

Matthew 7:7-12

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[0:00] Please take your copy of God's Word and turn to Matthew chapter 7. Jordan, thank you for leading us in that song.! If you've ever requested a song to be learned and sung here on a Sunday morning, I want you to know how much time it takes to get that accomplished.

I asked Jordan to do that song back at Easter. I want to think I carry a little bit of extra request weight, maybe. So be patient.

It takes those guys a lot of work to put stuff together, and I do appreciate you taking the work to do it, Jordan. Yeah, it blessed me this morning. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture teaches us that the Bible contains everything in it that we need for life and godliness.

And we believe that the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture applies to how we meet together as a church. And so across the years, as we have considered what was necessary for us in our growing, so as we started to add particular mics and sound equipment and things of that nature, Wes and I worked very carefully together to say, what would happen if we suddenly didn't have those things?

Like if the power went out. If the power went out, could we still meet the way that we meet as a church? And I want you to know that when the power went out this morning, a little bit of me was excited because I said, yes, we get to prove that it's possible to do it in this way.

[1:30] And then quite a bit of me was excited when it came back on because my voice is hurting this morning, and I'm glad I don't have to yell in this room. I can speak in my normal speaking tone.

So, a blessing on both sides. Our text for today is Matthew 7, verses 7-12. And before I read it, beloved, this is God's Word to us.

It was written for His glory and our good, and we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Jesus says, Ask, and it will be given to you.

Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Or which one of you, if the Son asks him for bread, will give him a stone. Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent. If then you who are 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?

[2:42] So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. For this is the law and the prophets. At first look at this morning's text, you may be wondering why it is that I jumped across the uninspired subheading that is likely found in your copy of God's Word.

There between verse 11 and verse 12, your text probably says the golden rule. An uninspired addition to our printings of the Bible.

Why did I read from verse 7 through verse 12? Why did I include verse 12 in today's text, which seems to be some further teaching about prayer?

You may also be wondering, why is there further teaching about prayer in verses 7 through 11? Doesn't this teaching about prayer belong back with Jesus' prayer instruction in chapter 6, verses 7 through 13?

Let me assure you that our Lord did not here have an afterthought about prayer. As we would tend to do, I find myself quite forgetful and want to go back and tack something on to something I said previously.

[4:05] Jesus, I'm confident, even in His humanity, was not nearly as scatterbrained as myself. He's not just going back and tapping on random

instructions at the conclusion of His sermon on the mount.

And many commentators treat it this way. He's been working thematically. Now He has some final things to say, and so He's dropping in these related but random instructions here at the end of the sermon.

Quite the opposite, in fact. Jesus is bringing His sermon to a close and He is finishing His teaching on kingdom ethics in verse 12.

He is wrapping up that portion, the major portion of His sermon on kingdom ethics. What does it look like for citizens of the kingdom of God to live in this world?

The summary of all that He has said is found in verse 12. And it begins with this important word, so. [5:15] So. In light of everything that I've said so far, so whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. This teaching is often referred to as the golden rule.

That would be to say the rule that rules other rules. And we can know that it is a summary statement because in Matthew 5, verse 17-19, Jesus says this, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others through the same will be called least in the kingdom of God. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of God.

And we spent quite a bit of time establishing the difference in the Old Testament law, the civil, the ceremonial, and the moral law. And we have put forth that the moral law is still meant to be obeyed.

[6:25] It is still the kingdom ethic by which we live empowered by the Spirit and having been redeemed by Christ. We spent quite a bit of time in Exodus 20 walking through each of the Ten Commandments and considering all of the commandments that flow out of those commandments.

So we have been there and then we find ourselves here where Jesus declares in chapter 7, verse 12, for this is the law and the prophets.

This is very similar in form to what Jesus says in Mark chapter 12, verse 29 through 31 when He is asked, which commandment is the most important of all?

Jesus answered, the most important is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

[7:37] Love toward others is a volition of the will, it's a decision being made aimed at another's good at our expense.

Which means that we cannot love others well unless we first love God. So in loving others as ourselves, we are keeping the law and the prophets.

Last week we saw in chapter 7, verses 1 through 6, that to love others the way God would have us first of all requires that we do not self-righteously, carelessly criticize and condemn others, but rather lovingly, carefully aid others in the pursuit of holiness.

We looked last week at Galatians chapter 6 and verse 1, which reads, Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual shall restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

This is a loving act of those who are called together as a family of God. Paul continues to say in Galatians 6, verse 2, Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

[8:59] So I hope that you are seeing the connection between Matthew chapter 5, verse 17 through 19, and chapter 7, verse 12. They're kind of bookends in that way.

Citizens of the kingdom of heaven will be characterized by their love. Specifically, their love for one another. In John chapter 13, verse 34 and 35, as Jesus is eating the last supper with his disciples, he says, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

We are not meant to be known by anything else but love for one another. We may prove ourselves to be disciples of someone or something else by the dressings that we put on. But the way we're to be known as disciples of Jesus Christ is because of the way we love one another. Now, this ethic of reciprocity, track me for a second, this ethic of reciprocity was not new to Jesus' day.

[10:25] but it was always stated in the negative. Let me show you what I mean. The Jewish Rabbi Hillel, all of these predate the teaching of Jesus here in Matthew chapter 7.

The Jewish Rabbi Hillel quoted a saying, What is hateful to yourself, do not to someone else. The book of Tobit, which is included in the Apocrypha, says, What thou thyself hatest to no man do. Confucius taught, and I quote, What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others. An ancient Greek king named Nicocles wrote, Do not do to others the things which make you angry when you experience them at the hands of other people.

And the Greek philosopher Epictetus once wrote, What you avoid suffering yourself, do not afflict on others. You see, the ethic of reciprocity had been taught for a long, long time, but not in the way that Jesus taught it.

The hearers of Jesus' day would have been very familiar with this form of teaching, but what Jesus does with it is astounding. He flips the teaching on its head.

[11:51] He makes it rather than a negative exhortation, he makes it a positive exhortation. He makes it from a avoid harm done to you into a do good for others ethic of reciprocity.

It's significant that he's even using this form of language because the people in his day would have gone, Wait, what? being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven is not about me and getting mine. It's about what I can do for others. And Jesus would say to that, yes, this is exactly what it looks like to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

And so in our text, Jesus gives us three reasons to obey the command to love others as ourselves. three reasons to obey the command to love others as ourselves.

First reason is God's promise to his people. And we see this in verse 7 and verse 8.

[12:57] Now, I don't believe, some do, I don't believe that we're given here some kind of code by which to get response from God. This asking, seeking, knocking.

These are three different steps in some process by which. I think that Jesus is just elaborating on the point. If you go to God for something that God is willing to give, he will in fact give it to you. Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and the one who knocks, it will be opened.

And so for us, this is most readily a teaching about prayer. It is, in fact, some teaching about prayer. And I want to look first at its general application, and then we'll look a little bit at its specific application, and try to understand why we find it in the flow of text here in Jesus' sermon on the mount.

So there is certainly a general application for our praying, right? God promises to answer prayer. God answers prayer, and this should move us to pray.

[14:13] God wants us to ask and seek and knock. This text, however, is not meant for us to think that God has written us a blank check that we can fill in any way we want.

Many have used these verses in this way. It's a plain teaching of Jesus here. Ask seek knock. It will be given to you.

These people will also use texts like John chapter 14 verse 13 and 14 in the same way where Jesus says whatever you ask in my name this I will do that the Father may be glorified and the Son if you ask me anything in my name I is the nature of what Jesus is saying about his name right they merely tack in Jesus name onto the end of a prayer and that's not why we say that at the end of a prayer we don't say in Jesus name as an incantation to get what we want but rather in Jesus day a name carried much more weight than it typically does in our day the name represented all that a person was in Jesus case his name represents all that he is to ask for something in someone's name is to ask for something consistent with who that person is and so at the end of my praying

and almost every time

I pray possibly every time you've heard me pray publicly I will say something to the effect of in Jesus name and for his sake we pray and what I'm saying is I believe that what I've prayed is consistent with who Jesus is consistent with his character it's consistent with the way he's working in the world and then we utter our amen God let it be believing it's consistent with who Jesus is and how it is he's working in the world his mission and what he intends to accomplish please let these things be so when Jesus makes this promise if you ask anything in my name he's saying if you ask me to do anything that I would do I will do it some other texts first John chapter three verse twenty one and twenty two John writes beloved if our heart does not condemn us we have confidence before God so if we are not finding ourselves in sin and whatever we ask we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him so as we're obediently following the commands of

God or asking! things consistent with his name he we ask and later in first John chapter five and verse fourteen and this is the confidence that we have toward him that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us so if you want to pray effective prayers and I hope that you do if you want to take hold of the promise of God found in this text that for the one who asks and seeks and knocks right that they will receive then we need to know our God we need to know who this Jesus is who says if you pray anything in my name I will give it to you and how do we know this Jesus we meet with him in the Bible we meet with him in the scripture we go to it regularly and often and we dive deeply into it we know the text we begin pray his will so this is a massively encouraging general application of the text is it not we should love and obey

[18:17] God which will find our desires coming into line with his so that as we pray he will hear and answer our prayers this is a promise of our text today but there is a more specific application so if you understand the text in that way in other applications I think you're correct in doing so there is general application for your praying but there's specific application for our text today why does it come here in chapter 7 again our Lord did not have an afterthought about prayer and begin to tack on random instructions!

confidence in your praying he is instructing us to pray as we are about the work of lovingly carefully aiding others in the pursuit of holiness we've seen that at the beginning of chapter 7 he's saying to us as you're doing this great work of helping each other pursue Christ likeness pray the father deeply cares about this thing and he will answer your prayers so we're about supposed to be doing that and as we are going about the work praying for strength to obey the command to love others as ourselves his teaching concerning prayer is bridging these two ideas of love to others together it's bridging it together right verse 12 begins so so what so because you're praying in this way it's bridging these two ideas together which ought to make it so clear how very much we need his help if we are to love others well we desperately need him to work in our working as we're loving one another oh may we be a people who obey the command to love others as ourselves because of God's promise to his people to answer their prayers may we also be a people who obey the command to love others as ourselves because secondly God's pattern for his people we've got God's promise to his people secondly God's pattern for his people verse 9 10 and 11 Jesus asks here three rhetorical questions everyone knows the answers to these questions if any one of my sons asked me for bread of course I would not give them a stone too many of us are familiar with loaves of bread bread then looked like a stone it was brown and it was roundish I wouldn't give them a replacement item for the thing that they asked for I would gladly provide for them in our family gluten free bread

I love my sons and their sustenance is of great importance to me when my boys are hungry I want them to be fed if any one of my sons asked me for a fish which none of them would but again this was a common item of sustenance right this would have been a common thing to ask for if one were hungry of course I would give them the good nourishing thing for them and not a thing that could injure them not a thing that could be injurious to them the good thing that they need to sustain them Jesus then says if then you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children he's not speaking of any specific fathers but of all fathers in general he is saying that all human fathers are imperfect the fathers in the room know this very well probably because you all have fathers you're very aware of this none of us have had perfect fathers none of us will be perfect fathers all human

fathers are imperfect but we can manage the giving of good gifts to our children we can manage when they ask for food to give them food and not something else right he then asks his third rhetorical question

Jesus says how much more will your father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him the answer here is meant to be obvious our heavenly father will give to us the good things we ask for specifically the ability to love one another and to provide for all that is necessary for us to love one another not only is our heavenly father willing to give us good gifts he is also able he does not lack the power to give us exactly what is good and necessary for us he can do all that his will purposes and we know that he will provide for all that he commands!

[24:10] that if he has given you a command in the scripture that he will provide for you the grace necessary to keep the command right it is never an excuse for to say oh I can't do that it is too hard right then you're not asking ask seek knock right God provides for all that he commands so if we are being told to love others as ourselves he will provide all that is necessary to do so he will provide the ability to forgive the ability to be patient the ability to see past each other's differences the ability to love each other even when we don't like each other the ability to have difficult conversations the ability to be bold when necessary the ability to be humble all the time you see beloved he has given to us his spirit who leads us into all righteousness

Paul tells us in Galatians chapter 5 verse 22 and 23 the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness self control against such things there is no law and in fact that what I think Paul meant these things are law fulfilling things right the spirit is working them in us to God's glory God if God will God can and will infinitely outdo them in every way a couple of times each Sunday I think I have managed it a few times by now I refer to you as beloved

I think you've heard this I hope that you have and I hope that it arrests your brain at least a bit maybe if only to say I wonder why why does he use that terminology with us on Sundays here's why when Jesus was baptized by John in the wilderness God spoke from heaven saying you can see this in Matthew chapter 3 verse 17 this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased God the father called God the son beloved and now for those of us who have placed our faith in Christ who have believed in him for the salvation of our souls this same terminology is extended to us we are now co-heirs with Christ we are his brothers and his sisters so

God looks at us and he calls us beloved how would I know such a thing later in history in the writing of first John John uses this title for the Christians that he is writing to he and I and using that terminology intend to remind you that if you are in Christ you have all the blessings of being called God's children it's my way of saying to those in the room Christian listen to this thing right but rooting that in us being God's children him being our father Paul wrote in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 3 blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places we have full access to

God and all that he's promised for us and we can see that so simply in this pattern right that fathers know how to give good gifts to their children how much more will our heavenly father provide for us all that we need as we endeavor to love one another as we should so may we be a people who obey the command to love others as ourselves because God promises God's promises to his people God's pattern for his people and third and lastly God's purpose for his people we find this in verse 12 so whatever you wish that others would do to you do also to them for this is the law and the prophets there is no capacity in an unbeliever one who does not follow Christ to love others as ourselves sinful man is only interested in self all that he does is aimed at his own well being the affirmation affirmation statements of the ethic of reciprocity were only aimed at self interest not harming others so that they would not harm us don't do to others so that they won't do to you but

[29:42] God asks so much more of his people he asks something supernatural of his people that he would accomplish it and be praised for it loving others as we love ourselves this kind of love is not self serving the self love comes so very naturally what Jesus is trying to say to us is that we turn that natural impulse to love ourselves outward to others selfless love served for the sake of the one being served and serves in the way it likes being served whether you are served in this

way or not beloved when was the last time you gave of yourself for the sake of another you may find yourself being one of those people this morning that are rather unloving maybe you're looking for others to love you well and then you're ready to love others you're willing to play in the game this ethic of reciprocity but others must act first and then the other way around most of you have jobs or have worked a job and how often have we or others that we work with said we would work harder once we got that raise guess what that's not the way the world works if you ever want to raise you better work really really hard first exceed what you're being paid for and then the person paying you

I hope will consider giving you a raise we're this way with relationships all the time we want others to invest in us and then we'll turn around and invest in others and beloved one sided relationships are almost always failed almost always do so you may find yourself in that place this morning but let me tell you that I think that may be the minority of us so often when I preach text I go oh what a place for us to grow in oh there needs to be rebuke brought this morning but I want you to know that I see many examples of this kind of selfless love in our midst I see it again and again and again and I am so very encouraged by it it just absolutely it encourages me to no end even the simple little things that will happen on slack as we communicate and somebody needs a little something here a little something there and somebody jumps right on helping in that way

I am so encouraged by it and I'm encouraged because selfless love in our midst this kind of love that seeks! is an evidence of the working of the spirit of God amongst us sacrificial love does not come naturally it doesn't and we should rejoice in those things that seem so simple and so mundane this is the way God is often working amongst us little acts of loving kindness toward one another Don Carson who is a contemporary pastor theologian I would commend to you once wrote the church itself is not made up of natural friends what binds us together is not common education common race common income levels common politics common nationality common accents common jobs or anything of the sort what he's saying is at least that shouldn't be what binds us together

I think what he's saying is the true church itself is not made up of natural friends anything of the sort Christians come together not because they form a natural co-location which I had to look up partnership but because they have been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance in the light in light of the fact that they have all been loved by Jesus himself they commit themselves to doing what he says and he commands them to love one another in this light they are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus sake beloved we love because God first loved us John does not write there in first John that we have the capacity to love or that we can love because God first loved us but we do in fact love because God first loved us like we are moved to this and I see this in our church you do this do it more you do it already but do it more in closing I want to encourage you from first Thessalonians Paul writes to the Thessalonian church the very same thing the thing I'm trying to say to you and the thing I'm trying to encourage you with in first Thessalonians chapter four verse one he says finally then brothers we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you receive from us how you ought to walk and to please God just as you are doing that you do so more and more and he begins to work through some examples and so down in verse nine and ten those those those!

[35:26] those!! those brothers brothers brothers those brothers this more and more. To continue to press on, to love one another well and continue and do more loving of one another. Because how is the world meant to know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ by our love? We are meant to be a community of people who are set apart for God's praise. You hear me say, we're supposed to be peculiar. Why? Because we're selfless in the way that we love one another. We don't love the way the world loves. We give of ourselves. For other people's good, at our expense, we love others. So I hope that you can see why we address verses 7 through 12 this morning. I think it's proper to carry through and ignore the subheading and go right through verse 12 to wrap these ideas together. I hope that you are moved to love more and more and to be continue loving in more and more and higher and greater ways. I hope that you can see that Jesus' kingdom

ethic is summed up in command. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. May we be a people who continue to obey the command to love others as ourselves because of

God's promise to his people, God's pattern for his people, and God's purpose for his people. Let's pray together.