

**Good News: Ask, Seek, Knock...**  
**Matt 7:7-12, Heb 4:14-16**

So here's the scenario friends, you get your cable bill or cell phone bill in the mail and there's an error on it, a big error – like you owe \$300.00 more than what you should... because somehow a bunch of long distance calls to Eritrea were charged to your account... what do you do?

Well you're not going to pay for these calls that you did not make, that's for sure – you didn't even know there was a country called Eritrea... but you can't just not pay the bill because that will ruin your stellar reputation as a Rogers customer, and you will start to owe interest on the unpaid amount, and eventually they could cut off your service or send it to a collection agency who will harass you non-stop because they don't really care that you didn't make these calls...

So... what this means is that you now have to try to get a hold of someone at the phone company who can help you solve this... and you know what that means...

*Thank-you for calling Rogers, pour la service en Francias dit  
"Francais" -----*

*For billing inquiries please press 1*

*For technical assistance please press 2*

*For sales press 3*

*For accounts changes please press 4*

*To report a stolen phone press 5*

*To hear these options again press the pound key*

Right – so where does my request fit in... umm I think maybe  
billing - press one

*Please enter the ten digit number you are calling about - enter  
the number...*

*Thank-you... I believe you entered ----- if this is correct  
please press 1, to re-enter your number press 2*

*Please note if you are calling for technical assistance from the  
device for which you need help, please hang up and call back  
on a different device...*

No I need billing – so I'll stay on the line...

*Thank-you for calling about your Rogers bill, to hear your account balance press 1, to make a bill payment please press 2, to hear these options again press the pound key...*

Well I know my account balance... but I don't want to pay it – so what do I do now? I'll try pressing 0...

You have entered an invalid option...

Press 0, You have entered an invalid option...

Press 0, You have entered an invalid option...

Press 0, You have entered an invalid option...

Press 0, thank-you... please hold while we transfer you to an agent... sigh~ hopefully they've got some decent music playing...

After five minutes there's pause in the music – oh I'm getting through... *Thank-you for holding, your call is important to us please continue to hold...*

Sigh~ another couple minutes and another pause in the music... can't fool me this time...

*We are sorry for the delay. We are experiencing higher than normal call volume, your call is important to us, please continue to hold...*

And you know this goes on for another ten minute at least until you finally get an operator.

*Hello – crackle, crackle – ...is is Rasha – crackle... ow may I assi- crackle*

Sorry... I'm having trouble hearing you... hello, hello?

*Oh my apologies sir, my name is Rashand, how may I assist you?*

Oh hello Rashand, I have some charges on my cell phone bill that don't belong to me, I didn't make the calls and I need the charges reversed.

*Ok sir, so for that you need to contact the billing department.*

Yes, well I've tried that option but it didn't tell me what number to enter for disputing calls that I didn't make...

*Ok sir, I will transfer you to the billing department now – please hold...*

And then you finally get someone in the billing department and they tell you that you need to call the customer care center instead.

So you are transferred to the customer care center where you discover that you're only supposed to contact them if you have a complaint to register...

Ok, so if you don't find me someone who can help me RIGHT NOW... then I will register a complaint about you!

*Ok sir; please hold I'm going to transfer you to my supervisor...*

So the supervisor comes on the line... *Hello this is Rashand, how may I be of assistance to you? 😊*

Friends there are few things as frustrating as trying to navigate your way through those infernal phone menus that so many companies and governments have put in place.

The irony is that this technology is supposed make it easier to get in touch with someone who can help you – but in fact make it makes it much more difficult.

Can you imagine if we had to go through all this when we wanted to talk with our Lord and Savior... when we needed help from our Heavenly Father, when we are looking for guidance from the Holy Spirit?

That would be ridiculous.

Praying to the triune God is so easy; our Lord is so accessible to us; and the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us –

So... I don't think we really hear Jesus' statement for the radical good news that it actually is...

*"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."*

You see as frustrating as those phone menus are; we actually have the opportunity to contact someone up to help us with our problems and most times it gets resolved with only few phone calls.

But, if someone needed help in Jesus' day it wasn't so easy.

If someone had been cheated by the tax collectors, or if a Roman soldier in the local garrison had commandeered someone's property, or there was a dispute over land or livestock...

It could be rather difficult if not impossible to find someone to appeal to, let alone just walk in and be able to get a fair hearing of your situation.

It's no coincidence that Jesus' parable on persistence in prayer features a corrupt judge, who feared neither God nor man, and the widow who wants justice from him has to badger him until he finally gives her what she wants just to make her go away. (Luke 18:1-8)

How long do you think that would take – probably a few months, maybe more... and you couldn't do that from the comfort of your own home or office.

And we know that those who collected taxes for the Romans often charged more than what they should have and kept the difference for themselves.

That's what makes the story of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in Jericho, so significant.

When he encounters Jesus' grace he has a change of heart he says *"if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."* (Luke 19:8)

But apart from a miraculous change of heart like Zacchaeus' had, there wasn't anything the people could do about it - that's why people despised the tax collectors so much.

The Romans didn't care about it so long as they got what was owed to them, it wasn't like the Roman Customs and Revenue Agency had a 1-800 tax-collector complaint line you could call.

So the whole notion of "ask, seek, knock and you will receive" was not part of the people's daily experience - Jesus' was speaking to people who had no idea that you could have a society where the customer is always right, the customers' needs are paramount, and where "your phone call is very important to us"

Now... we need to be aware of these day-to-day experiences because people will always project what they know from their day-to-day experiences on to their relationship with God, regardless of whether or not it's correct.

So the people in Jesus day, for the most part - would have believed that their God had forgotten about them, or at the very least He was not in a mood to give them what they would ask for...

They were under foreign rule, life was not easy - and even though their religious leaders were teaching them a most serious and conservative observance of the laws of Moses it didn't seem to help to bring back God's favor upon them.

So to have Jesus proclaim to them that "*everyone who asks receives; that the one who seeks finds; and that to the one who knocks, the door will be opened*" this was so contrary to their day to day experience it would seem almost too good to be true!

Good news for sure, but almost unbelievable good news... to be able to go have direct access to God and bring whatever needs you have right to Him, what about the priests? What about sacrifices, what about clean and unclean?

Jesus' good news for the people in His day was unbelievable.

And this "unbelievable" aspect also keeps us from hearing these words as the good news they are intended to be – we also sense that this seems too good to be true.

Because we too project our everyday experience on to our relationship with God and so we tend to hear this proclamation with consumer ears, with a customer mentality.

It sounds like Jesus is promising us the ultimate all-inclusive package to earn our consumer loyalty – whatever you want in life, you just ask for it and it will be provided for you, because the customer's wants are paramount.

But somehow we know that is just too good to be true - and so we are skeptical about what Jesus says here and we're not exactly sure how to take this as good news.

We don't doubt that we have the opportunity to take our requests and needs straight to our Heavenly Father without

the need for any sort of superstitious rituals - but can we go to that place where we say "everyone gets what they ask for?"

No, because our everyday experience teaches us that this is not true and false promises do not make for good news.

So friends, to hear this as the good news that Jesus intended it to be for us we need to get out of our consumer mindset and listen to it again with a Messianic mindset.

When Jesus started his ministry as the Messiah he selected this passage from Isaiah as his theme verse;

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)*

So with this Messianic passage in mind listen again to what He says in Matt 7: 7 *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

In other words Jesus is standing before the crowds of His day and announcing a monumental change; he is proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor; and that favor now means that *“everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened”*

Through Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God Almighty is accessible in a completely different way than He had ever been before... no more priests and sacrifices were necessary to approach God, to be in his presence and to receive grace and mercy from Him - the earthly ministry of Jesus demonstrated this, and his death and resurrection made it a reality.

That’s why the passage we read from Hebrews this morning says *“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (Heb 4:16)

So after Jesus told the crowds to ask, seek and knock.. He proved this new accessibility to God was real and He went among them healing their sick, casting out demons, correcting their misunderstanding of the Law, teaching with authority, feeding the hungry, forgiving their sins...

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

Now, not everyone appreciated Jesus’ message and ministry. Many of the religious leaders even went so far as to say that He was in league with the devil, they said it was by the Prince of Demons that Jesus was able to cast out demons... (Matt 9:34)

It’s almost as if Jesus anticipated this criticism of his ministry when He announces “ask, seek, knock...” because afterwards He goes on to say

*“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?”*

*If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (vs 9-11)*

So even though this new way which God was dealing with His people through Jesus Christ upset the status quo which the religious leaders had taught and caused commotion and turmoil – it was in fact a good gift from God.

And friends if we listen to these words of Jesus from a Messianic mindset then we are less likely to hear this as teaching about how to pray so that you get whatever you are asking for...

And we are more likely to hear this as an open invitation to get on board and join in with God’s plan to save this world and a promise that we will experience that Kingdom in our lives.

Furthermore even though God’s plan to save the world upsets the status quo of our consumer society and turns our belief that customers is always right upside down, we have the

assurance that this turmoil is actually this is good...in contrast to those who will always define good and evil in terms of keeping the status quo and not rocking the boat.

So Jesus says to us as well - *If you, then, though you are imperfect and self-centered consumerists, if you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*

Even the most self-centered consumerist knows that when it comes to parenting you don’t give your kids everything they want, and that sometimes kids don’t get what they want, they get what they need – that’s essentially what it means to give good gifts to our kids.

So if we can do that, how much more is God going to do this for us, that’s why this can’t be a teaching on praying to get whatever you want out of life.

God is not going to give us whatever it is that we think we want – that’s not good; He going to give us what we need – the Kingdom of Heaven. That’s good news!



And with this good news comes the promise that if we ask to be a part of this Kingdom – we will... if we seek it out in our families, our schools, our workplaces – we will find it... if we knock, the door to enter into this Kingdom will be opened to us...

And that is certainly consistent with what Jesus continued to teach his disciples during his time with them. Listen...

*“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” (John 14:12-14)*

Again this is less of a teaching on how to get whatever we want through prayer; and more of an invitation to participate in continuing Jesus’ ministry as the Messiah.

It’s a promise that we will participate in healing the sick, freeing the oppressed, feeding the hungry, proclaiming that people’s sins are forgiven in Jesus name.

And these kinds of promises are meant to be catalysts to birth faith in our hearts that will be expressed through our actions.

Friends, do you remember that as we finished off 2013, we were focused on asking to receive Grace-gifts from the Holy Spirit for Christmas?

So friends as we start 2014 and we hear this good news... *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

We need to realize this is the next step after our December series – the faith that we have been given must be expressed in the action of asking to receive more Grace-gifts in our church.

And so we must seek to discover which gifts we have been given, and then we must look around for the doors of opportunity which will open for us, so that we can minister to each other to those in our community.

And it will happen this year friends!

We have long desired to participate in the work of God's Kingdom in our community; to see people come to the truth about sin and brokenness; to be able to share the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ; and to experience healing and grace in our lives together as Christ's body.

Friends the good news for us in 2014 is that if we ask it will be given to us, if we seek we will find, and if we knock the door will be opened to us.

Believe the good news in faith – and let's put it into action friends – Amen!