about the kingdom of heaven. I'm telling you how it is for those who live under God's saving rule.

I'm telling you how to live in such a radical, counter-cultural way that not only will you please your father in heaven, but you're going to light up the world. And I don't know if you agree with me, we should say with this sermon open in front of us, that the way of living Jesus teaches is out of this world.

Have no hatred for anyone in your heart. Have no lust in your looks. Never rely on your lips. Someone slaps you, turn the other cheek.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. From your heart, in your life, shine with such a whole, pure, God-pleasing obedience that you actually start to resemble your heavenly father in all his perfection.

We're meant to read this and go, wow. We want to be like this. In my life, my heart no longer seething with self-pity and anger and spewing out insults quietly at home when no one sees.

[5 : 24] My eyes no longer roving and lusting. I speak truth and I'm meek like Jesus and without limit in my love for others, not just when I feel I've got enough energy.

Wow. And not just me, this is for you and us and all who enter his kingdom. I think you're meant to imagine a world living under the rule of Jesus.

Where behind closed doors anger and insults are just no more, it doesn't happen. Where the internet is clean of pornography because no one wants it. Where women walk home late at night without the fear of leering men.

Where the devastation of casual hookups and short-term marriages are done away with. And instead of revenge and hatred and violence, there is humble love and our father's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Wow. And then instead of trying to impress other people, we give to the poor and we pray and we fast in secret for our father's eyes only.

[6 : 33] And we don't store up rotting wealth, but we're devoted to our God. And rather than be wracked with worry, we trust our father to give us everything we need. And we stop that poisonous looking down on other people all the time, but rather we see ourselves clearly.

That's how to live in our father's world. We don't. From the lips of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, the beautiful way, the flourishing way, the God-pleasing, the light-up Orchard Park way.

We're meant to hunger and thirst for that kind of righteousness and go, wow, wow. And yet at the same time, having listened to Jesus up to this point in the Sermon on the Mount, we look at our lives and do we not also say, ow.

Ow. Ow. Don't we? Because I am a disciple of Jesus and God is my father. And yet to my shame, I fall so far short of the righteousness Jesus demands.

My under-the-surface anger about life, which bubbles over sometimes. How I look at people, the half-truths I say. The hurt I've caused even in this past week.

[7 : 50] I do not shine like God in all his perfection. In my better moments, I hate that. I hate it. You're so often trying to impress other people rather than God.

And your money and your possessions do have you in their grip a bit. And you struggle to trust your father to give you what you need. And you cannot seem to stop judging other people constantly.

Ow. Ow. Do you sense something of that as well? It's a long introduction. With the Sermon on the Mount working in us, we hunger and thirst for the live as Jesus shows us.

And we want our lives and our church to shine in this God-pleasing way. And yet at the same time, we become so painfully aware of the gap between the demands of Jesus and the reality of our lives.

What then should we do? I mean, chapter 7, verses 7 to 12, Jesus' command and his invitation to those who long to do God's will and yet fall so far short is in a sense very, very straightforward.

[9 : 02] Look, he says in chapter 7, verse 7, Ask. Listen, verses 7 and 8. Ask, and it will be given to you.

Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Three commands here and one idea. Ask, seek, knock. Jesus is urging us. We who say, wow, I want to live this way.

Yet, ow, I fall so far short to pray. And it's taken a long time to get here. Here's point one this morning. Just very simply.

Ask. Ask your Father in heaven to forgive you and empower you and change you. Ask him.

[10:02] To give you the good gifts you and we need to grow into the disciples we long us to be. And let's explore these verses a bit more tightly together.

In Jesus' earlier teaching on prayer, do you see just across in chapter 6, verse 8, he says, Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This then is how you should pray.

Our Father in heaven. So when in 7, verse 7, he commands us to ask, he's saying, pray. Open your lips. Speak to your Father in heaven and ask him for what you need and want.

He puts it really powerfully here. Ask has the sense of ask and keep on asking persistently. Or put it another way, seek and keep on seeking.

After church, in half an hour's time, the kids will play hide and seek in here if it's a grotty outside.

You go looking for someone. It's just a game that, though, with giggling. And if you get bored, you go and do something else.

[11:10] There is a more serious kind of seeking, though. Like seeking for water in a desert. You need water. You thirst for it. You pursue it. In the Psalms, David prays, you, God, are my God.

Earnestly I seek you. I thirst for you. My whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there's no water. That's the sense here, I think.

I'm pursuing you, my God. I seek you. Or put it another way, knock. And keep on knocking. Our Father sits in his heavenly throne room.

Knock on heaven's door. And knock again. And again. I dipped into a little book on prayer just on Friday that I have on my shelf, which I keep putting back because it kind of scares me a bit.

Quote, the saints of the early church had a princely energy as they asked, battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer.

[12:15] And maybe that sounds a bit much to you. Or maybe not. Our Lord Jesus here invites us, urges us, commands us to pray.

Ask our Father and seek our God and knock on his door and keep on praying to him. I wonder if we'll say this coming couple of weeks that the Sermon on the Mount has sliced us open a bit.

I'm so ashamed of my paper-thin love for others. I feel so guilty for how I cling on to my cash. What are you meant to do?

Seek your God. Father, my life is open before you, you know. Forgive me my sins, I pray. Would we say we long as a church to be more free of worry or anger?

What should we do? Knock and ask. My God, earnestly I seek you. May your will be done in my life.

[13:26] Work in me and change me, I pray. First thing this morning, we're meant to ask our Father in heaven. With the Sermon on the Mount open in front of us, aware of our sins and longing to change, we've got to pray and go on praying.

I thought to myself this week, I really need to hear that. I so need to hear that. I'm sorry for this long quote, it's not super long, but from a book. The Western world, as in the whole world, is not characterised by prayer.

By and large, even genuine Christians in the West aren't characterised by prayer. Our environment loves hustle and bustle, smooth organisations and powerful institutions, human self-confidence and human achievement, new opinions and novel schemes.

And the Church of Jesus Christ has fitted right in with that. Our low spiritual ebb is directly traceable to the flickering feebleness of our prayers.

I read that I thought, do you know what, that bites a bit. Because I can often think, well, try a new habit, read this book, get more organised and hope that my family life or this church will get better.

[14:44] How about battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer? Or just more simply, ask our Father in heaven.

I really like, I'm not sure there's anyone here from here, but I really like that in our little midweek, yes there is, in our little midweek church growth group, we've really talked quite honestly and openly this past week about worry and also money.

Really thankful to God for that. We've been honest together. And we have started to help each other think a bit about why we're tempted to hold on to our cash and a little bit about what's behind our worrying.

And we've said together, that's interesting. Come on, let's trust our Heavenly Father. But I realise what I haven't done so much, if at all, is pray for my brothers and sisters.

Like I note down their prayer requests on a Tuesday evening and then the bit of paper quite often sits on my desk. What am I doing? Jesus says, I'm meant to ask my Father in heaven.

[15:49] I'm meant to pursue him and seek him and place before him the lives of my brothers and sisters and plead with him to act. Actually, when Jesus says this, he's not trying to guilt us, naughty us for not praying.

He's urging us and inviting us and saying, come on. Aware of our sins, our deep-rooted habits and addictions and longing to change, he commands us, get on your knees and ask, seek and knock. So why don't we? I mean, come on, let's. Let's pray to him. Before we go on, let me just say a few practical things here.

Because there may be some of us who got out of the practice of praying. Or you say, I hear about prayer, Christians talk about that, and I'm a Christian, but I've never really learnt how.

I don't quite know what to do. And to say that is okay. Look, three little suggestions. One, if you feel out of practice with praying, why not start with the Lord's Prayer?

[17:05] Just back across the page here in chapter 6, verse 9, you see, where Jesus tells us this is how to pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, and so on.

Some of us don't really do this very much, kind of read a prayer and pray it, but we can do, and we're meant to. What you could do, just very straightforwardly, is read it through slowly by yourself, the Lord's Prayer, and then pray that prayer out loud, line by line, just by yourself, in your room.

Second suggestion, I just want to say, it is okay to just open your mouth and speak, you know. It might feel funny at first to do that, because you can't see God as you're speaking to him.

But I think our Lord would just have us say what we want to say to our Father in heaven. It doesn't need to sound special. Father, thank you that I can pray to you.

I really want to stop being angry with other people and do what Jesus commands, but it's so hard. I insulted her again this morning. I feel terrible.

[18:22] I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I ask you, Father, please help me to do your will and be kinder today. Amen. You are praying.

Third thing, finally, do you agree with this? Lots of us learn how to pray by listening to others pray. Children copy a praying parent.

Maybe you're a parent, you notice that. That's really good if you can learn how to pray from a parent. But if you've not had that, it would not be wrong.

In fact, it would be such a simple and wonderful thing to say to another Christian here at St. John's, please could we pray together because I want to learn how to pray.

Could we meet up and talk a little bit just for 10 minutes and then you say a prayer and then I want to listen and I want to pray something like that. And whether we're new to praying or not, Jesus is saying to us here, do it, ask.

[19:28] In your room, round the meal table, in twos and threes, at the edge of the coffee or at the back, at this evening's prayer supper, this week, next week, and on. We're meant to pray.

Let's pray to our Father because, because here's the wonderful thing in these verses. As we do what Jesus says here, do you see that Jesus makes a promise to disciples who hear the Sermon on the Mount and say, wow, I want to live this way, but ow, I fall so far short.

He says, ask your Father in heaven and it will be given to you. Look at these verses now. Verse 7, ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. That is, if we ask our Father to forgive us and change us, it will be given.

Seek our God and we will find him. Knock on heaven's door and it will be opened and he will receive us. He speaks very clearly here, do you see?

[20:46] Not even broad, general promises and comments, but for every individual Christian, whoever we are and whatever we're like, 4, verse 8, everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

It will. And that is because of who you and I are praying to. See, when you come to Jesus Christ and become his disciple, you are adopted into the family of God and together we are the dearly loved children of our heavenly Father.

It's who we are. And so when we pray, we're not praying to a reluctant stranger who says, no, thank you, not today. And we're not praying to a bad Lord who gives bad things.

And we're not praying to a sappy grandparent who gives us everything we want and all the sweets we want even when it's bad for us. We're praying to our Father. Look at this.

Question, verse 9, which of you, dads at church today, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone to eat? Or if your son asks you for a fish, will give him a snake?

[22 : 01] Of course you don't. Mostly, you love to give good gifts to your children, don't you? As parents, our faces light up and we love it when we see our children happy when we give them good things.

Verse 11, if you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

He really will. Our perfect heavenly Father, our powerful heavenly Father, who sees into our hearts and lives and knows exactly what is good for us, he will give good gifts to his children who ask him.

We say, rightly, there is mystery here in part in our Christian experience. As sometimes we pray and pray and our Father seems slow in answering.

Or we pray for something that seems good for us and in his wisdom which we do not understand, he does not give us what we ask for. Although we can't see now that that's not, although we can't see now what that is, how that's good.

[23 : 23] What I want to say, though, is we mustn't let that blunt the promises of Jesus here and we mustn't let that blunt the experience of answered prayer that so many of us can share.

Ask, says Jesus, and it will be given to you. In a sense, I've not said very much this morning at all. we've just been asking what should we do now? And these verses, Matthew 7, 7 to 12, how do they fit into the Sermon on the Mount? We who want the good gifts of our Father, because we do, don't we?

We who are poor in spirit and mourn our sins and need his mercy. We who hunger and thirst for purer hearts and more righteous lives.

We who want to do God's will and please our Father. We who want to live salty, bright lives so that the community around us is drawn to the light of Jesus Christ and our Father is glorified.

[24 : 30] What should we do now? We must ask and seek and knock and keep on praying. We must get on our knees and storm the gates of heaven if you're happy to speak like that.

and trust humbly that our Father in heaven will forgive us and change us and bring glory to his name as he moulds us into the church family that he would have us be.

Let me lead us in a prayer. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven you are seated on your throne you are all powerful and good and you have brought us to your Son the Lord Jesus Christ and made us your children ours is the kingdom of heaven we belong to you and we say to you this morning our Father that we do hunger and thirst for righteousness and we do mourn our sins your word the commands of your Son bring us low and make us poor in spirit you call us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world and we see in this sermon on the mount how good it is to listen to Jesus' words and do them and so we pray to you this morning our Father asking you to forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us and asking you to give us your Holy Spirit more and more may he work in our lives more and more deeply please wean us off the worry that we so often feel please help us not to store up for ourselves treasures on earth we long to have lives increasingly free of anger and lust and lies and half-hearted love we seek you our God we seek mercy and we seek grace to help in our time of need and we praise and thank you that you are such a good heavenly Father and in your good time you will give us what we need that we might live lives that light up the world and please you and so we bow before you this morning and praise you and thank you in Jesus' name

Amen