

"How Do We Love One Another?"

Matthew 7:1-12

Matthew 5-7 is the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins the message by making radical statements that you are blessed if you are poor, you grieve, you hunger for righteousness and even if you are persecuted for His Name. The kingdom belongs to these. We know Jesus is speaking against the Pharisees and other religious leaders who claim that only the rich and the religious belong to the Kingdom because He tells His listeners in vv.17-21 that their righteousness must be better than the Pharisees. In other words, a righteousness that comes from God. Then He expands on their false teaching when He begins a series of 'You heard these people say .. but I say – clarifying what God really says in His Word.

Then in Ch. 6 He starts showing how self-righteous giving, praying and fasting does not honour God but humble giving, praying and fasting does. In 6:19-34 He has an extensive section on not worrying about material things because the religious leaders have ingrained in everyone's thinking that only the wealthy are right with God – an early form of a health and wealth gospel. Jesus says seek God's Kingdom ways and don't worry about material concerns. He will provide.

So in Ch. 7 Jesus starts to summarize and bring the message to a close by telling them how God's people are to show love (v.12) because loving God and others is the narrow path to life (vv.13-14). They had been taught and had seen from the religious leaders how to put people down who don't measure up. None of us measure up to God's standards. Is there a better way of helping each other love God and love others? Then Jesus tells them through humour to pull out a log from their own eye before they remove the speck of sawdust from their friend's eye. Again using another humorous illustration about not giving pearls to pigs, to illustrate that not everyone will accept your gracious attempts to remove the specks from their eyes. And somehow prayer connects to this an illustration of v.12 which says,

¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

That little word "so" or "therefore" ties v.12 back to what Jesus just said. It really could tie everything Jesus has said since 5:17 where He stated,

¹⁷ "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"

As we have already seen, the summary of the Law is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love others the way you love yourself. V.12 is another way of Jesus saying love others the way you love yourself or do to others what you want them to do for you. How do we love like Jesus does and wants us to? By not being negative towards people (1-6) which is how the world acts every day. And what's the best way of avoiding being judgmental so we can love God and love others? I believe vv.7-11 is key to this and with v.12 reminds us that we need to pray that we will love God (vv.7-11) who loves us and will provide for our spiritual and material needs while we pray and seek to love others the way he wants us to (v.12). And because v.12 is the reason we are to do all these things, let's start there.

How can we treat people the way we want to be treated? How can we build people up rather than tear them down? Now that we're in Christ,

We Now Have the Capacity to Love **(v.12)**

Jesus is instructing His followers how to fulfil the Law – loving God and those God has made – instead of negatively undermining their character, based on outward observances. The little word “So” or “therefore” in v.12 is crucial to seeing the connection to vv.1-11. Some translations leave this important Greek conjunction out, making it seem like these are all disconnected sayings. And v.12 could stand alone for sure but no verse of Scripture is isolated from its context.

Jesus wouldn't command us to do something we are incapable of doing. Only those who know Christ and are committed to His kingdom ways understand how Jesus works. He goes lower (as we saw last week in John 13). He loves by serving and sacrificing. Since this is a command then, we learn

That loving is doing and obeying what God wants (v.12a)

What does God and Jesus want us to do?

¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

“Do to others” what God would have us do; serve and love. Love is an action, more than a feeling. The feeling of love often comes after the action of love because it's not always easy. But, we now have the Spirit of Jesus in us which as God continues to conform us into the image of His Son, means as we obey God and grow in Christ our love capacity expands.

When you have your first child, you immediately love that child. You ooh and aww over that baby. And that love only increases as they get older. But then you have another child and the same love is there for that one. And any more children you have. And then one day you have a grandchild and you love them just as much. And then you have more and your love for them is the same. How can this be? Because we are made in the image of God so even unsaved people can grow in love for more. But when we accepted Christ, we now have a greater capacity to love fellow believers in Christ, even though we're not perfect. And we grow in loving the unsaved and we can when we obey God even develop a love for those who hurt us. We have the capacity to now and it's something we need to work on of course.

How do we show that love? By doing things for them. By serving them. By not physically and verbally (vv.1-6) attacking them and condemning them. Which is what judge means. And the true measure of loving others like Christ is when we

Love others even if we're not loved back (v.12b)

¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

“What you would have them do” or “what you want them to do to you”. The word means what you desire; meaning the way you would like to be treated meaning you may not be loved in the same way you are showing love. That's the way of God. That's the golden rule or as James 2:8 says the

'Royal law'. Christianity is proactively choosing to live like Jesus regardless of how we're treated. The reason why we can endure that is because great is our reward in heaven, not here. As Jesus told the Pharisees in Matt. 6 if you want an earthly reward, then that's all you get; earth's reward systems, not God's.

"Therefore" or "So" do to others what you would have the to do you now helps us learn how not to be so critical of others in vv.1-6. Since, as followers of Christ, who now have the capacity to love others the way we want to be treated even though we may not, we are able to

Stop Judging without Mercy **(7:1-6)**

The word "judge" means you have passed a sentence or labelled someone based on something you can only see on the surface. And a speck means you are looking for the tiniest flaws in someone. We all do it. Make judgment calls based on circumstances. How often haven't we done that only to find a fuller story later on? A Jewish saying known in Jesus' day was "judge each person with the scales weighed in their favour." Jesus said something similar in Luke 6:37-38

³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Err on the side of generosity. If they ask for \$5, give them \$10. When we're tempted to judge, let's assume the opposite of what we think. Perhaps that person driving erratically and too fast on the road is racing to the hospital because his wife is giving birth at a hospital. We really don't know, right? And Michelle's not here to tell you I'm not good at this!

Judge favourably, Jesus said, and you will be judged favourably as well. Isn't that like

Do to others what you would have them do to you,

We are to judge humbly for restorative purposes (vv.1-5)

Many people misinterpret this passage, Jesus isn't saying never make any kind of assessment. We are commanded to rebuke a fool, reject false teaching, to have nothing to do with divisive people. All these require making a judgment of some kind. But for the purpose of restoration. And practice it on yourself more than anyone else. 'First take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye', if it's even an issue anymore.

Jesus isn't condemning healthy judgments because in the next verse he says,

Don't waste your energy and resources (v.6)

Pigs have no appreciation for pearls. Dogs have no appreciation for holy things. Don't waste your time and energy on those who have no desire to repent and change. This involves making an assessment too. And how do we know if that person has no desire to change? How do we know how to best to love people and treat them better than they treat us? Vv.7-11. We ask, seek and knock. We pray because God knows everything and wants us to come to Him for all our needs.

Pray for Wisdom to Produce Loving Relationships **(vv.7-11)**

⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Ask who? The Father. Why?

Since we lack wisdom (v.7a, 8a)

We ask when we have a need or when we don't have an answer. So we pray to the One who can provide all our needs and the One who sees all and knows all. One of my recurring prayers is James 1:5,

⁵ *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

Do you think James is implying Matt. 7:7 here? It sure sounds like it. In 1:17 James goes on to say about God,

¹⁷ *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

And then in Ch. 3:13 he writes,

¹³ *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*

James is talking about the need for relational wisdom amongst us. We need it from God. God's wisdom produces peace, not strife. Ask ... and it will be given. But notice prayer isn't passive where we just let go and let God.

Do your part (v.7b, 8b)

The command to seek means we have a role too. When it comes to relationships, we need to find out more about people. Ask good questions. Observe them, Get to know them. Our bad habit of judging people comes from a lack of knowledge. 'Ask and it will be given' means you will receive the answer from somewhere else, not yourself (God). But seek and you will find' means you will find the answers yourself when you are doing your part.

A lot of people have an improper understanding of finding God's will for something. That we pray and sit back and do nothing. But if you're praying about what school to go to, you will seek information about schools that interest you, apply and pray for how God is leading. If you're wondering who you should marry then you are going to look at potential spouses and develop a friendship with one you are interested in and communicate/seek to discover if you share similar goals

and desires. Especially spiritual goals and desires. We are to ask and we are to seek. Praying is not passive. And when the answer hasn't come yet,

Persevere (v.7c, 8c)

Don't give up. Keep praying earnestly. Knocking at the door means you've gone to where the answer can be found and you're not going to stop until you get the answer. Within the context of relationships and loving hard-to-love people, we have to keep going to God for strength and wisdom to be able to do what we can't do in our own strength. I like Timothy Keller's illustration about persistent prayer to the King of the world.

"The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 a.m. for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access."

And God will provide (vv.9-11)

And whatever His answer is it will be good for us. Because Jesus illustrates we have a good father:

⁹ *"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?"*

In Israel they have many flat round stones that resemble pita bread, the bread of Jesus' day. When Satan tempted Jesus to turn a stone into bread, most likely a pita-shaped stone was sitting right in front of Him. God will give You what you need.

¹⁰ *Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake?*

A fish was clean according to the Law; you can eat that. But a snake or perhaps an eel which you might catch with fish, is not clean. Our Father is only going to give us that which is good and produces His good in us.

Luke's version in Luke 11:12 He adds, ¹² *Or if he asks for an egg, will he give him a scorpion?*

A scorpion is very deadly of course. When scorpions sleep or pretend to sleep they roll up into the shape of an egg. God's answer will not be deceptive.

¹¹ *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!* ¹² *So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

Jesus says, God is good and not like us. His answers won't be poor choices. When we ask God for wisdom to love others like we want to be loved, He will provide what we need, so that we can accomplish His holy purposes.

Love God with all our heart, soul and strength and love others like Jesus and the way we would like to be treated. Make it part of your prayer life this week to ask God for how we can model Jesus' like love to the neighbours He puts in our path, to err on the side of grace when we're tempted to judge/criticize others and when He gives us direction and answers, give Him the glory thanking Him for His goodness in our lives.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
contact us at olivet@rideau.net