

**Sermon by Canon Jim Holbeck. 6pm Healing Service. St Andrew's Cathedral Sydney. 29
March 2006**

Reading: Matthew 7:7-11 Topic: The Heavenly Father Who Delights To Give

In chapter 6, Jesus had been teaching that we don't need to be anxious about the necessities of life even though we do need them. But how can you live a live free from anxiety about your needs? Jesus gave us the answer in *Mat 6:31-33 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* *32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

We saw last week that meant that we enthrone Him as king in our lives, to live for Him and to obey Him in every area of our lives. Then we had to *seek His righteousness* . We saw that meant becoming all He wants us to be, living lives of purity, integrity and obedience to Him. It means right living as He sees it. It means allowing His Holy Spirit to impart God's righteousness through our lives as Paul wrote in Rom 8: 4 *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit..* It means being clothed with the righteousness of Jesus. If our focus is on the Lord by seeking *first His kingdom and His righteousness* then God will supply our needs. But we need to be proactive in receiving them through prayer. In this passage in Ch 7, we see that God promises to answer His children's prayers, and to give them their needs.

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| 1. GOD WANTS US TO RECOGNISE OUR REAL NEEDS |
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Jesus in His ministry asked people what they needed. In Mark 10, we read that he spoke to Bartimaeus, a blind beggar who asked Jesus to have mercy on him and said, "*What do you want me to do for you?*" His answer was simple. "*My teacher, let me see again.*" Jesus replied, "*Go; your faith has made you well.*" He could have asked for many things but he asked for what he really needed most of all, his sight and he received it immediately.

Perhaps only hours before, 2 of Jesus' own apostles, James and John had asked Jesus to do what they asked. Jesus' reply had been exactly the same as that which came to Bartimaeus later. "*What do you want me to do for you?*" Their request was selfish, stemming from ambition, and not from genuine need. They wanted Him to give them places of honour in His kingdom when He became king.

Bartimaeus' request came from a deep need "*My teacher let me see.*" James and John's request was selfish and ambition, "*We want to be seen.*" We see in these two incidents, the difference between "wants" and "needs". God longs to meet our deepest needs, but not necessarily our wants.

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| 2. JESUS ENCOURAGED US TO ASK GOD TO SUPPLY OUR NEEDS |
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He told His disciples, *Mat 7:7 "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.* What greater encouragement could we ever get to pray? If it's only a matter of asking God, seeking Him, and knocking at the door of heaven for our needs to be met, then why don't we get more answers to prayer?

There are a number of reasons given in the Bible.

i. We don't ask God for our needs to be met. James 4:2. (... You do not have, because you do not ask.)

It is often true as James puts it, that we do not have, because we do not ask. If we don't bother to make the effort to pray, then it's like closing the door to God's provision. We may think about our needs but we don't bring them to Him in prayer. We fail to ask Him to supply that which we cannot supply for ourselves.

There may be many reasons why we don't ask Him to provide our needs.

We may have a wrong attitude to Him. Resentment, misunderstanding the Father-heart of God.

We may have a wrong attitude to ourselves. Eg., a sense of unworthiness, so that we don't expect to receive anything from God.

We may have a wrong attitude to others that makes us unable to pray. We are full of anger and bitterness and are in no position to receive from the Lord. That sort of attitude needs God's healing, and can be healed.

ii. We ask God from wrong motives. James 4:3

That's what James wrote in James 4:3. " *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* The word for passions is *hedonê* from which we get hedonistic, for personal pleasure.

When Bartimaeus was healed he began to follow Jesus. He could have decided to go and really live it up in a way that had been denied him before because of his blindness. But he now wanted to make the most of the enriched life that he had received, by being a disciple of Jesus.

That's why I believe it's right to ask God to heal us, not just for our sake, but for His sake, that we might be equipped to do His will for us. God will work for our benefit and to His glory by bringing the healing He knows we need. If you can come to the stage where you say, *Lord heal me for your sake that I may do your will to Your glory for the rest of my life*" you are asking God to equip you to live for Him. I believe that is a prayer that is much more likely to be answered than the prayer that says, *Heal me because I am in pain but I really don't want anything else to do with you.*

There maybe another simple reason why we don't see answers to our prayers.

iii. We pray but we don't recognise God's answers to our prayers

When we prayed we may have had in mind what answer God would bring. But God knows our real needs, and He will meet them in the most appropriate ways. That's why St.Paul wrote in Col 4:2, "*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*" We have to be watchful to see how He is going to bring His answer. His answer may be much deeper, much more beneficial than we might have imagined. As we learn to pray with thankful hearts and with open eyes for the answer God is providing, we will recognise more easily His loving hand at work in our situations.

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| 3. JESUS PROMISED THAT GOD WOULD GIVE US "GOOD" THINGS |
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In Mat 7, Jesus is trying to get His disciples to understand how motivated our Heavenly Father is to answer prayer.

A comparison. He makes the comparison between God as a Father, and earthly fathers, by saying that if they are motivated to give good, beneficial things to their children, so is God.

A contrast. But then He draws the contrast. If human fathers who are imperfect give good gifts, then how much more will the perfect Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him. Our Heavenly Father is highly motivated to give and to give generously. We see that in many ways in the NT.

In terms of healing. In Acts 3 a lame man, a beggar, asked for (alms) money, but God used Peter and John to bring far more than he expected by healing him and giving him legs (to walk).

In terms of forgiveness. Jesus told the story of the prodigal son who repented of his sin and returned home, saying, "*Father, treat me as a servant in your home.*" His father took him back as a beloved son, fully restored and forgiven. God forgives and restores us into His family when we repent and trust Him.

In terms of anticipation in prayer. Jesus taught us to ask the Father for what we need but Paul wrote in Eph 3:20, "*Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.*" Immeasurably more (far more abundantly) than we can dare to ask in our greatest faith. And immeasurable more than we can ever imagine in our wildest imagination.

What's the limit? You and I can never know. Paul says that it is immeasurably more than I can ever ask or imagine. God sometimes surprises us with His answers to our prayers. We ask for drops of mercy and He pours out on us a wave of blessing. We ask for mercy, and He gives us an abundance of love, acceptance and forgiveness.

4. THE GOOD THINGS THAT ARE OURS IN CHRIST

Listen to what God says in His word about prayer, as we as His children ask Him to work in our situations.

The word “ask”, *aiteo* used in Mat 7:7, and in all these other verses, is a word that is used when an inferior is making requests to a superior. It is not demanding from God, nor using emotional or spiritual blackmail on Him. It is humbly presenting our requests to the One who longs to hear them and can answer them.

These are promises from the lips of Jesus:-

Mt.18:19, Again if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Every Wednesday night we operate on that promise. We believe Jesus is present amongst us. We agree together with those who request prayer, and we humbly present those requests to the Lord, asking Him to bring His answers in His way and time.

Jesus also promised *Mt.21:22. Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith. (Mk 11:24). And Jn 14:13,14. " Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it". And Jn 15:7. *If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you... And Jn 16:23-26 Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in my name. Hitherto have you asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.**

God knows our needs before we even ask Him. But He never bestows on us that which we are not willing or ready to receive. He wants us to express our needs to Him and to ask Him to supply them. Then He delights to pour out His blessing.

Charles Spurgeon wrote a book called *Cheque Book on the Bank of Faith*. He said that God's promises are like cheques He has made out to us in our names to be presented to Him personally to be honoured. He wrote, *God has given no pledge which he will not redeem and encouraged no hope which He will not fulfil.*

What will you believe as you reach out to the Lord in prayer? What others might have told you about prayer or what Jesus said. As you think about your need today let God minister His word to your heart as you hear them, 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.*

Over 10 years ago a man was dying from an incurable disease. But as he reflected on the promises of God for those who ask of the Father who gives generously, he had the assurance he was being healed. He was. Doctors continue to be amazed years afterwards. I can imagine it happening again. It has to several other people with the same disease. How? They trusted in the God who tells us He can do more, immeasurably more than we can ask or think. Let's hand our concerns over to Him in prayer and ask that He manifest His love and power in those situations whatever they may be.