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ARE YOU A SEEKER OR A BEGGAR?

Today's Text: Matt. 7: 7-12

Extracts:

Then [Jesus] opened His mouth and taught them, saying ... “Ask and it will be given to you seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened” [Matt. 5:2; 7: 7-8]

Kelly Kinney is a 29-year-old unemployed marketing professional who lives in Los Angeles, California, USA, with her husband and a 10-year-old son.¹ She and her family moved to California a year ago from Dayton, Ohio, after her company downsized and laid her off. Her husband works but his pay is not enough to sustain a family of three. Moreover, they have eaten up the savings that they had kept as down payment for a house. She is now desperate for a job but, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in the Los Angeles area was 8.2% in October 2008. Since September 2008, she had sent out applications for an average of 40 jobs per day but without any response. So, she decided to do the extraordinary. She printed her résumé on a T-shirt with the bold sign, 'I NEED A JOB'! On the front, she put her experience; on the back, a cover letter. She goes to where she can find a captive audience, such as coffee-shops and street corners. Her action has attracted the national media!

Kelly has begun to receive responses from potential employers. For example, one told her that she was too qualified for their opening, and she has turned down a marketing assistant position. She is determined to keep wearing her T-shirt, and if that does not work, to keep “innovating” until she finds what she wants. She adds, “I have a couple of things in mind ... something no one else has done before.”

Some people say that Kelly's show is a gimmick and wonder why she is not ashamed to beg that way. Kelly believes she is being tenacious. How do you see what she has done? Do you see her as a beggar (one with a pan in her hands asking for dole in a shameless manner) or a seeker (one asking to be enabled to use her God-given talents for His purposes)? When you go on your knees to ask for God's favour, do you behave as a seeker or as a beggar? Let us find out from this week's study.

¹ Story is based on “Woman wants to get resume off her chest,” <http://www.cnn.com/2008/LIVING/12/10/job.seeker/index.html?iref=mpstoryview#cnmSTCText>; December 10, 2008.

1. Why ask at all when God already knows my needs?

As part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His listeners [**Matt. 6: 7-8**]:

When you pray, do not use vain repetitions, as the heathens do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them, for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

If God already knows what we need, why should we ask Him again? There are several possible reasons for doing so, and the following should be noted:

a) *So that you can thank Him when He meets your needs*

People are not motivated by what they do not know about. For example, people who live in advanced countries take for granted steady supply of power, water and other utilities until they travel to less developed societies where such things are a luxury. People in democratic societies cannot appreciate their relative freedom until they visit countries with autocratic regimes. If your children were to find pocket money or lunch packs in their school bags each day without asking or knowing who put them there, how would they appreciate or thank you for your generosity?

In like manner, God expects us to thank Him for the favours He has bestowed upon us, especially those who do not as yet know Him. Take the case of the servant of the prophet Elisha when both of them were surrounded by Syrian troops who had come under the cover of night to kill the man of God for revealing the secrets of the Syrian king to the king of Israel. When the servant arose in the morning and saw the city surrounded with horses and chariots, he said to Elisha, "Alas, my master. What shall we do?" The prophet replied, "Do not fear for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then he prayed to God, saying, "Open his eyes, that he may see." God opened the young man's eyes and he saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. Therefore, when the Syrian troops were struck blind by God in response to Elisha's prayer, his young servant did not need to be told who was responsible for their deliverance [**2 Kgs 6: 8-18**]!

b) *God owns what you are asking for!*

When you want to take money from your own bank account (checking/current or savings accounts), you have to meet some requirements. For example, if you are using your debit (ATM) card, you must correctly enter your PIN number. If it is a check/cheque, you must sign it. The process of taking money out of your own account is the

equivalent of praying to God to give you access to His bank of blessings and favours. If you have to ask the bank before you can get your own money, should you not ask God to access favours that He actually owns? After all, the earth and all that is in it belong to God [Ps. 24: 1]. If you take what does not belong to you without permission, you are a thief! Therefore, you have to first ask God before you can obtain His favours.

c) *So that you can keep asking for more!*

You may have a credit card, that is, a facility that enables you to spend the money that you do not own or have but which you hope to pay back in due course, usually in small installments. The credit card company imposes an upper limit and you cannot spend beyond it. In God's case, you are using a credit card without an upper limit and it is free of charge!² That is the point underlined in the word of God where it is said, "You who have no money, come, buy and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk *without money and without price*" [Is. 55: 1].

Most of us do not value what is free but God does not allow waste. For example, after miraculously feeding a multitude of over five thousand people (counting the women and children), Jesus said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain *so that nothing is lost*" [Jn 6: 1-12]. Asking is much more than glib because God will not throw pearls at pigs!

2. The Attitude of Asking

Jesus taught His listeners, "Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" [Matt. 7: 8]. Does that suggest that you will receive what you actually asked for or sought or knocked for? No! You could get nothing or same or better, depending on your asking attitude. James has written, "You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" [Jam. 4: 3]. Do you ask like the beggar or the seeker?

a) *The Beggar's attitude*

When beggars sit at street corners or market places with pans in their hands asking for alms, they have no relationship of any kind with their donors and may actually not care. That is why as many times as you pass by them, even over a short time span, they will still solicit from you and may not recognize you. In most cases, they waste their daily takings on their lusts, such as drugs and alcohol. Take the case of the man born lame and had to be carried to the gate of the temple daily "to ask alms from those who entered the temple." On seeing Peter and John entering the temple, he begged alms of them. If Peter had not healed him by the name

² "Shopping with God's Credit Card!" *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 5 Feb. 2006; http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/volume_7/PDFs/4_ShoppingwithGodsCreditCard.pdf

of Jesus, he might have remained a beggar for life, asking for silver and gold [Acts 3: 1-3]. So, for beggars, begging is a business!

When your asking is not anchored on a closer and growing relationship with God, so as to know how to ask according to His will, you are behaving like a beggar. You want to take from God but you do not want to give Him your life. When you receive and squander it on your lust, you are a beggar and you are limiting your ability to receive more. Therefore, Christ's teaching is not meant for beggars.

b) *The Seeker's attitude*

The seeker begins with developing and sustaining a close relationship with God. S(he) first looks for knowledge by which "rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches" [Prov. 24: 4]. Having been transformed by the renewing of their minds, seekers are able to prove "what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" [Rom. 12: 2]. If they "ask anything according to His will, He hears (them)" [1 Jn 5: 14]. It is to such people that the word of God assures, "and it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" [Is. 65: 24]. It follows that seekers hardly ask things for themselves but largely for God's glory.

For example, soon after Solomon had been crowned king of Israel, he went to Gibeon to make offerings. Before going there, we are told, "Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father, David," implying an existing close relationship with God. That night, God appeared to him in a dream and asked, "What shall I give you?" Can you hear that? He asked for wisdom to be a good ruler. In appreciation of his answer, God added what Solomon had not asked for- material blessings [1 Kgs 3: 1-15]! Christ's promise on asking is, therefore, meant for seekers, not beggars.

3. Seekers apply the A-S-K rule of Asking!

Jesus taught His listeners, "Ask and it will be given to you, Seek and you will find; Knock and it will be opened to you" [Matt. 7: 12]. The Ask-Seek-Knock sequence is what can be called the A-S-K rule of asking, which represents an *intensity continuum*. It says that *the intensity and longevity of your asking depend on the nature of your problem and purpose of your asking*.

a) *When to ask*

You may find yourself in a decision situation where a prompt response is required. At the same time, you do not want to decide without first hearing from God His position on the matter. Some times, you may just be

thinking about a matter on which you may need spiritual guidance. With an existing good relationship with God, He will answer you as soon as you ask Him.

A good example was soon after Peter and John had been set free by the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, following their bold witness for Christ in the temple. The disciples gathered together and raised a prayer, saying (among other things), “*Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.*” Immediately, the place where they were assembled shook and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness [**Acts 4: 23-31**]. Would you need to pray on that issue after that?

b) *When to seek*

Some times, you need to press harder until you get what you want. For example, Elisha wanted a double portion of his master, Elijah’s power. So, on the day that Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, he tried to discourage his servant from going with him to the point of departure but Elisha would not hear of it. He went with Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel and from there to Jericho. They crossed the Jordan River and Elisha did not give up. It was only at that point that Elijah asked Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken away from you.” His persistence paid off and his prayer was answered [**2 Kgs 2: 1-13**].

Some times, the delay in God’s response may be due to the work of hindering spirits. You must continue to seek until you find what you want. For example, Daniel prayed and fasted for twenty-one days and nothing happened. However, a few days later, an angel of God came to inform him that God answered his prayer from the first day, but that hindering spirits (“the princes of the kingdom of Persia”) had delayed him from bringing God’s response. It took Archangel Michael to come and help that angel to win the spiritual battle [**Dan. 10: 10-21**]. Take another example. When the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out demons from a certain man’s son, He replied, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” [**Matt. 17: 20**]. That is more than mere asking.

c) *When to knock*

When all else fails and you find yourself in a desperate situation, you can storm the gates of heaven to literally attract God’s prompt attention! All human methods have failed and every one has given up on your case. Now, you have no one else to turn to but God. For example, the woman with the issue of blood for twelve years had spent all that she had on

physicians and was left still bleeding, weak and dying. In such a desperate state, which Jewish law or human thron could stop her from reaching for Jesus? She had assured herself that she would be healed if only she could touch His garment. She did and she was completely healed [Mk 5: 24-34].

The Canaanite woman was not going to take ‘no’ from Jesus, even though as a Gentile she did not deserve to be granted audience by Him. Her daughter was badly troubled by a demon. When she cried to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, You Son of David,” He did not answer her a word. She was not discouraged. Instead, she raised her voice and followed Jesus wherever He went. The disciples complained to Him that the woman was crying after them. She surged forward and fell at Jesus’ feet. At that stage, Jesus told her that it was not right to take the children’s bread and cast it to dogs but she responded, “Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” At that stage, Jesus commended her great faith and healed her daughter [Matt. 15: 21-28]. In deed, we ought to pray and not faint [Lk 18: 1].

3. Conclusion: You too can become a seeker!

In concluding the discourse on asking, Jesus told His listeners, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” [Matt. 7: 12]. How would you want others to ask you for what belongs to you? It is the same question that God has asked you from today’s study. Here are the key points for you to ponder:

- Have a healthy (righteous) relationship with God *prior to* coming to Him with your shopping list.
- Offer thanks along with or before your requests so as to accelerate their being answered [Ps. 50: 14-15] and “in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and (His) peace ... will guide your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” [Phil. 4: 6, 7];
- Pray more for others than for yourself for, in the words of Jesus, “if you have not been faithful in what belongs to (others), who will give you what is your own” [Lk 16: 12]?

Be a seeker, not a beggar!