

7:8 *Asks... receives... seeks... finds... knocks... opened-* Note that the first two clauses are in the present tense. If we ask and seek for spiritual things, we shall receive them. But the metaphor of knocking and opening I suggested on 7:7 has a specific reference to seeking salvation at the last day. Hence the Lord uses the future tense. His repetition of what He has said in 7:7 is to drive home the wonder of it all. That if we ask for salvation, for ourselves as well as opportunities for others to have it, for the extension of God's Kingdom and glory- we really will receive it.

*Ask... receive-* The other couplets use the same Greek words as in 7:7 (seek... find; knock... opened). 'Ask' is the same Greek word, but *lambano* is used for 'receive' rather than *didomi* ("given", 7:7). The words 'ask... receive' are to be found again in Jn. 16:24, where the Lord says that in the era of the comforter, whatever is asked for in His Name will be received. This would not be the only time that the Sermon appears to look ahead to the promises of the Comforter era- see on 5:4. James 4:3 continues James' commentary on the Sermon by saying that his readership asked and did not receive (same Greek words) because they asked for the wrong things from the wrong motives. He was correcting the impression some had taken that the Lord was offering a blank cheque for anything. Our commentary so far has shown that the Lord is promising salvation and the things connected with the extension of His Kingdom principles in our lives and those of others.

7:9 *What man is there of you-* The Lord was addressing the disciples in Matthew's record of the Sermon. We can imagine Him looking around at each of them.

*Ask... give-* The same words as in 7:7. The Lord sensed that His promise of Divine response to prayer for salvation would be so hard for them to accept. He is here persuading them by all manner of methods to simply accept that reality. We are God's children, and He will not be cruel to us. It would be unnatural and counter-instinctive for Him to not save us. For His is the Kingdom- therefore He desires to give it to us, He designed it for us.

*Bread... stone-* The point has been made that loaves of bread looked like stones, just as there were some fish (similar to eels) caught in the sea of Galilee which looked like snakes (7:10). This surely played a part in the Lord's temptation to turn the stones of the wilderness into bread (Mt. 4:3). The similarity of the Aramaic words for bread and stone would have strengthened the connection. The simple message is that God will not play a cruel trick on us- because He is our loving Father. The Lord sensed human scepticism about God's simple offer of salvation. It is simply there- for all who will trust Him in a simple, child-like way. Perhaps the stone is to be connected with how the same word is used for the millstone of condemnation in Mk. 9:42 and Rev. 18:21, and "the stone of stumbling" in 1 Pet. 2:8. If we seek the bread of the Kingdom (a common Jewish concept at the time, Lk. 14:15), God will not condemn us. Note how the Lord spoke of salvation and relation with Him as "the children's bread" (Mt. 15:26), the bread of salvation given (*didomi* as in Mt. 7:7) freely (Jn. 6:32). The Lord saw to the essence of human

fear- of Divine condemnation, that instead of the children's bread we would be given the stone of condemnation. One reason for the crucifixion was in order to try to openly persuade the world of God's grace- that it is for real. The Lord's teaching here signals one of man's greatest difficulties: to believe in God's grace. To accept His desire and passion to save us. The *giving* of bread to us by Jesus at the breaking of bread (*lambano* again, as in 7:8) is surely an acted parable of His utter commitment to indeed give us the bread we seek above all things (Mt. 26:26).

*Ask bread-* Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same words to teach us to do just this: "Give us this day our daily bread". So He clearly intends us to see ourselves as the hungry little child, asking his daddy for bread. And surely God will not disappoint. The prayer will be answered.

7:10 *A fish... a serpent-* Lk. 11:11 labours the point: "If he ask a fish, will he *for a fish* give him a serpent?". The Lord is penetrating deep into the psychology of His people. We fear that the promised salvation may only be an appearance. And we are being shown here that that is to effectively accuse God of a cruel trick. At what stage the fish became a symbol of Christianity is not clear (there is a distinct similarity in sound between the Aramaic for 'Jesus' and for 'fish', something like 'Iisus' and 'Ikfus'), but the combination of fish and serpent tempt us to interpret this as also having the sense: Do you think that Christianity, the whole offer of the Kingdom I am making, is really such a cruel trick that it's really the serpent, the symbol of evil incarnate? Because that really is how it would have to be. It's either that, or gloriously true. And if we accept God as our loving Father, then with childlike faith we must also believe that His offer of salvation is simply true for us- if we ask. Again we see a connection with earlier teaching in the Sermon; for the Lord had taught His people to pray to "Our Father". Like all of the Lord's prayer, that is harder to pray than might first appear. Because if He really is our loving Heavenly Father, then we are to believe that if we ask Him for salvation and the things of His Kingdom, we shall surely receive.

7:11 *If you then, being evil-* This record of the Sermon was addressed to the disciples. Did the Lord consider them to 'be evil'? The only other time we encounter the phrase "being evil" is again on the Lord's lips and again in Matthew: "O generation of vipers, how can you, *being evil*, speak good things?" (Mt. 12:34). He may have the sense that 'Even the worst Pharisees have a soft spot for their little boys and would never play a cruel trick on them- so do you think God will do that to you?'. The sentence opens with the particle *ei*, and it would be justifiable to translate this 'Whether' or 'Even if' instead of "if". Even if they were as evil as the very worst sinners, they would still give their child bread rather than a stone. The logic is very powerful. If we believe God is basically good, then seeing even wicked people would not play a cruel trick on their kiddies, how much more would God not do that to us His beloved children, whom we address as "Our Father"?

*Know how to give-* Now the Lord moves beyond simply teaching that God will give us daily

bread and salvation if we ask. He alludes here to how a father, even a man who is otherwise evil, has an intuitive sense as to what present his child would like. Paul Tournier's insightful book *The Meaning of Gifts* demonstrates that the desire to give gifts is psychologically part of 'love'. God knows what ultimately we would love so much. And yet, as the James 4:3 allusion demonstrates, it is not material things in this life which are in view here. God knows us and He knows all our possible futures, our eternal possibilities throughout His Kingdom. And He will surely give us that. He has created for us the most wonderful things to lavish upon us. To think that in any sense God is a 'hard man' is to tragically misunderstand. That persuasion only really comes from a lack of basic faith in Him and His grace.

*Give good gifts-* The emphasis upon "good" continues the laboured addressing of our fear that God just might not be 'good' and we might get a serpent rather than a fish from Him. The point is laboured because it is such a powerful array of step logic- if it's not all a cruel trick, then it is all wonderfully true. The parallel record speaks of "the Holy Spirit" instead of "good gifts", and there is a clear connection with Eph. 4:8: "He gave gifts unto men", referring to the Holy Spirit. All the Greek words there are used here in Mt. 7:11,12. On one level, there is a prediction of the Comforter, as elsewhere in the Sermon (see on 7:8). And yet the principle appears to be clearly that in general terms, God will not only give us daily bread and future salvation, but so much more besides- in spiritual terms. Whilst the form of manifestation of Spiritual gifts has changed since the first century, the principle remains- that God will give His Spirit to those who are poor in spirit and who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

*Your Father-* Many times the idea of "Your father which is in heaven" is used in the context of faith in prayer being answered (Mt. 7:11; 18:19; 21:22; Mk. 11:24; Jn. 14:13; James 1:5,6,17 etc.). It's as if the reality of God actually existing in Heaven in a personal form should be a powerful focus for our prayers.

*Good things-* Answered prayer is paralleled with being given the Holy Spirit (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). The prayer of the Philippians for Paul is likewise linked with "the supply of the Spirit" (Phil. 1:19). These passages therefore teach that having spiritual fruit is associated with answered prayer (Jn. 15:16), as is the possession of the Comforter (Jn. 14:14; 16:24 are in this context). Many passages imply that God's hearing of our prayers is proportionate to His perception of our spirituality. He will not respond to the prayer of those whose way of life is contrary to His word: Ps. 66:18; Pro. 1:24-28; Is. 1:15; 59:2; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:10-12; 29:12; Lam. 3:8,44; Mal. 1:7-9; Mk. 11:25; Jn. 9:31; James 1:6,7; 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7,12. But He will hear the prayer of the righteous; and 'hearing' is an idiom for 'answering', it doesn't just mean that God takes cognizance of the fact the righteous have prayed: 2 Kings 19:20; Mt. 7:7; 18:19,20; Jn. 14:14.

*7:12 Therefore-* The reason why we should do to others as we would like them to do to us flows straight on from :11. But what is the connection of thought? Perhaps the Lord is changing tack here and introducing His concluding summary for the Sermon, which is about 'doing' what He has been teaching. The same Greek for 'do' here in :12 is translated 'bring forth' or 'do' in the

distinct seven fold exhortation to do' which we find in 7:17,18,19,21,22,24,26. The Greek *oun* translated "therefore" is of wide meaning, and could just as comfortably introduce a new section rather than conclude the section about judging which began in 7:1. It can have the sense of 'truly' or 'certainly', as if introducing a major truth. But it may be that the context of judgment, so clearly established in the preceding 11 verses, is not out of the Lord's mind in His use of the word *oun*, "Therefore...". If we condemn others, if we drag them before God's judgment because we refuse to forgive them, then we must consider: Do I want others to do that to me? For we have all sinned and upset others to the point some struggle to forgive us. As we judge others, then we shall be judged likewise. If we really hope they have to answer for their sin against us, then perhaps they will have to. And would you like others to take you to the Divine court for your sins?

*That men should do to you-* This is another way of saying 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. The Greek for 'do to you' recurs in Mt. 18:35 where we read how God shall 'do to you' if you do not forgive your brother. We also find the phrase in Mt. 25:40,45- 'whatever you do' to Christ's brethren, you do to Him and shall receive from Him accordingly. It is true that what goes around, comes around- so it's best to treat others as you would like to be treated. But that kind of truth is expressed in almost every religious and cultural system of the world. My sense is that the Lord is not merely repeating conventional, folksy wisdom, but rather is elevating it to a far higher and more deeply internal, spiritual level. For this is His style throughout the Sermon. The recurrence of the phrase 'whatever you do' in Mt. 25:40,45 teaches that whatever we do (or do not do) to others, we do to Christ personally. And in that dimension of life, the 'come back' of our actions will not simply be in this life, but more importantly, at the last day. Judgment day, either explicitly or implicitly, forms a major theme in the Lord's teaching. If He is indeed teaching that what we do to others is done to Him and therefore will have its response at the day of judgment, rather than merely in this life as folksy wisdom teaches, then indeed we can understand His comment: "For this is the law and the prophets". The law and the prophets do indeed teach that human behaviour, especially that done to others, shall come to final judgment in the last day. But I would not say that 'what goes around, comes around' is exactly their major and noteworthy theme, true as that bit of folksy wisdom is.

7:13 *Enter in-* The context is quite clear that the Lord means 'enter into the Kingdom' (Mt. 18:3; 19:24; Lk. 18:25). But the question is, whether the Lord speaks of entering into the Kingdom at the last day, or in some sense, in this life. Luke's record of this statement of the Lord is in Lk. 13:24: "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate: for many... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able". This favours a 'last day' interpretation, for we know from the parable of the foolish girls that some will seek to enter at the time of the Lord's return and be unable to. Some other usages of the phrase 'enter in' imply the same (Mt. 5:20; 18:3; 25:10; Acts 14:22; Heb. 3:19; 4:6; Rev. 22:14). However, John's equivalent of this phrase speaks of the believer 'entering in' to a relationship and salvation with the Lord right now (Jn. 10:9). And other words of the Lord speak

of 'entering in' to "life" right now (Mt. 18:3,8,9; 19:17). The guests enter in to the Messianic banquet now, before the Master comes, Mt. 22:12; the Scribes stopped men entering the Kingdom right now, Mt. 23:13; by birth of water and spirit we enter the Kingdom, Jn. 3:5; the Gentiles enter in every time one is converted (Rom. 11:25); a promise is given us of entering the promised rest, but we who believe do right now 'enter in' to that rest (Heb. 4:1,3). And yet we are to labour in order to enter into that rest (Heb. 4:11). The rich man must shed the load of his wealth and enter in- now (Mt. 19:23,24). For judgment day is too late to shed the load of wealth. We can therefore conclude that by following the Lord's teaching now, we enter into His Kingdom; insofar as His Kingship is exercised over us, we are His Kingdom, those whom He is King over. The outcome of the judgment day is not therefore some terrible unknown to us if we are in our hearts and lives clearly under His Kingship in this life. Our passage into the future Kingdom of God on earth will be a seamless continuation of our present experience.

*The narrow gate* - The Greek could imply 'made narrow'. The Lord repeats the term in :14, emphasizing how narrow is the entrance. The contrast is with the wide gate and broad road. The idea of two gates facing a man was surely an allusion to the gates of Jerusalem, which had a main gate, through which camels could pass, and the small gate through which only pedestrians could enter. This leads me to favour the traditional interpretation of entering through into the Kingdom through the eye of a needle (Mt. 19:24; Lk. 18:25)- the rich must unload their camels of all their wealth and squeeze through the small needle gate. The narrowness of the gate is because it is so hard for people to give up their materialism. They desire spirituality, to enter in, but not without their present attachment to wealth. Remember the Lord was primarily and initially addressing the poor. The desire for wealth, and especially mental concern about it, is the main reason why people do not grasp the way to the Kingdom. That needs some sober reflection, because our natural assumption is that warnings against materialism do not apply to *me*. Whenever we find ourselves making such an assumption, that Biblical warnings do not apply to us, we need to really ensure that we are thinking straight and that our self-deceiving flesh is not kidding us that we simply don't have to take the Lord at His word.

*The way*- Surely the Lord at this stage in His ministry had in mind the way that John the Baptist had come to prepare a "way" for Him (Mt. 3:3). By admitting that this way would only be found by a minority of Israel, the Lord was perhaps tacitly recognizing that John's attempt to prepare a way over which the King of glory could come to Jerusalem had not succeeded.

*That leads*- *Apago* is used another 14 times in the New Testament. Ten of these specifically refer to being 'lead away to death', the majority referring to the leading away of the Lord Jesus to death on the cross. 7:14 contrasts being lead to destruction with being lead to life; but the way to life is through the death of the cross. We either bear our iniquities and their result (Lev. 19:8), or we bear the cross of the Lord Jesus. It's a burden either way. The Lord played on this fact when He spoke of there being two roads, one which *leads* to death, and the other to life (Mt. 7;13,14). The Greek word translated 'lead' is in fact part of an idiom: to be led is an idiom for 'to be put to

death' (cp. Jn. 18:13; 21:18). Indeed, the very word translated "lead" in Mt. 7:14 is rendered "be put to death" (Acts 12:19). So, we're led out to death either way, as the criminal made his 'last walk' to the cross. We're either led out and put to death for the sake of eternal life, or for eternal death. The logic is glaring. The Hebrew of Ps. 139:24 reveals a telling play on words which makes the same point: "Wicked way" is rendered in the AVmg. as 'way of pain'; the way of wickedness is itself the way of pain.

*Destruction-* The Greek is used another 19 times in the New Testament, nearly always with reference to condemnation at the last day. We are making the choice now- condemnation, or the path to the cross, to death, and thence to eternal life. The essence of the future judgment is before us daily; "we make the answer now".

*Many-* The same word used about the "many" who were now listening to Him teach (Mt. 4:25; 8:1). Surely He was saying that the Kingdom road is not found by many. And yet we compare this with the promise that Abraham's seed will become many. Compared to the wonder of salvation, we are indeed "many", but relative to the many who do not respond, we are a minority.

*7:14 Narrow is the way-* "The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns; but the path of the upright is a highway" (Proverbs 15:19 NIV). The road of the wise is described as a highway in Proverbs 16:17 too; and the way of the wicked is also strewn with difficult obstacles in Proverbs 22:5; "Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths" (2:15). There is probably a designed contrast between this and the way the Lord described the road to the Kingdom as made narrow, and the way to death as a wide, broad highway (Mt. 7:13,14); the Proverbs seem to say the opposite. The answer may be that Proverbs is presenting God's viewpoint; in ultimate reality, the way to the Kingdom is wide and clear and easier, better marked, than the road to death. But the Lord turned all this round, because He appreciated that from *our* perspective, this wouldn't be the case. We will think that the way to the Kingdom is made narrow (Gk.) and hard, restricted; whilst the road to death seems so wide and obviously right. The Lord Jesus based many of His parables on the Proverbs, and His words concerning the wide road to destruction and the narrow road to the Kingdom (Mt. 7:13,14) are surely based on the frequent descriptions of the ways / great way to life, and that to death, which Proverbs so often mentions. The road / way of life which we are on is really leading somewhere. "The way of the wicked" is opposed to the way of him "that followeth after righteousness" (Proverbs 15:9 cp. seeking the Kingdom and God's righteousness, Mt. 5:47).

*Few-* See on "many" in 7:13. We find another contrast between the few and the many when we read that only "few" will be chosen from the many who are called (Mt. 20:16; 22:14). The implication seems to be that out of the "many" who were then listening to the Lord's teaching ("many" in 7:13 is s.w. Mt. 4:25; 8:1), only a minority would enter into life. There seems fair Biblical reason to think that the community of God's people are a minority in the world, and yet within them, only a minority will finally choose the way of salvation. This helps make sense of why all the faithful lament the weak spiritual state of the church communities surrounding them.

And recognizing that this is a general principle shields us from the disillusion which arises from having started out believing that the majority of our community are genuine believers. We have no option but to assume they will be saved, for we cannot condemn any individual; but on the other hand, we are to recognize that on a statistical level, only a few of those within the community will be saved. The majority of those who were 'baptized' in the Red Sea did not make it to God's Kingdom, and this fact is used in 1 Cor. 10 and Hebrews 3 and 4 to warn us not to assume that the ratio will be much higher in the Christian community.

*Find it-* This is clearly to be connected with the Lord's teaching a few verses earlier that whoever seeks will find (Mt. 7:7,8). He is balancing out the statistical difficulty of salvation with the fact that those who want to be there just have to ask- and they will be. The promise that whoever seeks / asks will find / receive is not a blank cheque about material things, but rather is a promise of entry into the Kingdom. All those who truly love the Lord's appearing will enter the Kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1,8). It is so simple that it is hard to believe- those who truly seek to be in the Kingdom, will find a place therein. Note how the Lord here speaks of finding the way that leads to life, elsewhere He speaks of finding life (Mt. 10:39; 16:25). This is typical of the now / but not yet teaching of the New Testament. We have the eternal life in the sense that we are living that kind of life which we shall eternally live, we have entered the way to life; but we are still mortal and await the physical change to immortality.