

The Life of Jesus

Sermon 13- Teaching on the mountain:

Ask! Seek! Knock!

Passages: Phil 4:4-9
Matthew 7:7-11

When Jesus took his new disciples up on a mountainside outside of Capernaum, He taught them what we now call, *“The Sermon on the Mount”*. Although this Sermon may, at first glance, look like a bunch of unrelated wise sayings and moral advice, if you look carefully you’ll see that there was really only **one thing** that Jesus wanted to teach them: There, on the mountain, away from the pressures of everyday life, Jesus was proclaiming *the invisible reality* of what He called *“the Kingdom of Heaven”*. Moreover, Jesus was proclaiming that it would now be possible for all God’s people **to see this invisible reality** as an integral part of our normal, everyday life. In other words, Jesus was proclaiming that the invisible reality of the Kingdom of heaven was here and now, and that its very presence would instill a new meaning and purpose to our lives!

For example, in the light of this present Kingdom, we no longer need to worry about what we should eat or drink or wear-- we can have confidence that God is our Father and that He cares for us. In the light of this invisible Kingdom, we no longer need to serve money as a god-- for those who have eyes to see the kingdom of God, the choice between God and money becomes very much easier. In light of the presence of God’s Kingdom, we can forgive our enemies and do good to those that persecute us—not only does God’s invisible Kingdom bring comfort to us in our affliction but it points forward to God’s final restoration of peace in the world through His forgiveness and love.

As said Jesus, ***“If your eyes are good your whole body will be filled with light!”*** Or, to put it another way, if your eyes are focused on the invisible reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, your world will be so much brighter and hopeful!

Indeed, I’m convinced that this was the main reason why Jesus took them all up on the mountain—this little excursion was designed to take them away from the pressures and responsibilities of their daily routines **in order to begin this essential process of revolutionising their eyesight!**

But, of course, we know that this sort of *‘revolution of the eyes’* cannot happen overnight. Even a weekend away is not enough to really get our eyes to shift

their focus from the material to the immaterial world. It's a process that takes a lifetime. And that's why, in today's passage, **Jesus commands His disciples to go back home and keep working on their eyesight!**

Let's pray.

How many of you go to the gym? When you first go to a gym, a good trainer will begin your training program by first assessing your existing fitness levels. It's important to start at the right level—not too easy, not too hard. (Too easy and nothing will happen. Too hard and you'll probably quit!) Then, the trainer will set up a routine—perhaps its 15 minutes on the treadmill, 15 minutes on the rowing machine and 30 minutes on the stationary bicycle. He/she might also suggest lifting some weights or doing some sit ups.

A good trainer knows how to start you off at a point which acknowledges *where you are* in your fitness and *where you need to go*. Progressively the routine will shift into higher gears. From 15, to 20, to 30 minutes on certain machines, with heavier weights and more sit ups. The point is, it's gradual, sometimes imperceptible, but it's always moving you forward to greater levels of fitness and strength.

Jesus was a master trainer. He took these new recruits away on a weekend retreat so he could measure their spiritual fitness. As He talked about the invisible reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, he no doubt watched their reactions, looking for clues as to how much they understood. What could they already see of the Kingdom of heaven? Essentially, He was checking their eyesight.

And so, what we see in today's passage (given the fact that the time is quickly approaching for them to descend the mountain and go back to their jobs and families) is the way that Jesus sets up an exercise program that these disciples can take back to their homes. *It's an exercise program for their eyes*, built upon three basic steps: **Ask, Seek, Knock!**

First, Jesus commands them to **ask**. Now, in Greek, this verb (*aiteo*) is only used when describing someone who is 'lesser' coming to *ask* a favour of someone who is 'greater'. For example, when a child asks something of his/her father.

I don't know when the last time was that you had children in your house, but we currently have a house of 5 children. You wouldn't believe how often they come asking for things: a glass of water, help with homework, help with

playing a game, reading a book, jumping with them on the trampoline, taking them swimming ...! It's tiring...but that's what children do! **They ask.** And why do they ask? Because they genuinely know (1) that they can't do these things alone, and (2) it's nice to do have an adult who loves them enough to do things with them, leading them and teaching them new things!

Jesus begins his *exercise program for the eyes* by commanding that His new disciples start **asking** God for things. *"Go on, you can do it. Don't be so proud. Don't hesitate. Go to Him as your Father and ask Him to give you what you need."*

Quickly skip down to verses 9-11, where Jesus describes this first step of **asking** in more detail.

⁹ "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 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!"

To best understand Jesus' words here, you need to remember that it was quite a radical idea amongst the Jews to think of God as a *Father*. For them, God was seen as the Law-giver up on Mt. Sinai, the One from whom lightning flashes and thunder roars. He was scary! **Jesus wants to change their eyesight**, so that they might see God as a Father who loves them. And He wants them to see God's Kingdom as a present reality of peace, love and a warm embrace.

That's why His first step in *training their eyes* is by commanding them to **ask** God for things. *As they do this, they will begin to see the Kingdom of heaven far better than they ever have before! They will see that God is near, that He is good, that He is present, and that He really does love them...as a Father.*

Let me ask you a question—**How well do you see the Kingdom of Heaven? Do you really see God as a good and loving Father?** If you want help your eyesight, then start by **asking** God for things. Come to Him like a little child, bowing in His presence and looking to Him for your daily needs. You can even make a list. Write down the things that you are asking God for. Do you think he will fail to meet your needs? ***"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!"***

Asking is the first step in Jesus' exercise program for our eyes.

After we **ask**, however, we don't simply keep asking. We must begin to **seek**. This is the second step in Jesus' exercise program to improve our eyesight. He commands us to seek. Now, think about this: **Seeking** is far more active than asking. You can ask God for things while you're lying on your bed. But you can't seek from that position!

In Psalm 27, the Psalmist writes, "***One thing I ask from the Lord, that is what I seek: that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His Temple.***" First, he asked. Then, he got up and went to the Temple, looking for the answer! In other words, *seeking* means looking for clues to see how God is answering your prayer. After we ask God for something, the next thing we must do is to open our eyes in faith, seeking to see how God is already at work.

Back in chapter 6, Jesus already used this word, "seek", when He told them to "***Seek first the Kingdom of God.***" In a sense, Jesus is repeating Himself here. He commands His disciples to actively seek the evidence of God's invisible Kingdom in their daily life. The same is true for us! We are called to actively seek to discover His fingerprints... in our homes, our offices, with our children and grandchildren. If we actively seek out the evidence of His presence, we will, surely, find it!

Back in the 1600's, an uneducated monk by the name of Brother Lawrence wrote a book called ***The Practice of the Presence of God***. The basic gist of it is this: Seek God in the mundane routines of life. As you seek Him, you will find Him. We all need to engage in this practice, for this is what Jesus meant when he gave this second command—**Seek!** It's an exercise to improve our eyesight!

There's one more exercise that Jesus lays out in today's passage— His 3rd command is to **Knock!**

It's quite logical really-- *Asking* from God must lead us to *seeking* clues to how God is answering our prayers. But *seeking* must lead us to take a third step: *knocking*. After all, it's not enough simply to seek for clues. Sometimes those clues are behind locked doors! In other words, sometimes we will only see how God has answered our prayers when we make the effort to do some serious investigating.

Here's a recent example. I've been praying for a while now for the men of our church. I've been **asking** God to encourage them in their faith and raise them up to be inspired leaders in the home, the church and the workplace.

God says to me—“*You’ve been **asking**. That’s wonderful. But, are you **seeking**?*” And so, I start to check out the evidence of what God is doing in our men. I hang out with them. I take their spiritual pulse. I seek to see the signs of how God is at work.

God says to me—“*You’ve been **seeking**. That’s wonderful. But there’s one more step. Are you **knocking**?*” Now, what do you think that means? I take it to mean two things: First, are you getting yourself ready...are you knocking on the doors of those who can help you to help these men become the leaders that you’ve been praying for? Are you reading, studying, preparing, getting your own heart right *so that you become the vessel that I can use to answer your own prayers?* Second, I take it to mean, are you knocking on the doors of opportunity, events and activities where these men can grow in maturity and faith? Are you taking them to conferences? Are you helping them get out into the community and get their hands dirty? Are you actively engaged with them in taking the risks of faith that will turn them into greater men of faith?

As we **ask** God to help us with our needs, and as we **seek** for possible ways that God might be answering our requests, we must then step out in faith and **knock** on the doors that present themselves. When we **ask**, we ask with faith. When we **seek**, we seek for potential answers with eyes of faith. And when we **knock**, we step out and take risks with faith by pursuing opportunities that were brought to our attention during the seeking phase.

I once saw a T-shirt that read, “**Everybody wants a revolution, but nobody wants to do the dishes!**” The reason why so few Christians can really see the Kingdom of Heaven *well*... that is, in our everyday lives... is because we are so unwilling to make the necessary effort (and take the necessary risks) to knock on the doors. Indeed, sometimes we have to knock on ten, fifty, even hundreds of doors. For this reason, the knocking phase is often the most difficult, but it is here that perseverance is vitally important if we are going to truly see the presence of God’s Kingdom in the here and now.

Do you want better eyesight? Don’t simply *ask* God for things. Step out and *seek* ways that He might answer them. And then, go one step further and *knock* on the doors of opportunity as they present themselves.

Unless we practice all three of these steps, our eyesight (our ability to see the Kingdom of Heaven) will never fully develop.

Let’s pray.