

Matthew 7:12 // Others First

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[0:00] It's interesting because I got to know Jerry, well I started to get to know Jerry not that long ago. And I always, I mean my personality, I always think it's a really good sign when someone just kind of settles in for a conversation.

And I think we talked for a couple hours in the office and immediately I thought, oh man, I love this guy. I'm so proud of him. And so when, you know, when I heard he was coming up this weekend, my first thing was to text off, hey, can you lead communion?

Of course I have ulterior motives like sermon, you know, I'll keep on going. No, just fantastic. And I do have to say to Derek, so I love you. I never put the spotlight on, by the way.

You know, we were talking about the discipleship class, how he was kind of like orphaned over here on this part of the stage with the drum kit and all the singers are going to be over here. And I walked in, I'm thinking like the light was just on you, buddy.

And I thought, I got to let him know I did not do this. This was not intentional. Anyway, turn with me today, Matthew chapter 7, verse 12, or tap and swipe your way there, however you end up getting to the passage.

[1:09] I'm doing one verse today. I'm going to strain this thing. Like, you know, when you teach the Bible chapter by chapter and verse by verse, the intent is, is to let the Bible speak for itself, to let God's work speak for itself.

It's important. I really believe it's important. We can go through sermon series, we can do all those things. I have no criticism or comment on those. But I find that there's something very special awaiting for those of us who open God's word and just read it passage by passage.

Every now and then, you hit a verse like this, or you have to just stop. Because it's bigger than the words. Okay? The concept, the idea, is a bigger idea than the words speak.

So I wanted to spend a little bit of time today. And I know because it's potluck, I'm not going to go long. Rest assured. I can sort of smell my stew right now.

And I'm thinking, yep, didn't eat breakfast this morning. And that was a mistake. So, verse 12.

When we look at this idea of the golden rule, we have to understand, I think, that the gospel itself can be boiled down to two words.

[2:24] And I've shared this before. And it's just simply this. Others first. Obviously, it's a little more complicated. There are many more nuances involved. But when we start our Christian life with this idea of others first, it changes things.

We've been going through, passage by passage, the Sermon on the Mount. And the Sermon on the Mount is simply the way of the kingdom. It's the way of the kingdom. It is our citizenship manual for how to be Christians in this world.

How to be disciples of Christ. How to follow after him in his way and not our own. And not be distracted by the world. And it all has, up until now, been a pretty steady theme of others first.

It does not stop with this wonderful little verse here. No. So let me read it first. Verse 12. How you want people to act towards you, that's how you should act towards them.

Simple enough, I think. But in some ways, what Jesus is teaching us here isn't actually anything new. This concept of doing unto others as they would do unto you, multiple religions have this idea as a tenet.

[3:48] Or it has, you know, an idea in their philosophy, at the very least. Judaism itself for thousands of years has been teaching this idea. But Jesus does something a little radical.

Our beautiful, wonderful outlaw king does something a little different here. And he takes what can be looked at as a negative and turns it into a positive as well.

Because the negative is not bad. I mean, think about it like this. You're driving down 54. You're not speeding. You're not driving recklessly. You're driving the way that you hope other drivers are going to drive around you too.

But did you stop on the side of the road for the person who's broken down? You see, it's not that you're doing something bad, right? Which is what the old prophets and the old law would say. Don't do anything bad to someone because you don't want them to do bad to you. That's not bad. But what good are you doing as well? This is how Jesus flips the table in this.

[4:48] He takes it not just what we have already been taught in passages in Scripture, but he also takes it and says, be proactive. You want love?

Then love. You want kindness? Be kind. You want respect? Give respect. And that changes everything. Because no longer is it we're coming into church and we can say, well, I left today and I didn't throat punch anybody.

It was a good day, right? Great. Nobody should be thinking violence, okay? And that's great. You don't want people to think violence against you. But did you tell someone that you're glad they're here today?

Were you kind to them? Did you love them? Is that what you want to receive? Right? I do. I don't know about you, but I want to receive kindness. But the means of the heart for me should be to be kind.

And it's not transactional. It's not like, well, I was kind to them. They weren't kind to me. What kind of math is this? No, no, no, no, no. We do it because God first loved us. He wants us to love him, but he initiated God first loved us.

[5:53] We'll get into that. There's a story that I really like that I found. A rabbi named Hillel, this Gentile guy, comes up to him and says, okay, explain to me the law while I'm standing on one leg.

Now, the idea is just that if you can explain the law to me while I'm standing here like this, fast enough, before I fall, okay, good. I don't want the long-winded part. Just give me something I can hold on to.

This is exactly what he says. What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law. Now, in a way, like I said, this is the same thing as verse 12.

In a way, it is very similar. What you don't want other people to do to you, don't do to them. You don't want someone to lie about you or gossip about you. Don't lie or gossip about them.

That kind of makes sense, right? Those are good things. You don't want someone to think the worst of your intentions, so don't do it to someone else. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Think kindly of them.

[6:55] But Jesus took this principle and put it in a positive. So let's read it again. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law of the prophets. And this is a huge advance in our understanding of this small little passage because he made the command so broad.

And like I said, it's that idea of the 54. We can obey the law. We can obey the law of God. We can come to church. We can play the part. We can look the part. Dress the part.

We speak the part. But what is our inner life doing? What do we do in the rest of the week? How's our heart towards one another?

How's our heart towards God's children in this house? How's our heart treating other people? Do we have an others-first mentality? Or is it a me-first mentality?

I was thinking a lot about fatherhood. I do. It's not that I only think about it now and then, but I was talking to my oldest son this week. And just a memory triggered.

[8:01] And it was one of those memories where, you know, you've had kids. You might know what I'm talking about. I remember the first night that we brought him home. First night.

And there was a moment around 11 p.m. I'm thinking, when are the parents showing up to take this kid, right? Like, it's just like, it was just all so new to me, okay? And then about two in the morning, I remember waking up.

And I'm, you know, he's on my bare chest here, and I'm rocking in this rocking chair. And I'm thinking, how did I get here? You know, like what? And all of these new things. And what parenting teaches you is that you have to live an other's first life.

You're in this now. You're thinking of other people's welfare, well-being, long before you get the chance to think of your own. And you know what it taught me was how incredibly selfish I was.

Because all of a sudden, the needs of this little baby boy took over our lives in the best way possible. And I read a quote not that long ago that to a son, and this is the same thing to a daughter as well, as parents, we're nothing but a chapter in the book of their life.

[9:11] We really are. We're there for a little while, and then they go off to do all of these wonderful other things without us. That's the natural good way that the Lord has for us.

But for us as parents, the child is our whole book. And they become our whole book when we wake up in the morning, at two in the morning, and they're on our chest, and we're rocking them back to sleep.

And they become our whole book when they go through the difficulties of life. You have to live an other's first life when it comes to parenting. You really do. It made me think of our Father in Heaven who does the same for us.

He loves us as His children. And He Himself, in a way, has this other's first life. He initiated for us. He loves us.

He cares for us. He wants us to get along. He wants us to cherish one another. He wants us to be able to be in the playground, love one another, and when one of us falls, we help each other get back up.

[10:10] But this is a father's view of his children, and it's beautiful, and it's right. And I think it is shown so loud and clear here in this one little verse wonder.

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. Because the golden rule here, as it's also called, applies to all relationships in life. Not just as father, not just as mother, or grandfather, or grandmother, or brother, or sister, or friend, or wife, or husband, or however you want to boil it down.

It applies to all relationships. The person who says, I wish people would love me more, or the person who says, I really wish people would reach out to me more.

Go out and love someone. Go out and reach out to someone. Maybe you're going to be the answer to a prayer that they are also praying, and the Lord is going to lead you into an other's first place in their life.

[11:12] If you want to be respected, be respectful to other people. If you want people to speak well of you, speak well of others. If you want to receive grace from people, be gracious to others.

It is a simple thing, but it gets confused at times. If we show a life of loving others, if we live an other's first life, if we live a life of grace, and mercy, and peace, it will astound us, time and time again, how much of those things we see reflected in our own life.

It's an old saying, but I've seen it true. The people who are often most forgiving realize how much they have been forgiven by God. That is kind of what we're talking about.

You want kindness. Be known for your own kindness. And go and do it first. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets.

Jesus shows us that this simple little line, this simple verse, sums up everything that we can read about how to treat other people.

[12:23] The way that we treat other people can seem simple, but oh, is it ever hard to obey this one? If we're really honest with ourselves, it's tough to obey this.

We talked about this earlier. There are moments where someone wrongs us, and our reaction is we want to mirror that, right? Someone comes zero to 90, and they're angry, and it's like, we want to be like, well, this happened 10 years ago, and you just bring up this, and then you mirror.

And that's not the golden rule. I don't know about you, but I don't like it when people start conversations yelling. That really doesn't work for me very well.

I don't respond to that very well. But if someone comes to me and says, you know what? I'm really upset, and I don't know how to get over this. Oh, I'll listen for days. Because the challenge is not to mirror, right?

The golden rule shows us that, look, treat others the way you want to be treated. And also, don't treat them the way that you don't want to be treated, because that is true as well. Jesus just shows us this other side of it, which is beautiful.

[13:28] So you don't want other people to lie about you. Don't lie about other people. You don't want people to steal from you. Don't steal from them. You don't want someone to commit violence against you, so don't commit violence against them.

It's simple. It's very important. It's a very interesting measuring stick for us. To be able to look at our own lives and say, how do I react? How do I treat those people around me?

Are they going to see us as loving, kind, respectful, peaceful, self-controlled, faithful? Are they going to see the fruits of the Spirit in our life?

Or do they just see us being a chaotic, hot mess? I don't know. I can't answer that for you. Like I said many times over, I have to look myself in the mirror.

I got my own problems. Okay. So what I can say is this, is that if you try a little bit every day, it makes all the difference in the world. Because our God is a God of love.

[14:32] He's a God of peace. And He is our good, good Father that loves us as children. And so when we submit to that, when we work with Him, He works with us beautifully.

Even when we don't want to work with Him, He'll work on us. If we did this, there'd be no war, there'd be no slavery, no lying, no gossip, if we really, really work this out.

And I know if you're like me, you kind of want the governments of the world to behave this way. You want the corporations of the world to behave this way. Don't you? But the thing is, is it starts with you and me.

We can't wait for someone else because that actually defies the golden rule. Start and initiate with us, personally. It starts with us.

Because the golden rule makes the law of God easier to understand, but it doesn't make it easier to obey. And some will say, no, no, no problem. I got this. I'm okay. I've been a nice person.

[15:32] Right? Good. How are you doing today so far? Right? We all have struggles with this if we're really honest with ourselves. And that's okay. We have to be going easy.

This isn't about condemnation. I think anything about this is a passage like this is about honesty.

And it's honesty with ourselves. We need help. We need a Savior. We need our Lord to show us in the time of refreshing of His Holy Spirit in order to know and learn how to be kind to others.

It doesn't necessarily come naturally to us. Maybe we're not aware of situations that we need to be kind for. So, Lord, open our eyes to our friends and family around us here, right here this morning. Someone who needs to know that you love them. How can I be your hands and feet for that? It's a simple prayer. It doesn't take much. We can start with that. Nobody's perfect.

And we have to give ourselves a lot of grace when we're working with this stuff. We really do. I'll read it again. Verse 12. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them for this is the law and the prophets.

[16:39] I think there's three things that we can really get out of this if we sit and camp on it long enough. One, God cares deeply about how you and I treat one another.

God cares about how we treat one another. He really does. Some will say that I'm right with God. Everything else is good. But how do we treat one another?

How do we use all of this wonderful lineage that we have in this church? How are we, are the hands and feet of God in loving and being kind, in showing grace and mercy to one another?

Now, I already know by saying that there's story upon story upon story that I am blessed to hear of myself. So I'm not saying y'all got to start. What I'm saying is let's keep telling the stories.

Because there's many stories, beautiful stories of kindness, of grace, of mercy in this place. Let's keep telling the stories. Okay?

[17:39] Keep on keeping on. second thing is that we should not do things to others that we would not want done to us. Be proactive is the thing that Jesus is putting on this.

How much marriage counseling could be simplified under this principle? How many friendships could be reunited under this principle, this idea? I'm going to treat my wife or husband the way I want them to treat me.

What a difference this would make. Instead of saying, I'm going to be nice if they're nice. Right? Well, I'll do the dishes if they do the dishes. I'll unload the dishwasher if they unload the dishwasher. If we stopped competing and stopped measuring and just started loving, right, and leaving it to the Lord, I wonder what would happen. Now, I'm not so naive and I don't come from a family of peace in my family of origin.

Where there is abuse, this is another story and I'm going to bookmark that and if you're encountering that or if you know someone, please come and talk to me. So I am not trying to have this huge blanket.

[18:48] I just pray it away. Now, there's some things that take practical measures to make things right. Okay? But under normal circumstances, under normal arguments, under normal disagreements, under normal things, initiate.

You want to be loved? Then love. If you want someone to bring you coffee, bring them coffee. If you want to show the love of God or be shown that love in your life, show the love of God from you. there's this thing where it's like, yeah, I'll start treating them better when they start treating me better. Well, no. That's not how it works.

God loves us so he loved us first. Right? Christianity is the only religion in this world. The only religion.

It's important to know this where God initiates. Every other religion, every other philosophy, every belief, the believer, the disciple, has to go to God and do something, somewhere, somehow.

[20:00] Jesus came down from heaven to initiate that love and that rescue because we couldn't do it on our own through religion, through good works, or morality. We need a Savior.

Savior. And the Lord saw that and he did something for it even when we never asked for it. That is love. That is the example of love that we need to have for one another in our marriages, in our friendships, in our families.

Don't set up walls of defense and say, when they treat me how I deserve to be treated, then I will like them and love them. No, no, no, no, no, no. That is not how it should work if we live by the golden rule.

And number three goes with this because we really, really need a Savior in Jesus Christ. We really need salvation. We really need him. We need his help when it comes to this stuff. It's hard to do it on our own.

As much as our intentions are good at times, we have to admit that there are many times when we've all failed at this, where we've made mistakes, we've fallen down in the wrong direction, or we have actually had a selfish attitude and instead of others first, we've put me first.

[21:12] And that has a very limited lifespan. Sometimes we have not done to others as we would like to have others do to us. And we need Jesus so desperately.

In some ways, we could say that this command is so precious because God himself practices this. It's like I had been talking before. God wants us to serve him, so what does he do?

He serves us. God wants us to give to him, so he gives to us first. God wants us to keep our promises to him, so he keeps his promises first.

We love him because God loves us. Anybody? He first loved us. Thank you. Right? This whole idea grows out of God's very nature.

You don't have to do anything for God to love you. He already loves you. You don't have to do anything for God to provide a Savior. That Savior has already been provided in Jesus.

[22:15] Jesus. This is how he wants us to live, others first. How much better could our marriages, our families, our churches, our communities, our country, how much better it could be, all of these things, if we lived by this golden rule?

Not just the I don't want to do what I don't want to have done to me, it's the I will love first even when it hurts. I will forgive first even when it seems impossible.

I will release the person from their obligation first because I will, I have been released of much myself. I can go on and on and on and you know what?

I bet you could probably do more than me in examples. Be the first. Be the one to love others first. Be the one to love your spouse first. To love your brother or your sister first.

Your grandma, your grandpa first. Be the one to show them love first. Surprise them with joy. Surprise them with love. Isn't this what the Lord does for us all the time?

[23:26] I'm going to read this verse one last time and then I'm going to close in prayer. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them for this is the law and the prophets.

Our Heavenly Father, Lord, I'm having a hard time even finding the right way to use the word deserve because I don't know that we deserve any of your love and yet you've given it to us freely. Even when we've been your enemies, you have still loved us. Even when we've doubted you, you still trusted us. Lord, there are no words in any language on earth or anywhere else that I could find that anybody could find that would give the right amount of gratitude that we should have.

So I pray that we will, each of us here this morning, we will leave this place with a heart towards others first. May it start in our homes. May it spill out into our workplaces, our schools, our

churches.

Lord, I pray that we will live in others first life, that we can be like citizens of heaven right here, right now. In Jesus' name, Amen.