

The Golden Rule

Matthew

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Thank you, John. As we get started tonight, this evening with our study, you know, oftentimes the greatest words of wisdom come from our children and though I will not give the specific identity of which one of my children said this within the last 24 hours, I thought it was a very biblically accurate statement. He said, "Dad, you know, America has its fair share of problems, but I'll take our problems over other places." I thought that was pretty profound. I looked at my wife and she said, and I said we don't know where it came from, but we're glad he said it.

This evening, I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Matthew 7. If you're a regular worshiper with us on Sunday evening, you probably naturally just went into the gospel of Matthew because for some time we've been walking through the gospel of Matthew for multiple reasons, one of which is I'm of the belief that we learn the totality of scripture by way of the gospel of Matthew. Not only is it the first message we hear after 430 years of silence in the Old Testament, but so many times, particularly and maybe no more so than where we are here in the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus Christ takes the teachings, the prophecies, the instruction of the Old Testament and he clarifies them in spite of humanity's, shall we say, history of twisting and turning them. Today, as we turn to Matthew 7, we are in the Sermon on the Mount. Again, let me remind us that there is not one single born-again Christian at the Sermon on the Mount. Every single person in that audience, at some level, thought that their deeds, their offerings, their sacrifices, somehow, somehow made them right with God and Jesus Christ takes that audience and he begins with the famous Beatitudes and he talks about how we relate to one another, how we relate to God himself, and then he basically is leading toward the end of chapter 7 where he says we have two choices, we can either build our house on the shifting sand of our good deeds, works, and religious fervor, or we can build it upon the rock, which Jesus refers to as himself.

Today in chapter 7, we're going to talk about one of the most famous passages in the Bible, we call it the Golden Rule. And so tonight I'm going to read verse 12 of Matthew 7, but then we're going to go back into verse 6 and read it in context. It says, "Therefore," now you understand why we have to read it in context, right, because you can't start with "therefore" because it's built on the previous. It says, "Therefore, all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the

prophets." That is what we know as the famous Golden Rule, however, if you'll turn your attention back to verse 6, I want to call your attention to the context of this very famous statement. It says,

6 Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. 7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: 8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. 9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? 10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? 12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Let me remind you what Jesus called his audience in this passage, he called him evil. He basically said in spite of your desires, in spite of your ambitions, in spite of your agendas, your perspectives, whatever it may be, we, at our core, are evil and depraved and sinful people. Jesus is trying to get their attention that there are none of us who have the right or the ability to take that which we've done, which we would consider good versus bad, and say, "Congratulations, I have attained, I have reached the platform." That being said, I want to kind of walk through this famous passage because there are some truths within it that set the stage for this famous Golden Rule that I think will help us understand why it's such a struggle because it is a struggle. It is a struggle when, shall we say, to act toward others as we wish they would toward us because we know that 99.99% of the time it is either not well received, it is not reciprocated, or it does not return as we had hoped. And so it's a struggle. It is so hard for us to do what verse 12 says.

So let's begin with the backdrop. If you weren't with us last week, in verses 1 through 5, Jesus made this famous statement where he said, "Judge not lest you be judged. For what judgment you meet it shall be rendered unto you." Verses 1 through 5 was an entire passage about hypocrisy. Basically Jesus was pointing out that we don't have the right to call out other people's sins if we have not dealt with our own. We don't have the privilege of casting that proverbial stone if we've not looked at ourselves in our own spiritual mirror. So what's happening here is in verse 6 there's kind of this interesting transition and then we get into verse 7 where he talks about our prayer life and asking of God in our behavior toward others. So the backdrop here is acknowledging our own sinfulness and then as we get into this next section he's saying, okay once we've dealt with that, the next struggle, the next battle is doing what we know we should do in spite of the fact that it probably won't be well received and/or reciprocated. It's a struggle.

So here's the question: why do we so struggle with humanity? Now I know if I just opened it up tonight, y'all could go for three hours to address that question but can we answer it from verse 6? "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again unto you."

There's two "what's" here, that which is holy and that which is referred to as pearls. Now we know that that which is holy is that which is distinct and that which is reserved of the Lord, but for the simplicity of this passage, can we just call it the stuff of our lives, the things of our lives, that which is holy. Do not take that which is reserved for the Lord, those things that we've reserved for the Lord, and turn them over to the dogs. Nor take the pearls, which by the way when you get into Matthew 13, the famous parable of the Pearl of Great Price is representative of what you and I know as humanity. So basically what verse 6 is saying is everything that we hold dear, everything we render as holy, whether it be an item or a person, be careful because as soon as you trust somebody with that or them, they're going to be trampled under by the dogs and the swine.

Now this is where tonight could take a really hard right turn into the abyss. 2 Peter 2:22. I want to show you a passage of scripture that you may or may not be familiar with. It's actually an adaptation of Proverbs 26. There is more truth in this verse than you could ever imagine, and I wish I could take the entirety of tonight's night just to talk about it, because I believe if you can get this, it'll help you understand a whole lot about the world we live in, the people we relate to, and even relationships within our home. Verse 22 says, "But it's happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow or the swine that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Now I don't want to over-analyze scripture but do you find it interesting that the dog is referred to as a male and the swine a female? Now I'm gonna work with that for just a moment because I don't think we give the Bible enough credit for its accuracy in describing us. Guys, we're a bunch of dogs. We really are. Ladies, if you don't believe me, allow me to testify. I have three young men that have made their way through my home and you know how I learned to raise boys? Because I've raised dogs. It's real simple. You realize that for a dog to behave, you scratch their belly, you feed their belly, and occasionally scratch their back. That's pretty much all you've got to do. They're simple creatures. If a dog does something they should not do, you rub their nose in it, you stick them outside, and when they whine enough, they'll come back. Right? Again, it's great parenting wisdom if you have boys, I'm here to tell you. Okay? It really works out.

But forget the humor for just a moment. Let's think about the reputation of a dog. The Bible just said they eat their own vomit. Dogs do that. Dogs are nasty. Just like little boys, they're nasty. I mean, real nasty, right? If you've ever had any kind of dog of any breed, any kind, indoor, outdoor, doesn't matter what it is, I mean, 30 minutes after you've washed them, they go find something dead in the yard and rub on it. And is that not what men do? Guys, I'm talking to us. That's what we do, right? We have this horrific tendency to say, "Hey guys, watch this." In other words, "I may have fallen into that trap 99 times, but I'm going to whip it this time." Just like a dog is who we are. You know, you think about it, dogs at times aren't real loyal to the relationships. They'll just wander around with whoever they find in the neighborhood, if you know what I mean. In fact, I have been on site when a dog was giving birth, and you know what dogs will do? They'll eat their own. No, they really will. It's disgusting, but they'll do it.

You know, some years ago, you may not be familiar with this, but James Dobson's ministry "Focus on the Family" based in Colorado, decided to do an experiment. It really

wasn't an experiment. It was really just an outreach. It was Mother's Day, and there was a penitentiary that was close by and they decided, well, here are these men, they're locked up, they're estranged from their families. What if we provided them free Mother's Day cards that they could have and send to their moms? It was such a hit, they ran out of cards. They had to go back. Then they repeated it on Father's Day and not a single card was taken. You know why? Because many of those men, their dad was a dog that proverbially speaking, ate them, if you know what I mean. Abandoned them, ran off, and found somebody or something better somewhere else.

Hey guys, the Bible calls us dogs. Hi ladies, how y'all doing tonight? You're swine. Now, I realize that in our culture that has a very negative physical appearance to it but don't read that into it. I want you to think about swine for just a moment. You haven't spent a whole lot of time around them. I will assist you tonight. One thing you may not know about swine is they mate for life. They do. They don't run around like dogs. Nope. It doesn't matter how they're mistreated, how they're mistreated, they will stick, I mean, tried and true, thick and thin to the very end. They are some of the loyalist of the animal kingdom, so to speak. And unlike a dog, did you know that a swine will allow their own life to be taken before you touch their babies? See, a dog eats their babies. Swine will give up their life for theirs. But what did we just read in 2 Peter 2? What's the negative of a swine? Oh, they'll wallow in it for years. Mm-hmm. Guys, we know the joke, right, our wives have never forgotten anything. Never. And by the way, ladies, you have this incredible ability, you can bring up stuff that happened 16 years ago that we done forgot 15 and a half years ago but you're still wallowing in it. Right? That's who we are. Now you're kind of happy God called us evil. I mean, think about it for a moment. It was a lot easier to take. But you know what's interesting and this is just an aside point, if you've ever spent much time on a farm or on a ranch, dogs and pigs get along real well. They can be the best of friends because their deficiencies are interestingly matched well with the other's positives.

Now, the reason that I went to such great length there is in verse 6 when it talks about don't give that which is holy to dogs or your pearls before swine, the real issue that we have with the Golden Rule is that we've had so much that has been done either to us or of us that we've got a trust issue when it comes to humanity because we've taken that which we've entrusted and we've given it to some dog and he's torn it up like a toy and buried it in the backyard, or we've turned it over to the swine and 16 years later, it's still being brought up and never been dealt with. So we have this trust issue when it comes to humanity.

So we go into verse 7, all right? So we know that humanity is tough. It's a tough field. So why do we struggle turning it over to God? He says, "Ask and it shall be given. Seek you shall find. Knock, it shall be opened unto you." Why is this so hard? Well, because when we ask of God, one of the things that I've discovered over time is that rarely, if ever, does he give us the time frame in which it will be answered. In fact, Luis Palau, the recently deceased great South American evangelist who was based up in the Northwest for years, he has a famous statement. He says, "Most Christians give up on God within two years of God coming through." That's a great statement. How many times do we question if God

will ever fulfill what we believe him to do, and then when we look back on hindsight, it was always in his perfect timing. We struggle with humanity. We struggle with the failure of humanity. But even when it comes to God, we struggle turning over because rarely, if ever, is his time frame our time frame. In fact, I'll be honest with you, and this may surprise you, please note my gift of sarcasm, my time frame when it comes to God is yesterday but usually his is tomorrow.

Seek, and you shall find. Not only does God rarely give us the location of where that can be discovered, but often the distance is not revealed and we have become a culture of instant gratification. One of the great missionaries of the modern era, a man by the name of Judson, didn't see a convert for seven years, how many churches would have already fired that pastor? I'm just being serious with you for a moment. "I mean, Pastor, it's been seven years. Where's the fruit?" See, one of the struggles we have with God is not just the time frame, but the distance that often he has asked of us to go that wasn't on our agenda.

Knock, and it will be opened unto you. Rarely, if ever, does God tell us what's on the other side of the door and so, when we realize that we can't determine what it may or may not be, we struggle.

Now, why do we struggle with God? Because of our struggle with humanity. Because humanity has let us down. Because humanity has trampled the pearls. Because humanity has spoiled the holy things of life. And so unfortunately, we take that approach to humanity, we place it on God, and we say, "Well, they never came through for me. They had me go further than I ever planned on going, and they didn't tell me what was on the other side." And so what is our struggle? We take that struggle with humanity, we place it on God.

Why should this not be a struggle? Look in verse 9, "what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" The reason that what we just talked about should not be a struggle is because if you've ever had the privilege of raising children or grandchildren or vicariously doing so in whatever relationship that may not be biological but feel like your children or grandchildren, that even though, and I'm just going to call it out for what we're all believing, even though there are times that you would love to "take them out," all right, at the end of the day, one of our biggest struggles is not spoiling them. I heard a man tell me just in recent days, he said, the number one mistake that I've made in life is I've spoiled my children and I've ruined them.

What child asks for bread and you give him a rock? Asks for fish and you give him a serpent? Now, I'm not a parenting expert, but I know enough about parenting not to do that. Think about it for just a moment. It's absurd, right? There's not a single, even if you're struggling with your kids, there's not a one of you said, "Hey, you want to go out to eat," instead of giving them something to eat, you actually give them a serpent to bite them. No, there's not one of us that would do that. See, that's why this should not be a

struggle because what's happening here is Jesus is building this case. We struggle with humanity because they failed us. We struggle with God because we overlay our concepts of humanity onto God. And yet at the same time, our struggle with humanity is not what we struggle with, even our own children.

That being said, verse 12, the famous Golden Rule, "Therefore," you know the old adage, therefore is there for a reason? In spite of these struggles, in spite of these truths, in spite of these facts, what does it tell us to do? It tells us that "whatsoever you would that men should do to you, you should do unto them for this," [peal of thunder] yes, God, "is the law." Amen, that's right. We could be here a while because of the weather. "This is the law and the prophets." Let me tell you what the Golden Rule is saying, that you relate and respond to humanity as you would desire them to respond to you even though they've trampled you, even though they've lied to you. Even though and even those relationships that are so difficult at times says that somehow, some way, we have to get past it. It's tough. It's a struggle

Tonight I want to give you a list based on that which we've studied of the "therefore's." Therefore when men, the dogs, have soiled that which is precious. If you've ever raised a dog, you know there's times they've taken that blouse, that article of clothing or something that you thought was very important and they've ripped it to shreds. They've soiled it. They've drug it through the yard. You know the response that you have. When women turn a person against you. There's a phrase in the Bible, and ladies, you can't get upset with me. The Bible talks about silly, laden women, making mountains out of molehills, problems that weren't even problems, and creating a whole scene around them. When you would rather take than to simply ask. When you settle for what is substandard versus the optimal. When you force a situation and you don't wait for God. When you shortchange somebody else. When you cut someone off at the knees. When you withdraw so that you can have more for yourself.

See, as we've walked through the Sermon on the Mount, as we've walked through the gospel of Matthew, the thing that keeps being repeated is that there is no place and there's no point in our lives where we can ever say, "I am holy, I am righteous, I am deserving." In fact, that is why Jesus has given us all that he has in the Sermon on the Mount so we'll realize that if we don't allow our lives to be built upon him, then we will surely fall short in spite of him.

This famous Golden Rule oftentimes has been spiritually hijacked to say that if I do unto others as I should do, then I'm going to end up getting from them what I want. It's not what it says. What the Golden Rule does is it exposes, can I use the words of Jesus, it exposes our evil hearts. It exposes our depraved heart, if we want to quote the prophet Jeremiah, that even though we desire and have ambitions to live lives of godliness and holiness, because we've been burned, and because we've been done wrong, and because we are impatient, and because we are evil, we always fall short. Don't get me wrong, the Golden Rule is that which is to aspire for but can we all concur tonight we have fallen short more of it than we have succeeded in it and that famous statement that Jesus uses allows us to kind of introspectively look at ourselves and say, "You know, how many

times have I shortchanged somebody? How many times have I been burned by somebody? How many times?" And when you begin to go down that list of how many times, you realize how much we need Jesus. Yes, we've been burned. Yes, we've been done wrong. Yes, those things have occurred. But you know what Jesus is saying in verse 12? That's no excuse. Whatsoever you would desire of others, a standard that we woefully fall short on.

Before we close, let me remind you about next Sunday night, verse 13, straight is the way, broad is the road to destruction. Jesus is setting the stage that the only means of righteousness, the only means of forgiveness, the only means of salvation is him. Not our religious, zealous behavior or even our spiritual ferventness because all of us have read verse 12 and tonight we realize all of us have fallen woefully, woefully short.

Let's pray. Tonight, as our service draws unto a close, one of the hard pills to swallow, not just of scripture, but the book of Matthew, is our absolute inability in and of ourselves. What a challenge, "whatsoever you would have men do unto you, do unto them." There's nobody looking around. I'm not asking for a raise of hands, but I'll confess I've fallen short on that one. How many times in my life, how many times in your life have you allowed somebody else's response or somebody else's reaction to dictate your belief concepts, etc.? And yet Jesus makes it very clear that in spite of the dogs and the swine, the things which are holy and the things which are pearls of great price, in spite of that, it's God's standard, not ours. So tonight, we come humbly before him, realizing there's nothing we can do to be holy or righteous enough. It is all about him. You may be that one tonight, you never called on the name of the Lord to be saved, you've never cried out to Jesus that you've got a sin problem that only he can fix. Tonight would be a great night to do so. Maybe tonight, there's that one aspect of your life. Maybe there's a person that you're supposed to forgive. Maybe there's a relationship that's supposed to be mended. And each and every day, there's that constant excuse, "God, but you don't know what they've done." He said, "whatsoever that you would that men do unto you, you do unto them." Tonight's a hard, bitter pill to swallow, but Jesus has made it very clear. Let us respond appropriately.

Lord Jesus, tonight, thank you for the very truthful yet hard teachings of your word. Lord, I believe that your Holy Spirit has done a surgical procedure in our hearts, that sharper than two-edged sword of Hebrews 4:12. God, tonight, whatever it is that you showed us within and without of this passage, may we respond. It may require us responding physically tonight. It may require us to leave out of here, to send a text, make a phone call, or set up an appointment with somebody. But, O God, today, may we no longer allow our behavior to be dictated by others, but by your word alone. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.