

## **The Kingdom of Righteous Men**

### **Matt 7:1-12**

Creekside Community Church, San Leandro, California

Greg V. Arthur, July 16, 2017

**Matt 7:7-12** - <sup>7</sup> Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup> Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup> 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 good things to those who ask Him! <sup>12</sup> Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

### **I Can See Clearly Now**

Good morning Creekside, I'm Greg Arthur, one of the pastors here and I will be speaking to you today. As you can tell, it's that time of year when everything slows down, the dog days of summer, when schools are out, when the grass turns brown and sometimes catches fire, when the Curry t-shirts go for only \$5 out front of Walgreens, when everyone but you, is taking a fabulous vacation or attending a perfect wedding or going to an awesome summer camp, when John and Jeff Bruce, our dynamic duo, and their families are taking their well-deserved summer breaks. Even my wife is away visiting her parents. So today here we are, the Remnant, the ones who have no more vacation days, or no more money in the bank, or have to go to summer school, or never liked cruises or airports or weird food anyway. Here we are. I'm going to call you the faithful remnant. I'm glad you are here.

Okay Faithful Remnant, I have two hopes for today. First, that by God's grace we'll hear what God intends to say to us through our passage for today from the Bible. And second, that we'll really hear what God is saying, with ears to hear, that it won't be in one ear and out the other, and that His Word will forever change us from this day forward. Would you pray with me?

I'd like to start with an observation. Is it not true that there are times in life when something happens and everything after that moment is different? Before, all of life and the whole world was one way, and after, it was another. We mark these singular moments by saying things like, 'now everything is different,' or 'from now on,' or 'things will never be the same.' Or if you're old like me, we sing that song, by Johnny Nash – I can see clearly now the rain is gone.

When have you had these singular moments in your life? I can tell you a few of them for me. There are obvious ones like births and deaths, marriages, graduations, moving. One was when I had just started working as an engineer, at my first big boy job, all proud of myself. Well maybe more than a little proud, more like impressed with myself, like really, really impressed with my awesome self. And as I pulled up to our little apartment after having another awesome day of work, humming that great old hymn written about how great I art, at the door my little wisp of a wife who was all of 21 and couldn't even rent a car yet, said,

“I think you love work more than me,” and off she went gently closing the door and leaving me to stand there singing a brand-new song called how-great-I-aren’t. From then on, everything was different. I could see clearly now for the first time that the world did not revolve around me and my little agenda of things to do, a fact that I still have to keep learning. And as momentous as that was, there have been bigger singular moments: when I was saved reading the Word in a Bible study group, when the Lord changed my heart to forgive, when we said ‘I do ‘til death do us part,’ when Noah was born, when I left my engineering career.

And then there are those bigger singular moments that we may have in common. The Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989 during the World Series, when part of the Bay Bridge fell, and the double-decker freeways collapsed in Oakland. It’s surreal to remember for those of us who were here back then. Or the Oakland hills fire of 1991. Or 9/11 in 2001. We just fell on our knees in my office in San Francisco watching the news coverage. Colleagues of ours in New York told us that they were looking out of their office windows at the tragedy of an airliner hitting the north tower, when they all saw the second airliner strike the south tower. All knew that was an act of war – and everything changed in an instant. For those of us who were around then, it is still so surreal, like it just happened yesterday. And the world is forever marked out as pre-9/11 and post-9/11. Elections could have that quality. The end of communism and fall of the Berlin Wall in Europe has that quality. Pearl Harbor and V-day was that for my parents’ generation. Every generation and every culture has had these bigger moments, when everyone there could clearly see that everything was different.

### **Now That the Kingdom of God is at Hand**

But the greatest singular moment in all human history, when everything really changed, was when Jesus, the Son of God, the King of heaven and earth, came to live among us. Everything before His appearing was one way and everything after is another. And with His appearance comes His Kingdom. His Kingdom is now at hand,<sup>1</sup> as the scriptures say, meaning close by, here on earth, in our midst. The establishment of His Kingdom has begun. There is salvation of sinners now, but His conquest to redeem the fallen world is still to come. I was taught the Kingdom of God is wherever God is King. So, for now His Kingdom is in those who surrender to Him and call Him King. But there is still sin, death, evil and the Evil One in the world. There are still many who serve other kings. There are two kingdoms, until He has rescued every last one who will be rescued out of this world into His Kingdom, “*for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*”<sup>2</sup> There are two kingdoms, until He destroys the kingdom of this fallen world. He has come once to save and will come again to conquer, but for now, between his two appearances, it is the arrival of His Kingdom in us that changes everything.

If you’ve been with us for the past couple months, we’re going through the Book of Matthew in a sermon series entitled ‘The Return of the King.’ Matthew was an eyewitness disciple of Jesus, who was stirred up later in life to write an account about that singular moment when Christ the King came and established His Kingdom on earth in us. It is instructive that Matthew took the three years he spent with Christ, and the next thirty years he spent

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, Mark 1:15

<sup>2</sup> John 3:16

reflecting on what it all meant, and distilled it down to five discourses, five sermons, Ted-talks if you will, when Christ the King taught about His Kingdom to all who had ears to hear. Matthew wrote to the Jewish Christians of his day, so he also wrote to reassure them, what he had witnessed with his own eyes, that Jesus is the risen Savior, the everlasting King, who has fulfilled Jewish Messianic prophecy – specifically that He is of the royal line of King David,<sup>3</sup> that He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem, that He healed the blind, the lame, the deaf, and the mute, that He raised the dead, and that suffered, died, and rose again.<sup>4</sup> That being said, and as important as that would be to the Jews of his day, the focus of the Book of Matthew is Christ's teachings about reality now that His Kingdom is at hand.

So, today we'll continue our look at the first discourse, known as the Sermon on the Mount, in which Christ explains what it means to be moral and ethical in His Kingdom. I've entitled this message "The Kingdom of Righteous Men," because one of the deepest human desires is to be virtuous, to live an admirable life, to see ourselves as moral, ethical, noble, and good, to believe ourselves to be righteous. Much of what we do is motivated by this desire to do the right thing -- duty, honor, loyalty, fidelity, being an exemplary worker, giving to causes, devoting our lives to something greater, as my parents did who together served our country for 102 years ... or putting the cap back on the toothpaste, or returning lost money, or tipping 20%, really anything in which we hear that little moral voice in our head say 'it's only right.' There's that scene at the end of the movie, 'Saving Private Ryan,' when James Ryan, as an old man, visits the grave of the officer who gave his life in the war to rescue him from the front lines. And as he is overwhelmed with guilt and grief at the sight of Capt. John Miller's grave, he says to his wife, "Tell me I'm a good man." And we, like him, need to hear her say, "Yes you are."

It's not surprising that we'd have this longing since we are made in the image of the righteous God. But this desire to do the right thing, when sickened by the poison of indwelling sin in us, becomes a twisted shell of itself. C.S. Lewis said that when he intently prayed, every third thought was self-admiration.<sup>5</sup> For him, the desire to be righteous warped into self-admiration. That's true, isn't it? For others of us, every third thought is its evil twin, self-condemnation. For me, the desire to do the right thing morphs into self-superiority, which becomes indignation at the unrighteousness all around. Once on the BART, I had a small backpack with about \$400 in it to deposit. You can tell where this is going, right? I got off the BART and just as the door closed, I realized I left it behind. I could see its little lonesome self through the train window. So, I ran immediately to a station agent, who radioed ahead to the next station, where the BART police boarded the train car just two minutes later. And it was ... gone. Incredible. Unrighteousness was perched like a cat waiting for its opportunity.

This desire to be righteous, when distorted by sin, motivates us to judgment and condemnation, to resentment and indignation, to tearing down of others to build ourselves up. It motivates guilt and secrecy about our moral failures, and exaggerations about our

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<sup>3</sup> The Davidic Covenant: 2Sam 7:12-13 in Matt 1:1-17.

<sup>4</sup> Fulfillment of Messianic prophecy: Micah 5:2 in Matt 2:1 born in Bethlehem; Gen 3:15 in Matt 1:1-2, 24:27 seed of the woman; Is 7:14 in Matt 1:18-25 born of a virgin; Is 42:7/61:1-2 in Luke 4:16-21 preach to the poor and in prison; Is 35:5-6/61:1-2 in Matt 11:5, 13:57, 4:23, 9:2-8, 9:32-34, 9:18-31, 20:29-34 heal the blind, deaf, lame, mute; Is 60:1-2 in Matt 17:1-8 appear in glory; Zech 9:9 in Matt 21:1-9 come in peace; Dan 12:2 in Matt 9:18-31 raise the dead; Is 53:4-12 in Matt 8:17, 16:21, 24:25-27, 27:11-56, 28:1-8 Christ must suffer, die, and rise again.

<sup>5</sup> C. S. Lewis: Collected Letters, Vol. 1, Family Letters 1905–1931, ed. Walter Hooper, 2000, p. 878.

moral victories. And now in the social media age, it prompts humble bragging and virtue signaling, where we post, from the safety of our devices, how good we are and how bad they are. Sociologists simplify human motivation to economics and survival. But perhaps the deeper source, is really this hope to see ourselves as righteous.

### **Christ's Higher Standard of Righteousness**

Which brings us to our passage for today, because all of this, that has to do with self-righteousness, was especially true for the Jews of the first-century.

**Matt 7:1-6** - <sup>1</sup> "Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. <sup>3</sup> And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. <sup>6</sup> "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

As much as any other culture, Jewish identity in the first-century had to do with the sense of self-righteousness that comes from keeping the 613 of the Lord's commands in the Mosaic law. And not just the commands but also the thousands of rabbinical statements describing how to keep them. This morality of right and wrong is what separated them from the rest of the nations, and preserved them as a people through wars and exiles. It consumed their thought. It defined their culture, and motivated their actions. It was who they were.

But now that Christ has come, the natural question is: How should we, who are saved by the risen Savior, live, now that the Kingdom of God is at hand? Are we to keep the 613 commands in the Old Testament? Are we to 'keep calm' and remain a separate Jewish people, or are we now citizens of a different Kingdom living under a different standard, with a different identity, and different motivations? What is the right thing to do now that the Kingdom of God is at hand? Let's look at our passage for today, from the Sermon on the Mount.

**Matt 7:1-2** - <sup>1</sup> "Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

First of all, Jesus is plainly not saying to keep the status quo and keep on judging and condemning like before. He says 'judge not,' to a culture in which moral condemnation was everything. They had twisted parts of the Mosaic laws into the purity codes where everything and everyone is judged to be holy or unholy, clean or unclean. They believed God would only bless them if they made sure the holy is approached only by the clean. As a result, Jesus is saying the impossible to people who judge everything, making minute distinctions regarding holy and unholy days, clean and unclean foods, holy and unholy places, and clean and unclean people. They even judge "secondary pollution" where uncleanness, which disqualifies someone from approaching anything holy, could be passed from one another simply by

touching, like tag-you're-it. In the first century, with the Jewish nation under Roman rule, without national borders or rule under a sovereign king, the purity codes were their expression of national identity. And so, by the first century, the purity codes were central to Jewish life.

But Jesus clashed with the purity codes right from the start. Not only does he say here 'do not judge', but He profaned (in their eyes) the holy Sabbath with the work of healing. He appeared in a vision to Peter and declared all foods clean. He touched the unclean lame, blind, deaf and those with leprosy. He ate in unholy fellowship with prostitutes and tax collectors. In a very real way, He overturned what the purity codes had become. Instead of the holy approached only by the clean, Jesus Himself was holy and He approached the unclean. Instead of the unclean passing defilement to another by touch, Jesus touched the unclean and made them clean, restored and absolved of sin. Jesus essentially ended Jewish identity. For in His Kingdom, *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, Jesus overturned their religious laws as mere depictions of the purification for sins that He accomplished on the cross. Christ is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,"<sup>7</sup> whose innocent blood God accepted in place of our death for sins. So, His death on the cross ended the slaughter of lambs for the atonement for sins, the observance of the Passover, the sprinkling of the blood of lambs to cleanse utensils, altars, and priests, and the offering of animals upon an altar. He ended the priestly class that offers the sacrifices, and the temple as seat of holy worship. In other words, Christ Himself, even though He is King of the Jews, fulfilled and thus ended the Jewish religious laws.

So, how should we live now that the Kingdom is at hand? As Christians, not Jewish Christians. As Christians, not American Christians, for Jesus is a challenge to every culture and worldly sense of right and wrong. As Christians, not Gen-X Christians, or Millennials, or urban or rural or Republican or Democrat or black or white Christians, for there is no longer distinction.

But Jesus isn't really saying 'do not judge,' is He? For what would be the point of the rest of what He said? And while the religious laws no longer apply, what about the moral and ethical laws pertaining to sin? What about deceit, adultery, immorality, meanness, coveting, arrogance, lawlessness, all the faithless trusting in something other than Christ? Are we to not judge this sin in others or are we to tolerate it? In the Kingdom, are we to ignore crime and those who wreak havoc in the church or in families? No, instead, isn't Jesus saying 'do not judge' but 'but when you do,' when you must, then keep in mind that God will judge you the same way, essentially with the same heart that you have.

And that's the difficulty here. It's a fearful thing to be judged the way we judge each other with our critical hearts twisted by self-righteousness. Worse than that, we don't even see the extent of our own sin since no one is more blind to it than ourselves. So, judgment of us has to be with Christ's heart of mercy, and by His grace, in His forgiveness and power, through His love and sacrifice of Himself to satisfy justice, otherwise how would anyone survive it, "*for the wages of sin are death,*"<sup>8</sup> as it says in the scriptures. In essence, by saying '*with what*

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<sup>6</sup> Gal 3:28

<sup>7</sup> John 1:19

<sup>8</sup> Rom 6:23

*judgment you judge, you will be judged,* Christ says that in His Kingdom, there will be, there has to be, the righteous judgment from God's heart, and not self-righteous judgment from our critical hearts. That's the reality of His infinitely higher standard. Now, the only way we might even know what it means to righteously judge others to that higher standard, is to have experienced His righteous judgment ourselves. That is why Jesus follows up with:

**Matt 7:3-6** - <sup>3</sup> And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. <sup>6</sup> "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

Who can do this? He says to remove the speck from our brother's eye, so we are to do it, but who can first remove the plank from their own eye? In His Kingdom, we are to judge each other of the sin that so cripples us, and do so at the right time and in the right way with godly discernment (that's the meaning of the pearls before swine verse), but who can on their own first take out their sin, that infests every fiber of our being, that lurks in every dark corner of our mind, and motivates every self-righteous action? Can we make ourselves righteous? Can a pig fly? Sin is our nature. How can we do what God does without being like God? How can we do what God does without having His heart?

The answer is we can't. We don't have His heart, so we can't do it. Everything He said is impossible, impossible to not judge when our whole culture and identity runs on judgment, impossible to judge and to so with discernment when His standard is His righteous heart, impossible to righteously judge ourselves first when sin is our very nature. So, if we were there listening to Jesus and we were honest about it, it would be one of those singular moments in life when everything was one way before and another way after. And we would have to decide, either He's our King and we're not fit for His Kingdom, or we refuse Him as King and go on with our self-righteous, sinful lives. Either way we're sunk. In fact, that would be the honest response to everything Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount about morality and ethics in His Kingdom. You might remember at the start He said:

**Matt 5:20** - <sup>20</sup> Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

In other words, Christ's law in His Kingdom far supersedes and exceeds the Mosaic law kept by the scribes and Pharisees. And Jesus then spends most of the rest of his discourse showing that superiority. His main argument in the Sermon on the Mount starts with six *you-have-heard-but-I-say-to-you* passages involving the ethical treatment of others now that the Kingdom is at hand. (See the next page.) Jesus says that in His Kingdom, the ethical treatment of others requires a clean heart of reconciliation, fidelity, forgiveness, humility, generosity, and perfect love. It is an infinitely higher standard, for Christ measures the heart behind the actions, against the standard of His own heart. The argument continues with three passages on the ethical *in-secret* devotions to God, now that His Kingdom is at hand. Jesus says that in His Kingdom, religious devotions to God require a heart to please Him, trust Him and depend on Him. Once again Christ measures the heart behind the actions. Finally, the

argument concludes with three *do-not-do* passages on ethical values, now that His Kingdom is at hand. Each involves trusting God instead of ourselves, again measured by the heart behind the actions.

| <b>Scriptures</b> | <b>Worldly Moral Standard</b> | <b>Christ's Higher Standard</b>  |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Matt 5:21-26      | 1 - Do not murder             | Be free of hatred in heart       |
| Matt 5:27-30      | 2 - Do not commit adultery    | Be satisfied in heart            |
| Matt 5:31-32      | 3 - Divorce the right way     | Be married in heart              |
| Matt 5:33-37      | 4 - Keep your oaths           | Trust in God's sovereignty       |
| Matt 5:38-42      | 5 - An eye for an eye         | Trust in God's perfect justice   |
| Matt 5:43-48      | 6 - Hate your enemies         | Be merciful in heart             |
| Matt 6:1-4        | 7 - Do good (to be known)     | Be pleased with God in heart     |
| Matt 6:5-15       | 8 - Pray (to be heard)        | Trust in God's goodness          |
| Matt 6:16-18      | 9 - Fast (to be admired)      | Trust in God's faithfulness      |
| Matt 6:19-24      | 10 - Prepare for the future   | Trust in God's provision         |
| Matt 6:25-34      | 11 - Worry about needs        | Trust in God's wisdom            |
| Matt 7:1-6        | 12 - Judge the right way      | Be free of a critical heart      |
| Overall           | Act moral by keeping the law  | Be like Christ obedient in heart |

In each case, His standard of righteousness is infinitely higher than simple conformance of behavior to the law. Some might think it is possible to keep the lower ethical standards of the law and traditions. But no one can do even that. And His standards are so much higher, requiring the transformation of the inner man to conform in mind and heart to Christ's mind and heart, to be like Him, to obey Him out of allegiance and love for Him. In His Kingdom, thoughts and deeds matter. I don't know about you but I can outwardly keep the law and inwardly break it. I can say nice things to your face and think awful things at the same time. Jesus says that in His Kingdom, this will never do, for our thoughts matter as much as our actions. He requires us to be righteous like Him in mind and heart.

And I'm nowhere near there. Perhaps you aren't either. If His higher standard is the righteousness of His heart, then an honest hearing of the Sermon on the Mount should leave us desolate. We should see clearly now that we have nothing. As the scriptures say, "*there is none righteous, no not one,*"<sup>9</sup> and "*all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.*"<sup>10</sup> As Paul said, "*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*"<sup>11</sup>

### **Righteousness Comes by Faith in Christ**

And once we realize we have nothing, that we bring nothing to the table, that we are the poor in spirit with no righteousness of our own, Christ then says to us the following:

**Matt 7:7-11** - <sup>7</sup>"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and he who

<sup>9</sup> Rom 3:10

<sup>10</sup> Is 64:6

<sup>11</sup> Rom 7:24

seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup> Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup> 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 good things to those who ask Him!

Why does Christ follow what He said about our hopeless state with this familiar passage on asking, seeking, and knocking? Perhaps it's helpful to look back at the first thing He said, His opening statement of His Sermon on the Mount:

**Matt 5:3** - <sup>3</sup> Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven!  
(exclamation point added)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, who have nothing to bring to the table, who have no righteousness of their own, who can't measure up to Christ's standard of righteousness, who don't have His heart. Blessed are the poor in spirit who must ask, seek, and knock for what they don't have, for His righteousness, for His heart, for life itself. Christ says theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven! In other words, the Sermon on the Mount starts and ends by describing a faith in Christ that seeks Him, and asks Him for what we need, and knocks until He opens. And the scriptures say, God rewards faith, the faith it takes to ask, seek, and knock, God rewards with Christ's righteousness credited to us, which makes us fit for the Kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

This is the revolution. Ours is the Kingdom, those of us who have nothing and come to Him asking, and seeking, and knocking. Seeking is faith in action. Seeking is believing for we only seek what we believe exists. Seeking is trust put into practice for we only go to whom we trust. Seeking the Lord, coming to Him, asking Him for what we need, that is our surrender. The Old Testament scholars considered two verses to be the summary of the law and the prophets. The first is "*Seek the Lord and live.*" <sup>13</sup> And the second is like the first: "*The righteous shall live by faith.*" <sup>14</sup>

To us who are saved by faith in the risen Savior, this all confirms the great transformation that has already occurred. We know Jesus is the Savior and King, and He is coming back to fully establish His Kingdom. And we have gone from the walking dead who trusted in our own righteousness, to a new people who have Christ's righteousness credited to us by faith. I'm going to have to rename the title of this message, from 'The Kingdom of Righteous Men' to 'The Kingdom of Those Made Righteous by Faith,' for ours is the Kingdom and now everything is different. If you don't have this assurance, you can just ask Him to come into your life and make you the person you are meant to be.

### **The Father Who Gives Good Things**

I'd like to end by asking the original question again. How should we live, now that the Kingdom is at hand? I'd like to suggest a few things taken from the passage.

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<sup>12</sup> Gen 15:6, Rom 4:22-24

<sup>13</sup> Amos 5:4

<sup>14</sup> Hab 2:4



- First, ask means pray. Seek means read. And knock means hang around His people and His mission until He opens to you. So, pray always, read the scriptures daily, and stay in fellowship.
- Second, ask (pray) when you feel God is near. Seek (read) when you feel God is far. And knock (hang around His people) when God seems closed to you.
- Third, the verse really is keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. We're saved from our sins by faith in Christ, and we are being saved, made new, changed in heart, by the same faith in Christ. As the scriptures say, "*He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*"<sup>15</sup> So, keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking.
- Fourth, it's one thing to know to ask, seek, knock, and another to do it. What can increase our inclination and motivation? What can increase our faith? Worship. The more we see the beauty and excellence and love of Christ, the more we are transformed into His image.<sup>16</sup>
- Finally, it doesn't depend on us. The passage says which father among you when your children ask for bread or fish will give them stones and snakes, which means even evil fathers like us know how to give what our children need. But what if our children ask for stones and snakes, will we give them that, or will we still give them good things? In other words, it doesn't depend on our having perfect wisdom, knowing exactly what to ask, reciting an exactly perfect prayer. Rather it only depends on us asking, seeking, and knocking, because Christ says that in the Kingdom, our Father in Heaven knows what we need and will give us the good things we need. We ask for help with our children and He gives us a heart for children. We ask for success at work and He gives us a love for workers. We ask and He gives us good things.

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One last thing, about our Heavenly Father who gives good things to those who ask Him: I have had a few fathers in my life, who knew how to give good things to me. Most are gone now.

My own father, Paul Arthur, on the left, when I was 15, I asked him to drive me to an Earth Wind and Fire concert. And you may have heard this story before, but this man who was a dignified military officer, took me down to the only department store in town and bought us matching disco shirts and went with me to the concert. To this day, I will never forget that I asked for a ride and he gave me approval.

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<sup>15</sup> Phil 1:6

<sup>16</sup> 2Cor 3:18

The middle one is Dave McElroy. There has never been anyone happier. I sought a chance to have our band play at a ministry he directed, and he turned around and joined us in our prison work, preaching and teaching, and showing us how to love prisoners. I will never forget that I sought something to do and he gave me the joy of the mission.

The last on the right, is Wendell Smith, who worked at EPA all the years I was there. He was our spiritual leader. Ten years in, a newly graduated engineer joined us. She was smart, funny, soft-spoken, from the Oklahoma farms. But once she got to the big city she fell into the wrong scene, and before the year was out, she was coming in late, not finishing her work, looking haggard, telling lies. All she could do was show up. All she could do was knock on the door by hanging around. Then one day, Wendell, who knew how to give good things, came to her, and said "leave with me now to a drug rehab center, or die." And with tears she went. I will never forget how all she could do is show up, but he lived out Christ's command:

**Matt 7:12** - <sup>12</sup> Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

How much more our Heavenly Father knows our needs and gives us good things. The singular moment of all human history was when the King of Heaven appeared on earth. That moment repeats itself, every time it dawns on someone that Christ is truly our King, and we begin to see clearly now just how good our God is, how righteous our King and Savior is, how merciful, patient, kind, faithful, self-sacrificing, wise, powerful, and full of love Jesus is. And before that singular moment everything was one way and now after everything is another.

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*I can see clearly now the rain is gone  
I can see all obstacles in my way  
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind  
Gonna be a bright, bright, sun-shiny day  
Gonna be a bright, bright, sun-shiny day*

**Questions for Further Thought**

Q1 - How does Christ define righteousness? Who are the righteous men and women in His Kingdom? Here is a comparison from the main argument in the Sermon on the Mount that Christ’s Law supersedes Mosaic Law, Matt 5:21-7:6.

| <b>Scriptures</b> | <b>Worldly Moral Standard</b> | <b>Christ’s Higher Standard</b>  |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Matt 5:21-26      | 1 - Do not murder             | Be free of hatred in heart       |
| Matt 5:27-30      | 2 - Do not commit adultery    | Be satisfied in heart            |
| Matt 5:31-32      | 3 - Divorce the right way     | Be married in heart              |
| Matt 5:33-37      | 4 - Keep your oaths           | Trust in God’s sovereignty       |
| Matt 5:38-42      | 5 - An eye for an eye         | Trust in God’s perfect justice   |
| Matt 5:43-48      | 6 - Hate your enemies         | Be merciful in heart             |
| Matt 6:1-4        | 7 - Do good (to be known)     | Be pleased with God in heart     |
| Matt 6:5-15       | 8 - Pray (to be heard)        | Trust in God’s goodness          |
| Matt 6:16-18      | 9 - Fast (to be admired)      | Trust in God’s faithfulness      |
| Matt 6:19-24      | 10 - Prepare for the future   | Trust in God’s provision         |
| Matt 6:25-34      | 11 - Worry about needs        | Trust in God’s wisdom            |
| Matt 7:1-6        | 12 - Judge the right way      | Be free of a critical heart      |
| Overall           | Act moral by keeping the law  | Be like Christ obedient in heart |

Q2 - Where do you fall short? Would you say that you are poor in spirit about where you fall short (Matt 5:3)?

Q3 - What do you need Christ to do for you?

Q4 - What does it mean to ask, seek, knock? What does it mean to keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking?

Q5 - What gets us to the point that we want to go to Christ?