

The Father of Grace

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Well, there are times where you step into a pulpit and you're just very very confident that what you have to say is going to be a great blessing to those who hear, not because of any words of wisdom of my own, but because of the content of what God's word is going to bring to us today. So I'm very excited even in my weakness to be able to say these things that we have for you here today because I know that they will be a blessing and an encouragement to your heart. And I can say I know that because it's simply going to point you to the nature of the God that you know, the God that you serve as a Christian.

In the Sermon on the Mount, I invite you to turn to Matthew 6 is where we'll start out with, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus Christ is setting forth a lofty standard of life, of righteousness for his disciples to pursue, and I want to remind you of some of the things that he said. In some respects, I'd like to just read the whole sermon but that would kind of dilute the point if you did that. Let's look at, for example, Matthew 6:19 and 20. Jesus calls us to a life that sets our hearts on things that are higher than this world. That's an easy way to put it. To be a Christian is to have your heart irreversibly set on things that transcend this world; that are better than this world; things that are unseen. Paul speaks of looking to the things that are unseen rather than the things that are seen in 2 Corinthians 4, I believe it is, because the things that are seen are temporal but the things that are unseen are eternal. And beloved, that is one of the intrinsic things about being a Christian is you realize that you are pursuing a life that is devoted to unseen realities as the greatest priority in your life, and that makes things of passing prosperity or the things of passing relationships or passing joys or sorrows, all are secondary to something greater and that's what I want you to see in these verses that we're going to look at.

Matthew 6:19, for example, Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Do you see the contrast there? You set your heart on things of this earth, the treasures of this earth, and they are all subject to loss, and so there is always this pervading sense of anxiety that the things that I treasure the most are going to be gone. But he says by contrast, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, in this place where man cannot reach, where the effects of the fall cannot diminish them. So he says where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. We looked at this verse weeks ago, months ago, and the

idea of just being consciously aware of what you most want out of life and processing that in your mind, that it's not a particular relationship I want, it's not a particular job I want, it's not a particular level of prosperity. None of that stuff is the ultimate affection of a true Christian. And Jesus says these things to bless us and to give us a clarity of mind about the way that we think about life and it calls us to a deep-seated reflection that causes us to set priorities that are nonnegotiable; to set priorities that become the defining force in the way that we view life and respond to it.

Verse 24 of chapter 6, he says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Then in verse 31 of chapter 6 he says, "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." So don't be so preoccupied with what you're going to eat today or what you're going to eat tomorrow, the whole idea of this great fear of the future is just so contrary to the spirit of the true Christian. He says in verse 33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." So it's very clear where we set our priorities and what our focus and attention is supposed to be. Jesus makes that very clear and obvious to us.

Here's the thing for today: Scripture and experience teach us that that is not an easy path of life to take. It is not an easy path of life to maintain and to keep that focus consistently clear in your mind; to follow it faithfully in your heart and faithfully in your relationships and faithfully in your involvement with other believers. Illness sidetracks us, right? The world entices us. Friends fail us. Foes assail us. Satan confuses us. Our own sinful desires betray us and lead us into paths that are inconsistent with that priority. The valley of death casts its shadow over us either personally as we enter into that valley knowing that it's approaching, or death comes to someone close that we love and we feel the weight of the grief of that and it just makes it very difficult to keep these things clear in mind because we are creatures of flesh, after all. So on the one hand we embrace this lofty view of life, we embrace the words of Christ as those who follow him, we love him and we want to be like that, and yet there is like a spiritual gravity that pulls us down from ascending up into the heights that we would want to go and there are multiple foes to our soul along the way.

Well, sooner or later the earnest soul, like many of you, the earnest soul eventually realizes that it's inadequate for the task. For as high as the lofty goal is, the lofty life that Christ has called us to, we realize that we are inadequate for it. We fall short of it. That there are just so many ways, as James says, I keep going back to this passage, James 3:2, we all stumble in many ways. So the question becomes, "Well, what about that, then? What about this gap between where I'm at and the nature of life and the way that Christ calls us to live?" Beloved, now we are pivoting to our text for this morning. It is precisely at that point that the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:7 through 11 come to bear.

Look at that text with me. That's where we're going to go back to. Matthew 7:7, in light of all of these things that we said to introduce today's message, Jesus says in Matthew 7:7,

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 he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

Here's the point of this passage in light of everything that we've said: Jesus is teaching us here in this passage that grace is available to help you live the life that God has called you to. Jesus is teaching you that you need grace to live as he calls you to do. You see, you needed grace to come to Christ in the first instance for salvation. You in your spiritual dead state, you needed God to breathe life into you so that you could awaken and come to him for salvation. You needed grace to save you in the first instance. Well, where a lot of Christians go wrong is forgetting that principle of grace as they move into the realm of spiritual growth and try to do it on their own and, "I'm just going to be really self-disciplined and I'm going to do this and that," and to just try to generate spiritual growth on their own. The whole thing of today's message is this: is that you need grace on the other side of salvation as well. You need grace to grow and that's expected and God calls you and God offers you the grace that you need. You needed grace to come to Christ for salvation and now, beloved, you need grace to grow in Christ in the life that follows, and this passage is telling us how willing your Father is, how willing your heavenly Father is to bestow that grace upon you, to assist you, to help you to live out the life that he has called you to live. This is a wonderful wonderful passage that should encourage you greatly about the love of God toward your eternal soul.

We're going to look at this in two ways. We're going to look, first of all, at the human illustration. The human illustration that Jesus uses. The last time we looked at the first two verses, verses 7 and 8, "Ask, and it will be given to you: seek, knock, it will be opened to you," the whole idea was that Jesus here is dealing with a spiritual request. We said that the entire Sermon on the Mount is dealing with a nature of spiritual life and so the promises given here about asking and receiving are pertaining to the spiritual realm of your life. Sooner or later people learn, people figure out no matter what prosperity teachers tell them, sooner or later you find out that God doesn't answer all of your requests for things that pertain to earthly existence, right? You find that that's true, you don't always get what you ask in a physical realm. That's not a contradiction of what Jesus says here because this is not a blanket open-ended promise for every hedonistic selfish desire that anyone could ever conjure up in their mind to ask God for and he's obligated to give it. That's not the purpose of that passage at all. The whole context of the Sermon on the Mount contradicts that. Jesus said, "You can't serve God and wealth," and

so you can't have a prayer life that's devoted to wealth and think that you're going to have the blessing that Jesus promises later on in the same sermon.

No, the focus is a spiritual one here and we also said last time that Jesus is talking about a sustained request; that this is a request that is an ongoing part of your prayer life; that this prayer for this kind of grace is something that is a feature of the way that you consider prayer. The whole idea that Jesus is giving us here is notice in verse 7, it will be given to you. You will find. It will be opened to you. And so Jesus is promising the blessing of God in response to a spiritual request for your spiritual growth, and as you pray for others, for their spiritual growth, for their spiritual needs. And now here in verses 9, 10 and 11, he's going to illustrate and bring to bear the response of God to that to help you see God's perspective on that type of praying so that you would be confident to pray this way and that you would be encouraged to pray this way, to seek this kind of blessing, to seek this kind of grace. We have to understand that these blessings are waiting to be given to us if we will only ask. If we will only ask.

So Jesus uses a human illustration. That's our first point for this morning: he uses a human illustration here in verses 9 and 10 as an example to show God's willingness to bless us. And let me just step back and try to crystallize in your mind a thought about your own spiritual life and the way that you think about God and the way that you think about your heavenly Father, the way that you think about the Lord Jesus Christ, because having gone through some of these battles in my own heart in years gone by, I realize how difficult it can be. Fundamentally, beloved, what do you believe about God's willingness to bless you? Fundamentally, do you believe that God is on your side to help you along this Christian path to which he calls you? Or is he like a grumpy referee waiting to see how you do and if you fail along the way, he's going to throw the flag on you and call the penalty out? Is God a resource of grace or is God someone that you are still trying to please in a way that he may or may not accept? Is he reluctant to bless you? Is he hard and difficult and harsh to respond to you? Does he welcome you with open arms when you come to him in prayer, or are his arms folded across his chest and he says, "What do you have to say for yourself this time?" I mean, we're talking about this in kind of crass terms but I'm confident you know what I'm talking about. How are you conceiving of God when you go to him in prayer? Jesus is trying to get to the point that you would understand that he's a Father of grace, he's a Father waiting to bless you. That is the whole point and this is what he's going to go on and show us here in verses 9 and 10.

Look at verses 9 and 10 with me again. He says,

9 Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?

Now think with me with what's just happened here in this passage. Jesus has just given multiple promises in verses 7 and 8 that if you ask for these things, they will be given to you. The sheer promise of the Lord Jesus Christ guarantees to you the answer of God

when you come to him seeking your spiritual growth, seeking your sanctification, to put it more theologically. But Christ is not content to leave it there. Christ is not content to leave it at just the promise, he goes further and lays another way of thinking about it before you so that it would reinforce your understanding of the nature and the character of God so that you would pray rightly. And as you go to verse 9, notice that word there, "or." You know, he's laying an alternative before you. He says, "I've given you these promises, or you could think about it from another perspective to strengthen your faith, to engender your confidence in the God to whom you pray. If six promises from the mouth of the Son of God are not enough to convince you to pursue praying this way, well, look at it another way, then," and he pictures a trusting son going to his father. This is so important for the good of your soul. This is so important for the encouragement of your heart. Jesus makes a simple human illustration here in what he is saying as he is helping people understand, as he is helping his disciples understand the willingness of God to bless them in this spiritual realm, and he compares it to a son going to a father, a human son going to a human father asking for food.

Look at it in verse 9, he says, "what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?" Now, in those days loaves of bread would resemble round, flat stones. You could disguise a stone for bread if you were wanting to trick somebody. There were certain fish that looked like snakes. And Jesus asks a question related to basic human nature and says, "How would a decent father respond to his son who comes and asks for food? Is a decent human father going to trick him and give him something bad, give him evil in response to a legitimately good request? Would he give his son something that looked like bread but would break his teeth when he bit into it? Would he give a snake as fish?" Well, the Greek construction of the question expects the answer, "No." It says, "Absolutely not." It's like this, in fact Jesus says it, "He will not give him a snake, will he? Will he give him a stone?" You can see that the expected answer of this is, "No." It says, "Of course not. Of course not." In any decent human family relationship when a son goes to his father and says, "I have a need here, can you give this to me?" a human father is going to answer that in a righteous way. To give him anything else would be contrary to the trust that is implicit in a father/son relationship. No human father would mock his son in that way, presupposing a decent human relationship, right?

The human relationship calls forth that kind of response. What Jesus is saying is, "Just look at it on a horizontal level. This is what fathers do for their children, they give to them. They bless them. They gladly respond to their requests." This is what fathers do, Jesus says. This is the human illustration that he's using and he's using that human relationship to illustrate now, beloved, a greater spiritual reality and that brings us to our second point where we will spend most of our time here today: the divine reality. We've seen the human illustration, point 1, the human illustration; point 2, the divine reality.

Look at verse 11 with me. Jesus says,

11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Now, what Jesus says here is encouraging and it is humbling at the same time. Notice what he says there at the start of verse 11, he says, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children." He's recognizing the fallenness of humanity. He's addressing us as those who are not holy, those who are not perfect, those who have sin within us. And as he addresses his audience, he speaks it and says, "You are sinners and even you as a sinner know that this is how a father deals with his children. You know that a father would give a good gift to his children in response to a request like that." He's making a lesser to a greater argument here in what he says. He says, "Learn something about the nature of God from that."

First of all, what are you supposed to learn about the divine reality here in this illustration that he's giving? Two things about God your Father, two things about God the Father of grace that you need to understand. These are so basic but they are designed to frame the entire way that you pursue your life with Christ. First of all, God is a greater Father. God is a greater Father. Look at what he says there in verse 11, he says, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" God is a greater Father. Jesus says, "How much more?" Follow the logic, beloved, this is so simple. He is not making a complicated argument here. This is not an intricate assertion that he's making. He says, "You are a sinful being. You have a fallen mind and even in that condition, you can understand that an earthly father will give a good gift to his son because that's what a father does for the son that he loves." He says, "If that lesser thing is true, how much more?" and the words just pick you up on a spiritual wind, if you will, pick you up and take you up into heaven and say, "How much more do you think a holy sinless God will be good to his children whom he loves? How much more if an earthly father will be good and give good gifts to his son, how much more an infinitely better God will do for his children?"

That's the argument. If the lesser thing is true, the greater thing is true also. You understand that an earthly father will do this and understand a greater Father will do even better, and that's the point and that's the way that you are supposed to think about your God. That's the way that you are supposed to think about the nature and the character of God. If lesser sinful men can give good gifts, how much more will a greater holy God bless us when we ask for what is good? That's the argument and it's undeniable. You see, this is designed to drive out your unworthy thoughts of God, your unworthy thoughts that somehow he is hostile to you. Jesus compares a child's trusting request for food to a disciple's trusting request for spiritual growth and says, and settles it, he says, "The Father is ready, willing and able to bless that request."

So, stepping back and remembering what we saw last time, when you make a spiritual request to God and you make a sustained request over time, "God, I want to grow in righteousness. I want to become more of what the Sermon on the Mount describes as

being the life of a true disciple. God, I want to be someone who is poor in spirit and who mourns over sin. God, I want to be someone hungering and thirsting after righteousness. God, I want to be a proper man of prayer, a proper woman of prayer. God, I want to have right priorities." When you pray that way, when you respond to the Sermon on the Mount that way, the question is what does God think about that request? What is the disposition of God toward that? Well, the disposition of God is to say, "Yes." The disposition of God is to say, "Of course. Let me give you what you need. Let me give you what you've asked for. Let me give you that which transcends your ability to do on your own because I've got a storehouse. I've got a great storehouse of blessing. I'm not diminished in my ability to give to you. I'm glad you asked. Let me supply."

That's the disposition of God and so when you persistently ask your Father, and every word important here, we'll address this, when you persistently ask your Father to help you grow in righteousness, what do you think he will do? He will help you grow in righteousness. There is no other possibility. He will respond favorably. When children make good requests of their fathers, the fathers answer and say, "Yes." That's what they do and that's the way that we should think about our God as we seek to develop our sanctification.

Now, a couple of objections here. A couple of objections. First of all, I could well understand someone saying, perhaps some of you saying, "That's too simple. Spiritual growth is more than just asking for it." Well, remember Jesus' audience here. Jesus is speaking to those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness already. He's not making a blanket promise to people who are spiritually indifferent or anything like that. He's speaking to people who have already cultivated in themselves and the Spirit of God has worked in them a hunger for righteousness. They are eager to obey but they see their inability to do so. They are eager to obey but they see their weakness. They have been a Christian long enough to understand, "I don't always get this right. In fact, sometimes I fail pretty miserably." To them, he says, "God will help you when you ask. God will help you when you ask." He is describing an earnest sincere request coming over time from someone who is earnestly seeking to grow this way. This presupposes that somebody is reading God's word, somebody is seeking actually to grow, not just lazily asking God to do it all while they do nothing.

Another objection someone else might say impatiently, and I say it with a smile because I think this arrow will find its target with some of you. Someone else might say impatiently, "I tried that and it doesn't work. I asked God to help me get over my particular sin. I've asked God to help me grow spiritually and it doesn't work. I still struggle. I still fail. I got frustrated and I just quit asking." To that objection I would say this: if you stopped praying for God's help, beloved, I say it gently but we need to be frank with each other here, if you stopped praying for God to help you grow in righteousness, you never once asked in the spirit that Jesus requires here in this passage. You see, Jesus says, "You ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking." The fact that the answer was delayed was not an excuse for you to stop asking. That was not a reason. The goal of righteousness, the desirability of righteousness, the call to righteousness didn't diminish simply because of your failure.

You continue to ask. You continue to seek even when it seems like the answer is delayed. You persevere through that and you keep asking until heaven opens the door for your growth.

If someone stopped praying because he was discouraged, he has no complaint against these words of Jesus. Listen, just think with me here. Just think with me here. Jesus says, "Ask and keep on asking and you will receive." You say, "I asked," to which I say, "Ah, but you stopped and you brought yourself outside of the realm of the promise." Jesus told you to keep asking but you stopped, and the fact that you were discouraged, beloved, is not an excuse for that. Think with me on that simple example, homely little example here. I know what's coming. Can you imagine someone taking that approach with their personal hygiene? "You know, I want to be clean and, you know, I tried taking showers but I found that I just got dirty again and it just got so frustrating to me that I just gave up and I quit. No more showers for me." Really? That might explain why you don't have many friends. You would never do that. You would look at that and you would say, "Friend, that's preposterous. Physical hygiene doesn't work that way. It is a sustained effort. It is something that you do consistently over time and you don't expect one shower to take care of you for life." We all understand that. It's so absurd no one would even think it.

Well, beloved, just take that over into the spiritual realm and see the obvious application. Your spiritual growth requires your consistent attention through humble prayer to your heavenly Father. This isn't something that you pray one time. You see, look, especially you young people developing relationships and all of that, hygiene matters to you. You want to be at your best for the person that you are seeking or whatever. Great. Love that. All in favor of it. It's a consistent day by day effort. Well, if you want this kind of righteousness of which the Lord speaks, that desire doesn't go away. You keep asking. You keep seeking it. You want it day by day and so you seek it and you ask for it day by day. You see, the person who gives up, who gets frustrated and quits, the problem is not that God has failed us in some way. I've said this multiple times, I probably ought to say it more often: sometimes the Lord lets you go through struggles, sometimes the Lord lets you fail again and again just so that you would come to realize more and more how empty you are spiritually and how much you are in need of grace; to humble your pride, to afflict you to the point of humility so that you would come and say, "God, help me. I can't do it on my own." And only when you have come to a settled rejection of your own natural ability do you start to pray in this kind of earnest spirit that says, "God, I really need your help," and you start to pray that way and then you find over time the Lord changing you, the Lord helping you. And the whole idea is that this is a sustained matter of spiritual life, not a one time event that allows you to arrive and then you're on spiritual Easy Street. It's not like that, beloved, and sometimes you just lay broken in the trench, bloodied from the battle, and you say, "God, help me again today," and it seems like the measure of grace is small, perhaps, but that's not the case. That's not the case. The mere fact that you are asking is showing the work and the operation of grace in your heart.

You should never lose sight of who your heavenly Father is. He is a greater Father than a human parent and he knows exactly when to give what you need. So you trust him for

that and you keep asking along the way. The problem is not that our God has failed us. That could never be the answer. And in our discouragement, we need to come back to the fact that possibly, possibly, probably, we just don't know him like we should. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this, "The greatest defect in most Christian lives is our failure to know God as our Father. We say we know that and believe it, but do we know it in our daily life? Is it something of which we are always conscious? If only we got hold of this, we could smile in the face of every possibility and eventuality that lies ahead of us."

Beloved, if you're struggling in your Christian life, I say this to help you and to encourage you, to be a blessing to you, not to rebuke you. If you are struggling with a lot of chronic discouragement in your Christian life, come back to the realization that God is a heavenly Father who desires to bless you; that he is with you; that he saved you in order to bring you into his family; to put you on the receiving end of his blessing and generosity. And to come back and ask him afresh again, "God, I've been run over by a truck here. Can't you help me?" and to realize that that's not a prayer of desperation that he may or may not answer, this is a confident request we make knowing that our God is for us, and if God is for us, who can be against us? He is a greater Father. If the human father would give to his human son, how much more a greater God to his spiritual child? This is fundamental to the way that we think about our God.

Secondly, the divine reality, God is a greater Father. Secondly, God is a gracious Father. God is a gracious Father and as you go to your heavenly Father in light of this passage, remember – oh, this is sweet – remember how Jesus has described him throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Look at chapter 6, verse 4. You see, this all comes down to knowing who God is. This all comes down to knowing the nature and character of God. Don't let anyone ever tell you that theology is impractical. Theology is immensely practical, theology immensely informs the way that you respond to life, it immensely informs your whole demeanor as you go through life which is sometimes good and sometimes hard. You must know these things that we are so easy to forget when things don't go our way.

Chapter 6, verse 4. What is God like? Verse 4, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Verse 6, "when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." He sees, he will reward you. He sees, he will reward you.

Look at verse 8, "do not be like them," don't be like the Gentiles who meaninglessly repeat the same prayers over and over. You don't need to be like them, "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Your Father knows your circumstances. Your Father cares. Your Father is intimately aware with every detail of your life. Your Father is intimately aware that these particular things are difficult. He is intimately aware of the struggles that you have, of those besetting sins that sometimes seem to dominate you more than you dominate them. He knows. He knows. He anticipated all of that before Christ even went to the cross. He knows and he saved you anyway. Now having saved you, is he just going to turn his back on you? This is unthinkable.

Look at verse 26 of chapter 6, "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." These little two cent creatures have needs and your Father gladly feeds them. He gladly makes sure that the birds of the air have what they need. Don't you think you're worth more than a sparrow? Aren't you worth more than a flitting cardinal that will die in a short amount of time? Well, if God feeds the birds like that, won't he do much more for you? You see, we just need to repent, frankly, of our unworthy thoughts of God that somehow he is reluctant to answer prayer; that somehow he is reluctant to bless us; that somehow he's reluctant to receive us when we go to him in prayer.

Verse 32, "the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." Beloved, your Father knows. Your Father cares. Your Father is willing to answer and willing to give. He sees you and he knows your need and he has promised to provide for you.

So what do you say in response to that? How do we respond? How do we think about that? How do we think about God in light of this? Beloved, there is something really basic and fundamental that should sink deep into each of our hearts in light of these things: the God of the Bible, the God of your Lord Jesus Christ, the God and Father of your Lord Jesus Christ, this God to whom we pray, this God who sent Christ to lay his life down on a cross for our sins, this God who graciously sent his Spirit to draw us to Christ to save us, to redeem us and to bring us into his family, this God who as Christ expressed it in John 14, he has gone to prepare a place for us so that he can receive us and we will be with him forever, this God deserves your trust. This God deserves your confidence. This God deserves your trust. He receives you in love. He is sovereign over all and he uses his strength to help you. So this frames everything about the way that we pray to him.

Look at verse 11 again with me now. He says, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" Beloved, I say it reverently but I say it emphatically: for the love of God, for the love of God, lay hold of this in your heart, lay hold of this in your mind, God is not a reluctant blesser of his children. God is not reluctant to forgive and to cleanse and to help us in our struggles with sanctification. He is not an unwilling stranger unwilling to give you five dollars for gas. He is not an uncaring tyrant just looking to smack you and to whip you once more for another failure in your life. That is not who he is. You can't look at the cross of Calvary and think that. No, the one that he whipped was his own Son, right? The Son bore the stroke on our behalf. God is like this, he is willing to bless.

Now, there is one last thing that you need to notice here, that we see who God is, we trust him, we bless his name for the goodness of his character, the greatness of who he is. We see that but we realize in what Jesus says, that there is an element of responsibility for you here and this is where it becomes, now having looked up, now we look in. Notice the last phrase of verse 11, "how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to," to whom? "To those who ask Him!" He gives to those who ask him.

Beloved, this is not an indiscriminate promise that God makes to everyone. This isn't something that you can just automatically receive regardless of your mental involvement, your mental engagement. No, this is designed to cultivate in you a spirit of dependence and a spirit of humility where you actually go and ask. You actually go and ask in this sustained way. If you want this blessing, you have to ask for it. If you want this kind of spiritual growth, if you want to lay hold of this kind of blessing from God, you've got to ask for it. And it would do us all good to ask ourselves, for you and me, to ask ourselves this question, "Do I even ask for this? Do I even ask? Yeah, God bless my work. God, help me this. God, help so and so that." Yeah, yeah, yeah, we get all that, but what about getting to the core of what Jesus is teaching throughout the whole Sermon on the Mount about pursuing a life of righteousness; about having a character that is reflective of the character of Christ himself; of having a character that desires the things of heaven more than the things of the earth and cultivating that, of cultivating a spirit of trust? "God, I believe that you will provide for me," over a spirit of anxiety, "God, I'm afraid you won't." The inner man, beloved, who you are in your heart and who that is shaping up to be, when do you ask God to shape you there? Change you there? "God, make me into a godly person. Make me into a godly young woman. Make me into a godly young man. God, make me godly inside, whatever else may come." When do you pray that way, beloved? You see, that's what Jesus is saying. That's what Jesus is promising and he says that that blessing is reserved for those who ask for it and asks consistently.

Maybe we would do well to rethink what we pray for, huh? Maybe we would do well to rethink our thoughts about God, "What a good God. What a great God." And to be willing to accept the possibility and the responsibility even to the point of repentance of saying, "You know, I accept the responsibility. I accept the fact that the reason I haven't progressed more in my spiritual life is because I really haven't asked God for help. You know, I'll go through my Bible reading plan and I'll do my quiet time and all of that, but when it really gets down to, God, change me and make me what you want me to be, I don't ask for that. I ask for other things. I ask for lesser things." Maybe we should change the way that we think about these things.

In addition to all of this, this willingness of God to bless us, who he is as a Father, beloved, let me remind you of one final central thing. In addition to all of this as we think about our meager spiritual lives and the help we need to grow, beloved, go back to Calvary. Go back to the cross. Our Lord shed his blood to make atonement for your sins. He left the glories of heaven to walk on this earth in the midst of 33 years of sinful opposition to his soul. He was beaten. He was crucified. He was spat upon. He bore the wrath of the Father. He bore the wrath of God on his shoulders on your behalf. And as they mocked him, he cried out, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing." He saw you in your sin in the 20th and 21st century and overlooked it. The Spirit of God brought Christ to you through the Gospel and he received you when you cried out in repentance and faith, "God, save me!" And he washed you and he cleansed you and he gave you an assurance that now you belong to him.

Beloved, think with me. Think with me. This determines everything about where you go spiritually from here. Did Christ make that gracious self-sacrifice in order to abandon you in the middle of the Christian life? Did he graciously reach out to you to start it only to step back and walk away in shame because of your repeated failure? Having lain down his life for you, will he turn you away as you seek help in the sometimes weary life of being a disciple of his? The question answers itself, doesn't it? No. No. No. No. No, he's not like that. He is not like that. He is a gracious Savior. God is the Father of grace.

Psalm 86, I believe it is. I turned right to it. You turn to it too, Psalm 86. This is what we walk out with. He knows our weakness. He promises growth for the asking. Look at verse 1, he says,

1 Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me; For I am afflicted and needy. Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man; O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You. 3 Be gracious to me, O Lord, For to You I cry all day long. 4 Make glad the soul of Your servant, For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

Now look at the ground upon which he prays this prayer, David reciting in Old Testament form the things that we have so weakly been trying to expound here today. Verse 5, Psalm 86:5,

5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You. 6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; And give heed to the voice of my supplications! 7 In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me. 8 There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord, Nor are there any works like Yours. 9 All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name. 10 For You are great and do wondrous deeds; You alone are God.

Do you see it, beloved? Do you see the ground upon which David says, "Help me in my affliction and my weakness. Lord, you are good. You are ready to forgive. You are abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon you." Did you come in staggering under the load? Been there, done that. Beloved, this God will hear your cry for mercy and he will answer as you call upon him.

Father, show those things to be true to every one who calls upon you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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