

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW



## ***The Golden Rule*** **Matthew 7:12-14**

Let me invite your attention to Matthew chapter 7 this morning as we continue our series through Matthew's gospel. And we are still in the section called the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7 contain the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is teaching all about life in the kingdom of heaven.

This morning we will be looking at verses 12, 13, and 14, and verse 12 serves as a conclusion to a large section within the Sermon on the Mount and verses 13 and 14 serve as the beginning of the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, so we are straddling two sections this morning.

But I want to start with giving attention to verse 12...

### **Matthew 7:12**

12 "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

This has long been called the "Golden Rule." That name is not in Scripture. It was a title given to this verse centuries ago. But, if you grew up in church or have been around church for a bit, no doubt you have heard the Golden Rule. In fact, this saying is so popular that even if you didn't grow up in church, you've probably heard this. Even those who aren't Christians are familiar with this, because there are some similar statements in other world religions as well, which we will talk about in a bit.

But, it has been called a "rule" but more specifically, a "Golden" rule, which communicates its importance.

Notice again, Jesus gives the background - "for this is the Law and the Prophets"

It's a way of saying all of the Old Testament, or all of God's Law is summarized in this statement.

And it's a part of the "Great Commandment." Later in Matthew, Jesus will have a conversation with some religious leaders which draws this out...

### **Matthew 22:34-40**

**34** But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. **35** And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. **36** “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” **37** And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. **38** This is the great and first commandment. **39** And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. **40** On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

The religious leaders wanted to test Jesus, and said, of all the laws, of all the rules, that God has given us to follow, which is the greatest? And Jesus said, let me sum it up this way: Love God and love people. That’s the way of the kingdom of God. Love God and love people. Those are the laws of the kingdom of God.

So, here in 7:12, Jesus is focusing on the latter part of the commandment - our relationship with other people.

And I want to point out a few things that the Golden Rule teaches us as we seek to follow Jesus as citizens of his kingdom...

### **1. The Golden Rule redirects our focus from self to others.**

This is important for us because we are naturally lovers of self, so Jesus’ teaching on life in the kingdom serves as a radical reorientation of our hearts.

Notice even the way this teaching, and others like it in Scripture, is worded. It uses our natural love for self as the starting point to direct us to others. He says, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.

This is how the great commandment is worded for us as well...You shall love your neighbor as yourself. In other words, you know your desires for yourself, now redirect them outward.

As naturally self-obsessed people, we need this redirection to consider others.

And this true in so many different ways, not just in normal, rhythms of every day life, but even in the way we view our faith. We can be tempted to see our faith as a strictly a personal experience. We have a *personal* relationship with Jesus. And if we aren’t careful that might lead to practicing a stripped down, single dimension Christian life, one in which I think as long as I am doing the personal, spiritual disciplines of bible reading and prayer, then I am faithfully following Jesus.

To be clear, those are good and right and should be a daily part of your life, but that is not all we are called to in following Jesus. Those aren’t the only practices in the kingdom.

The New Testament is filled with what are often called “one another’s.” They are instructions and exhortations to treat one another in certain ways. And there are a ton of them.

For example, we are told to...

Honor one another (Rom. 12:10)  
Welcome one another (Rom. 15:7)  
Show hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)  
Be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32)  
Forgive one another (Col. 3:13)  
Bear with one another (Eph. 4:2-3)  
Comfort one another (2 Cor. 13:11)  
Pray for one another (James 5:16)

...among many other ways we are to relate to one another.

Now, in order to do those things, we need eyes and hearts that are set on one another. Life in the kingdom is a life that is others-focused.

We are gifted by the Spirit for the good of others, sent to make disciples of all nations, to do good works that others might see them and turn to glorify our God in heaven - that all necessitates a posture of service for others. While it doesn't eliminate selfish motivations at times, we can't view Christianity as a solely isolated way of life.

So, the Golden Rule reminds us of the importance of our posture towards others.

## **2. The Golden Rule Calls us to Active Good**

And this is one of the ways that the words of Jesus in the Golden Rule stand apart from similar statements from other faith traditions. Again, many people, even if they have never been in a Christian church, are familiar with the Golden Rule or at least something very similar. That is because other religions, especially Eastern religions, have saying that are similar. And since that is true, it has led some people to undermine the uniqueness of Christianity. They say, all religions are basically the same, and clearly they borrow from one another. The Golden Rule is an example of that.

Well, not quite. It is true that other religions have statements like the Golden Rule, but they aren't exactly the same. For example...

Hinduism says, “This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.” (Mahabharata 5:1517)

Buddhism says, “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.”  
(Udanavarga 5:18)

Confucianism says, “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.”  
(Analects 15:23)

Notice what those have in common. They are written in the negative sense of the rule. *Don't do* to others what you don't want them to do to you.

That's the opposite of what Jesus says. Jesus says, *do* unto others. And that's important because if the kingdom ethic that Jesus desires for his people is merely don't do bad things to one another, then that is much easier. I don't want someone to murder me, so I won't murder anyone else. That isn't too hard (most of the time). I don't want someone physically attacking me, so I won't physically attack others. That's not too hard.

It is a far higher calling to not only avoid evil actions against others but to actively do good to them. That often costs more. It means denying myself. It means looking after the interests of others before myself. It means I may need give my time and my resources for their good. And, according to Jesus, we do that for even our enemies.

In fact, look again at the words of Jesus, "whatever you **wish** that others would do to you, do also to them."

We might wonder, what if people don't do good to me? It doesn't relieve me of my calling to do good! Do I want others to treat me well? Of course! But sometimes they don't. But my doing good is not dependent on the way they treat me.

It also doesn't guarantee that they will reciprocate. Just because we do good to others, doesn't mean they will return the favor.

So, we hear Jesus' words and might think, how can we do that? How can continue to actively do good even when others don't respond with good?

We need to see the connection to the previous passage. I said earlier that verse 12 is a conclusion to a larger section. Notice the beginning of verse 12, Jesus begins with "so," or it could say, "therefore."

It is likely the end to this larger section that begins in chapter 5, verse 17, when Jesus says that he didn't come to abolish the Law and Prophets, and here ends with summarizing the Law and Prophets in the Golden Rule.

But that "so" or "therefore" also connects it to the passage just before it, the passage we saw last week. There Jesus encourages us to ask, seek, and knock because God is a generous Father.

Look again at verse 11...

**Matthew 7:11**

If you then, 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!

“So,” or “therefore,” do good to others. The connection there, I think, is to recognize that God is always doing good for you. And since that is true I can love and serve and do good to others without fear of whether or not someone might do good for me. We could say that the ability to do good to others is fueled by a confident trust that God is doing good for us.

So, the Golden Rule redirects our eyes and hearts to others, and it calls us to actively do good.

### **Practical examples...**

But let's go on and look at verses 13 and 14...

#### **Matthew 7:13-14**

**13** “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. **14** For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

These verses serve as the beginning of the concluding section of the Sermon on the Mount. In the next few sections Jesus will be contrasting two different ways of life.

He will talk about good trees that bear good fruit versus bad trees that bear bad fruit. He will describe the wise man who builds his life on the rock, or the words of Jesus versus the fool who builds his life on the sand, or ignores the words of Jesus. But here, he begins by describing the wide gate versus the narrow gate. And all of these analogies serve to teach one big idea, and that is there really are only two ways in this life: the kingdom of Jesus or the kingdom of this world.

And so we are reminded that the kingdom of Jesus is both inclusive as well as exclusive. The kingdom of God is made up of people from all kinds of backgrounds and ethnicities and cultures, but it doesn't include everyone, everywhere regardless of belief.

This is contrary to a universalist belief, that says either God is loving therefore he will save everyone, or that Jesus died for everyone, therefore everyone will be saved.

Jesus, and the rest of the Bible, present a very different picture. Here Jesus says, there are two ways, and one is described as the narrow gate and one is described as the wide gate. The narrow gate is hard and less traveled while the wide gate is easy and thus far more congested. However, the narrow gate is the one that leads to life, while the wide gate leads to destruction.

There are a few thoughts we can glean from these verses.

**First**, the true way to life, the way of the kingdom isn't discovered by appealing to the majority opinion. We don't follow Jesus because everyone else is doing it or because following Jesus is a popular thing to do. We don't follow Jesus because it will win us friends or we will gain influence in the world. We recognize that there are far less followers of Jesus than there are followers of Jesus. We seek to make disciples but we know that, in this age, we have to live with the reality that we are in the minority.

But being in the minority doesn't make following Jesus foolish or wrong. It might be tempting to look around at school or at the office and think, man, I'm the only one who believes in Jesus. I'm the only one who believes that the Bible is true. Maybe I'm the foolish one? Maybe I'm the weird one who has it all wrong? Jesus says, few will find the narrow gate. And so being in the minority is the way of life for the Christian, for now. It won't always be like that. But it is now, in this age before the return of Christ. So, don't let make you think that something is wrong.

**Second**, we shouldn't miss that Jesus describes the narrow gate as difficult. It is hard. And that might cause us to pause for second, because that can sound opposite of the gospel. The gospel is good news, and its good news because salvation is a free gift, one that I don't have to earn, because it has been earned for me. Jesus died for my sins so I don't have to, and now simply by faith, I am redeemed, forgiven, made new, and justified for all eternity. That doesn't seem to match up with this description of the difficult narrow gate.

Well, salvation really is a gift and not something to earn. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 11:29-30...

**Matthew 11:29-30**

**29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

He says, come. I'm not putting any kind of burden on you like the religious leaders do. Salvation is a gift and you really can rest in Jesus for all eternity. You don't have to impress me, you don't have to earn my approval through harsh religious rituals, come to me and I will never cast you out.

The Christian life, though, is not without its restrictions, so to speak. Life one who is squeezing through a narrow gate, the Christian life is one in which we are called to take up our cross and die to self, to daily put our flesh to death, to endure persecution and reviling, and so on.

Life with Jesus in the new heavens and earth is a glorious gift waiting for you and me, but the road to get there isn't always smooth and comfortable. I mean, listen to how the apostle Paul describes life...

**1 Cor. 15:19**

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

In other words, Paul says if there is no life with Jesus in eternity on the other side of this, and this is all we had, then we would be the most pitiful people in the world. Why? Because we are living in such a way that treasures the world to come while living in the world of today. Because we are denying ourselves instead of indulging ourselves. We are embracing the role of exiles instead of seeking the world's approval. Life on the narrow road is much different than life on the wide road.

But Jesus makes clear here, even though it is hard, it is the one that leads to life. And this is the paradox. The wide road, the wide gate is actually the more restrictive one, while its the narrow gate that leads to freedom.

ILLUS. In Florence, Italy, where we served as missionaries, in the city of Florence is what is called the Duomo. It is the main cathedral of the city. It's absolutely beautiful and it is huge. I mean it is really, really, big. It's dominant feature of the city's skyline. And it is an amazing piece of architecture to see from the ground, but what is cool is that you can buy a ticket and climb to the top of the Duomo. I was able to do it a number of times with guests who came over, but what you do is you start at the bottom and climb 463 steps to the top. And at the bottom, the stairwell is a pretty normal size. But you keep going up and up, and it gets narrower and narrower. Eventually you get close to the top and it becomes so narrow and so steep it is like you're climbing a ladder to get to the top. At the top, there is a small door, a small gate so to speak, that once you climb through you step outside onto the deck of very top of the dome. You get 360-degree views of the city of Florence and the Tuscan hills that surround it.

It's a long hike, it's not easy, you're tired when you get to the top, but the destination is absolutely worth the difficulty of the stairs.

Jesus says the narrow gate is hard, but it is so worth it. It leads to life. The other gate is easier, but it offers you nothing but pain and misery, it only leads to destruction.

### **PALM SUNDAY**

This is also Palm Sunday. It's the day of Jesus' "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem. He will ride a donkey into Jerusalem and kick off his Passion Week, the final week of his earthly life. It is at the end of this week when he will be arrested, put on trial, crucified, and buried.

And though we continued in the Sermon on the Mount this morning, we can actually see a connection to Palm Sunday.

Because Jesus demonstrates everything we talked about in our passage. Jesus travels a difficult and painful road, one that will end on a cross.

He will be completely abandoned by his disciples, standing alone before Pilate and the angry crowd.

And he does all of this because he put our interests before his own.

In fact, Paul appeals to Jesus' life and death as the basis for us serving one another as the Golden Rule calls us to.

**Phil. 2:3-8**

**3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So, as Christians, in this age, we are a minority of loving servants who follow our King.

And the great news of the gospel is that Jesus took on himself our failure to treat others the way we want to be treated. Because we want to follow the way of Jesus, but so often fall short. We tend to be selfish and self-obsessed. We tend not to actively do good, because it is an inconvenience or it is costly. We prefer the praise of the majority and reject the cost of following Jesus. And in so many more ways, we fall short of the standard of the kingdom.

And yet, Jesus dies for all of it. He dies for the selfish and self-obsessed. And his grace covers it all. We need only to repent of our sin, turn away from our sin, and turn to him in faith.

## **COMMUNION**

This morning, we will observe communion together as a church. And communion preaches to us time and time again this good news. Jesus took the form of a servant, put our needs before his own comfort, and allowed his body to be torn and his blood to be spilled so that we might be forgiven.

It reminds us that we are absolutely dependent on the grace of Jesus to be forgiven and to have life and that because of the sacrifice of Jesus, we really are forgiven and really do have life.

It is both a sober and joyful activity of the church. We recognize the great cost of our salvation, but we are grateful that the cost really was paid.



But we always want to spend time in careful examination of ourselves.

This is the New Testament's instruction for churches...

**1 Corinthians 11:23-29**

**23** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

**27** Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. **28** Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

So, in a moment we are going to have a time of silent prayer and confession to prepare our hearts for the taking of communion. It's a time for confessing any known sin and thanking the Lord for his grace. But we are going to observe communion a little differently this morning than we usually do.

Normally, we have our time of confession and we pray, then we sing two songs corporately inviting all Christians who want to participate to take communion during those two songs while we all continue to sing. This morning, on Palm Sunday, as we set our gaze at the end of this week, toward Good Friday, we want our time of communion to be more reflective. So, what we are going to do is after a time of silent prayer and confession, I will pray for us, and then we have a few musicians and singers who will come up and they are going to sing just one song this morning for us as we, rather than singing along, take the elements in silence, reflecting on the truths of the song that are being sung as eat and drink.

**CONFESSION**

**PRAYER**

**ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

**Romans 5:6**

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

**VERSES**

Matthew 7:12

Matthew 22:34-40

Matthew 7:11

Matthew 7:13-14

Matthew 11:29-30

1 Corinthians 15:19

Philippians 2:3-8

1 Corinthians 11:23-29

Romans 5:6

**SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Did you learn the “Golden Rule” growing up?
2. What contributes to us being so self-obsessed?
3. Why is the active nature of the Golden Rule so important?
4. What are practical ways you can put this into practice this week?
5. In what ways is life in the “narrow gate” so difficult for you?
6. How can the church community help as we sense the weight of being in the minority in this age?