**The Golden Rule of His Kingdom**

August 26, 2018

Matthew 7:1-12

Key Verse 7:12 “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

Today Jesus gives us the Golden Rule of his Kingdom: “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” Down through history this has been the mark of Jesus’ kingdom people: taking the initiative in loving others with a sincere heart and practical action. This rule has been expressed in negative terms in other religions. For example, Confucius said, “What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.” This is called the Silver Rule, inferior to the Golden Rule. By stating the rule in positive terminology, Jesus is encouraging us to take the initative in actively doing good, rather than passively not doing evil.

**First**, do not judge. Look at verse 1. “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” This teaching of Jesus is widely misunderstood. We often hear, “Don’t judge me,” especially from those who do wrong. Here Jesus is not telling others not to judge us; he is telling us not to judge others. What others do is not our primary concern; what we do is our primary concern. Our biggest problem is not how others judge us, but how we judge others. It is important to note that this teaching follows immediately after Jesus’ teaching on worrying about tomorrow. Out of self-righteousness, it is very easy to criticize others for worrying about tomorrow. For example, when I started my job, my wife asked me to buy life insurance in case I die. I got angry, saying, “You of little faith. God will provide. I will not die.” But she was prudent, planning for the future, but I was judgmental. Judging others is easy because we don’t have to do anything except opening our mouths. Judging also makes us feel good about ourselves for being morally superior.

Then why should we not judge others? Look at verse 2. “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” The reason why we should not judge others is because we too will be judged in the same way we judge others. It is true. When you treat others harshly, they will treat you harshly, too. Judging others is like Boomerang or like spitting into the wind. It comes back to me. Fundamentally, we should not judge others because we have no right to do so. Only God can judge people. Judging others is God’s job. If we do so, we are usurping God’s authority. James 4:12 says, “There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?”

When Jesus says, “Do not judge,” he is telling us not to come to a judgment and conclusion about a person based on one small snapshot of their life, as if we were the judge of their life. Does anyone here like a judgmental person? God doesn’t either. But God loves a merciful person. Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (5:7). To overcome the tendency to judge others, two things have been helpful for me: (1) Realize that God is the Judge, and FEAR HIM. It is his job, and he will do it once and for all. I am not fit to judge anyone, only God is. He chooses to be kind and patient with us, rather than quick to judge. His patience leads us to repentance. (2) God sees the whole picture, I do not. While I judge a person on some immediate event, God sees their whole life, including the motives in their heart. Be kind, you have no idea what people are going through.

Jesus helps us with two hyperbolic questions: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” (3) We tend to scrutinize other people’s small issues, while ignoring our own very large issues. We say, “You always…” or “You never….” Since we notice other people’s problems, we may feel better about ourselves, and we may be correct. But such judging destroys people and community. Sometimes fixating on other’s problems is the very means of ignoring our own major issues, or even justifying them.

Look at verse 4. “How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?’” To avoid dealing with our own baggage, sometimes we devote ourselves to wanting to help others. But due to our own plank, we can’t see clearly, and end up beating people over the head, swinging our plank around. Note the contrast here between a speck of sawdust and a plank. We all have elements of our behavior, habits, lifestyle and speech that exhibit sin in an extremely irritating way, like having a speck of sawdust in their eye. We have planks in our life like injustice, legalism, pride, lust, selfishness, and so many others, which originate from within and are far more serious than the small things we fixate on in others. Jesus’ questions should lead us to take a moment of deep introspection, examining my own life. Do Jesus’ questions in verses 3 and 4 expose anything in your life? Any planks needing removal?

Look at verse 5. “You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” The church should become a place where people grow in holiness, with fewer planks and specks all around. Jesus wants us to help our brothers and sisters with their specks. How can we? Jesus says, “You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye...” I should take personal holiness seriously as I seek to love my brothers and sisters. Jesus said he sanctified himself, that we too may be truly sanctified (Jn 17:19). Let’s repent of our sins, and seek God’s help to pull out the planks in our own lives, to experience his deep grace of forgiveness, cleansing and healing. Then we gain perspective we didn’t have – seeing others clearly from a position of grace and humility. Instead of throwing stones at people, we will help people leave their life of sin, just like Jesus did. This changes our community inwardly: we will grow in holy strength to bear any matter, deal with it, and overcome it in the light. Outwardly: we become a place where there is real acceptance and forward progress toward holiness. We become true Salt and Light in the world.

Look at verse 6. “Do not give to dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” Jesus teaches discernment to protect what is sacred and valuable. Under Mosaic Law, dogs and pigs were unclean animals. In the Bible they may represent the fools who say in their heart there is no God, or who despise correction. In this way Jesus tempers the instructions of the previous verses. This godly community of love, where we seek to help each other grow in holiness through compassion and grace is sacred, as the household of God! The word of God, guiding our every step and decision, is more precious than the finest pearls! But not everyone in this world thinks so. Without discernment, our efforts can be misunderstood, misapplied, or leave us vulnerable. For this, we need wisdom.

**Second**, ask, seek and knock. Look at verse 7-8. “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” Many people take these verses out of context and believe that they can get anything they ask for. But these verses must be understood in their immediate context and in light of the whole Bible’s teaching on prayer. 1 John 5:14 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” So we need to ask God according to his will. Discerning God’s will requires wisdom. Discerning whether someone is a pig requires wisdom. Discerning when to be merciful and when to rebuke requires wisdom. In seeking to “not judge others” but to “remove our own planks”, and also the sensitive task of delicately removing another’s speck, we need help. You won’t get without asking, and you’ll never find it without seeking, and if you don’t knock, how will anyone ever open the door for you? The form of the verbs imply persistence: “keep asking,” “keep seeking”, and “keep knocking.” Don’t give up!

Notice that “ask, seek, and knock” represent progressively increasing earnestness in prayer. This teaches us that in our prayer persistency, unceasing boldness, earnestness, and never-give up spirit are very important. If, after asking in prayer, our request is not granted, then we must not give up; we must seek God in prayer until we find him. If our request is still not granted, then we must knock until the door is opened. When we pray, we should not pray with minimum effort. God does not want us to pray half-heartedly. God wants us to pray wholeheartedly, with all our hearts and soul, and strength. Here, the words, “Ask, seek, knock” are all present tense. The phrases “…it will be given.” “…You will find.” “…the door will be opened to you,” are future tense. This means that if we keep praying with unceasing earnestness, God will surely answer our prayers in his right time.

Apostle Paul also said this in Galatians 6:9, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” When we help others, one of the most difficult things we have to overcome is to learn how long we should bear, endure and wait for the change and the growth of the one we help. When the one we help seems to be always the same; no change; no growth, we become impatient and begin to demand and sometimes we are tempted to even judge. Then what happens? The relationship can become sour and broken. In the family, in the church community, in the school, in working place there are so many who struggle with broken relationship because they didn’t overcome judgmental attitude. For this matter, Jesus teaches us to pray in asking, seeking, and knocking. We must do so very earnestly and persistently with unceasing boldness until the prayer is answered.

In order to help us to be sure that God really hears and answers our prayer, Jesus explains the intimate love relationship between Father and his children. Look at verses 9-11. “Which of you, if his 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!” It is true that even though our human father is not perfectly good, he loves his children and wants to give good gift to his children. There is no human father who gives a stone when his son asks for bread and gives a snake when his son asks for a fish. Giving good gift to his children is the father’s pleasure. Jesus says, “How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?” Our heavenly Father did not spare his One and Only Son to save us from our sins and eternal condemnation. Romans 8:32 says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” Jesus is the ultimate expression of our heavenly Father’s love for us.

**Third**, do to others as you would have them do to you. Look at verse 12. “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” No one wants to be condemned by others. No one wants to be mistreated by others. Everyone wants to be accepted, be understood, be respected, and most of all, be loved by others. Jesus summarized the law in Matthew 22;37-38, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind… And love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Love is the fulfillment of the Law. Galatians 5:14 says, “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.’” So the golden rule is exactly the same as God’s greatest commandment. In practicing the love of God, Jesus wants us to take the initiative. Before waiting until others love you first, do love others first! Do you want to be accepted? Accept others first. Do you want to be understood? Understand others first. Do you want not to be judged? Do not judge others first. Do you want to be loved? Do love others first. This is the golden rule in our human relationship and this is fulfilling God’s greatest commandment. Let’s practice this golden rule of love. When we do so, there is the kingdom of God.

May God bless us to grow in the image of our generous, merciful and gracious heavenly Father, who chose to forgive, rather than to judge. Let’s come to him, trusting in his good character, as we ask, seek, knock. May God give us the burning desire to practice his golden rule to bring the love of God to all around us.