

Sermon Title: The Golden Rule

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 7:7-12 (Sermon on the Mount #28)

Date: 3-14-21

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One of the sometimes more difficult aspects of preaching and teaching through the Bible is when you get to the very familiar parts of Scripture; because most people may know a verse, know a sentence, know a phrase or a paraphrase of something, and not have any idea how it fits with the rest of the Bible. Well, we have *maybe* the granddaddy of all of them today in our text before us,

When I was growing up, I heard about the "Golden Rule." I was never told it was in the Bible. I was never told that Jesus said it. But it sounded like a pretty good idea. My folks would use the Golden Rule whenever it suited their agenda to tell me about it; that usually involved a time when I had made the mistake of provoking my older brothers, and I had received retaliation for it—which I always deserved, and more. But the version that they would quote me was: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Then, around my 18th birthday—just a few months after I had come to know Christ—I was, for the first time on my own, reading through the New Testament; and I ran across this *in the words of Jesus!* Now, as I read it for that first time, it was: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matt. 7:12, KJV). And I even got past the "ye's" and the "whatsoevers" and all of that, and I figured it out—that sounds like the Golden Rule!

Several years after that, I was taking a class in the Greek exegesis of Matthew, and I first examined this saying in great depth in its actual context in the Sermon on the Mount. And in that process, I learned that Jesus's version of the Golden Rule was not the *first* version of the Golden Rule; but it is profoundly different from—and superior to—all of the others.

There is a story told of the famous Jewish rabbis, Hillel and Shammai. They lived not very long before the time of Christ. They were both quite influential—one of them far more liberal, the other far more conservative. The story is that they were confronted by a heathen who said he would embrace Judaism, provided it could be explained to him while he stood on one foot. Shammai was the more conservative—more of the Pharisee type—very, very zealous for keeping all the rules and regulations. He failed; he didn't manage to say it in the time that the man could stand on one foot. Hillel, in his answer, is said to have spoken this: "Do not unto thy fellows what his hateful unto you. This is the whole Law. The rest is commentary." That story says that the heathen man did give serious consideration to Hillel's version of the Golden Rule, and that later, he became a convert. And rabbis love to make up stories like that. We don't know if any of that is true.

The Jewish scholars who lived in Alexandria, in Northern Africa—the same ones who translated the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament—they advised, in a certain piece of correspondence that they wrote: "As you wish that no evil befall you, but to be a partaker of all good things; so you should act on the same principle toward your subjects and offenders."

You don't even have to stay in the realm of Judaism and Christianity—Confucius taught: "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

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There was an ancient Greek king named Nicocles—I had never heard of him, except that he wrote this: "Do not do to others the things which make you angry when you experience them at the hands of other people."

Then there is a Greek philosopher—who I had also never heard of, except that he wrote this; his name is Epictetus, and he said: "What you avoid suffering yourself, do not afflict on others."

The Stoic philosophers had their version that said: "What you do not want to be done to you, do not do to anyone else."

Now, there's a difference between Jesus's version and those versions of the Golden Rule—none of which are *bad*, none of which are *evil* in any way. The difference between them and what Jesus said in Matthew 7:12 comes in one or both of two aspects of them.

1—notice, those were all stated negatively, rather than positively. If you don't want other people to hurt you, don't hurt them; that's pretty much the way they go.

Secondly—the other versions are oriented primarily toward doing what is best for *your own self-interest*. Now, certainly, the point that I was led to get by my parents when they quoted their version of the Golden Rule was that it is good to treat other people well so *that you will be treated well in return*. But it was all about self-interest, what's best for *me*; that's why I would be nice to *you*.

Now, I won't deny—you tend to be treated better if you treat other people well. But in Jesus's version of the Golden Rule, there's a *higher purpose*; and we're going to see that when we get to the end of our passage for today.

But our task today is to see this Golden Rule in the context that Jesus taught it. We come to Matthew Chapter 7, Verses 7 through 12, in the third and final of the three chapters of the Bible which are the summary of that great sermon that Jesus preached, all at one time (see also Lk. 6:20-49).

We can outline these six verses this way: Ask—which you can also turn into an acronym for Ask, Seek, Knock; that's Verses 7 and 8. Then, Verses 9 through 11 is: Why You Can Ask. And then Verse 12 is the Conclusion, and that is the Golden Rule.

So let's turn first to Matthew Chapter 7, Verses 7 and 8—"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 he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

Now, you might not immediately figure out the connection of how this fits in the Sermon on the Mount, the connection to the context. It isn't abundantly, immediately clear; but we know Jesus never said things haphazardly or without good reason, so we know that He meant this to connect.

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So here's the connection: Jesus has just admonished His followers to abstain from judging others, in the sense of being critical—hypercritical; acting as the ultimate judge of their behavior; judging on things that are not important, according to God's Word. But in the same breath—all of this is in the six verses before this—He also told us to *make* judgments, because we *have to* do that in order to help one another by getting "specks" out of each other's eyes, which is a metaphor for helping a brother or sister deal with sin.

And then, without breaking verbal stride, Jesus told us that we also have to make judgments about people who prove, by their behavior and by their attitude, that they are unworthy of us trying to teach them—trying to give the Gospel to them, if you will. We have to make judgments to figure out who are the spiritual "dogs" and "swine" who don't really want to hear the Word of God, but they'll turn and attack those who give it to them.

In other words, He has just said we have to be critical but not *hypercritical*; we need to abstain from judging in one sense, but on the other hand, we *really do* have to make important judgments in other ways. The natural response to that kind of responsibility to get that right and to maintain that balance is to recognize how hard it is, and how inadequate we feel to do those things. Who *is* adequate for such a responsibility, as to know when to make the judgment and when to refrain from making the judgment?

Jesus answers that unspoken question by urging the necessity of specific and persistent prayer, accompanied by diligent effort. And it is in this well-known instruction—Ask, Seek, Knock—that Jesus not only addresses the issue of what we need in order to make the right kind of judgments at the right time on the right standards, but He also gives us yet more teaching about the nature of prayer, and how to make the most of this great privilege that we have to pray to our heavenly Father.

So Verses 7 through 11 really are appropriate in their context in the Sermon on the Mount, but they are also applicable to a myriad of other things, because they all have to do with addressing the goodness of God and our access to Him as we ask, seek, and knock to know what best to do.

I want you to notice that in our text—and I'll explain this more in just a moment—there is a rising intensity in the three commands. It starts with "Ask," moves to "Seek," and then to "Knock." Each is a different word, and each one comes with its own promise from God.

"Ask" implies humility; it requires a sense of our own need of something. It's a verb that is used for a petition from an inferior addressing a superior. You don't ask somebody for something if you don't think they can help you. So it's us reaching out to God. The very act of prayer itself is acknowledging your neediness and your humility before God.

In that parable that we looked at so many times lately as we worked our way through the Sermon on the Mount—remember, over in Luke Chapter 18—it says that "Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself" (vs. 11); and if you read what he said, he asked *nothing* of God—his *entire prayer was telling* God things, as if God needs to learn from us. And especially, he was telling God, reminding God, just how good he really was.

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But there was that "tax collector" off to the side, who humbled himself to the point of being "unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast" in mourning for his own unworthiness; and *he* asked God something. Remember what it was? "Be merciful to me, the sinner!" (vs. 13). He came humbly before the Father.

The very nature of asking implies that you have faith in a God who *can* do something about your situation, who *does* care about you, and who *answers* your prayers. He is God, your *heavenly Father*—and like any parent, He welcomes a child who comes and asks (Prov. 15:8b).

What is the promise associated with that kind of humble asking? It's there in Verse 7—"It will be given to you." Or, in verse 8: receiving. Even the wording of the promise reinforces who God is, and how prayer works. You can't make it on your own! You don't have all the wisdom that you need! And your strength will fail you, like the song says—"ere the day is half done" (Annie J. Flint, "He Giveth More Grace). But when you humble yourself before your Father, He gives you what you need (Heb. 4:16).

The next command after "Ask" is more intense; it is "Seek." It's a stronger word than asking, and the implication is that seeking means asking *plus* acting. When you "seek" something, it means you're expending effort to go out and obtain it; you are doing something about it.

For example: It's good to pray for a deep knowledge of the Bible—but you won't get that by just putting the Bible under your pillow at night and sleeping on it! You're going to have to search and examine the Scriptures (Prov. 2:3-5). You need to be in the place in the services where the Scripture is expounded upon and is the focus, and where people who love the Lord are encouraging one another. And above all, you need to strive to live in harmony with God's Word (Ps. 25:14; Prov. 2:7a).

So the principle is, as you move from "Ask" to "Seek": If you want your prayers to be effective, start by humbling yourself before God, ask for what you need, but you have to also be willing to *do* something by way of seeking what God is going to provide for you (Ps. 104:28; cf. Matt. 6:11 with 2 Thess. 3:10). Don't pray if you aren't willing to expend any energy! God is likely to make *you* a part of the answer to your prayer, to use you to "seek" that which you have asked for.

The promise attached to seeking—"You will find"; you'll find what you need. God is not a cruel taskmaster who wants to make things hard for you. *He's your Father*, and He "loves you" (Jn. 16:27), and He "knows what you need," even "before you ask Him" (Matt. 6:8). So the promise of finding is based in the reality that God actually *leads* His children, and He leads them "in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Ps. 23:3); He leads them to the truth (Matt. 16:17; Jn. 6:45).

Romans Chapter 8 is a spectacular chapter for a lot of reasons; one of them is: it contains several descriptions of what it means to be a believer. One of those descriptions is in Romans 8:14-15—"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

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For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' " That's a term of endearment. I can come to my Father, I can humbly ask Him, and I can seek what He has promised to give me, and He promises me He will lead me.

Now, if you look very carefully, you'll find that God leads through His Word; He will lead you into the truth that you need (Ps. 119:104, 130; Prov. 22:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:15-16). And when you are His child, and you come humbly and you ask Him for what you need, and you're willing to seek out His provision, what a wonderful promise: He is going to lead you where you need to go!

You know the 23rd Psalm. Let me pluck a few phrases from the first three verses: "The Lord"—Yahweh—"is my Shepherd...He leads me beside quiet waters"—in other words, He quenches the thirst of my soul. "He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake"—if I belong to Him, He will lead me and He will guide me.

And that leads to the third command. You "Ask"—you pursue; you "Seek" what you need; and you "Knock." This third command—knocking—is asking, plus acting—or, seeking—plus persevering. You knock again and again, until the door is opened (Lk. 18:1). You keep knocking on the door of God's Kingdom Palace until the King—who happens to be your Father—opens the door and supplies what it is that you need.

And the great promise here is: if you keep knocking, "It will be opened." The connotation of that promise is that God does not withhold from His children what they need. We saw it already: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). What is the context of "all these things? What you need to eat, what you need to wear, and a place to sleep—God will give you everything that you actually need. Or, as James put it when he gave his command for us to ask God for wisdom in the midst of our trials: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (Jas. 1:5).

So understand: when you come to your Father, you're coming to somebody who knows you, knows what you need, and loves you, and wants you to grow, wants you to be more holy, wants you to be blessed.

So, three commands, three promises: The command—"Ask"; the promise—"Receive." The command—"Seek"; the promise—"Find." The command—"Knock"; and the promise—"It will be opened."

This kind of persevering prayer—accompanied by the visible activity of faith, whereby you seek and you keep knocking—that is two things at once. On the one hand, that is a distinguishing mark of a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven; they are the ones who *come* to the Father and keep asking. And at the same time, this is also a *great privilege* of a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven; you *can* talk to God, and you *do* talk to God. That's one of the ways that you can see signs of a spiritual pulse—there really is life there.

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There's one more matter of interpretation here that needs to be pointed out. It's one of those things that is very clear in Greek, and it does not translate into most other languages—certainly not into English, without some circumlocution. All three of these commands are present tense; and in Greek, that doesn't just mean what's happening now—it has the connotation of continuous activity and/or repeated activity. God actually *wants* to hear from you (1 Thess. 5:17; cf. Ps. 62:8). How often? Every time you have anything to ask! He wants you to "seek" what you need. How often? Every single day! He wants you to "knock" until you have the thing that you need, every day. He wants you to "ask" Him. He delights to give to you. He loves to lead you to the answers. He loves opening the door that you cannot open for yourself.

Now, we have to put some guardrails on this—a couple of points of caution, you might call them. These two wonderful verses—Matthew 7:7-8: "Ask," "Seek," "Knock"—they're not a blank check for anyone to get anything that they want by praying. The context is limited to *believers*—genuine believers (Ps. 145:18). Jesus has distinguished between those who are trapped in the works-righteousness system of the Pharisees, and He said that's going to fall *infinitely short* of even gaining entrance into "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). This is for those who truly believe. Prayer is *not* a matter of formulas and techniques. Prayer is intimate communication within a relationship between a heavenly Father and His adopted child (Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5).

Another caution here: To claim these promises—and by the way, I never have really liked that terminology: "*Claim* a promise," as if God is just out there like the guy selling peanuts and popcorn at the ballgame, "Peanuts! Popcorn!" and then you raise your hand and he tosses you one. No, these are standing invitations from God, standing promises from God; but, shall we say, to "avail yourself" of these promises, you have to be living in obedience to the Father (Ps. 84:11b). We're going to see more of that in the next point; but of course, these two verses have to be taken in light of what the Bible says in general—in total—about answered prayer. For example: First John 3:22—"And whatever we ask we receive"—there it is: "ask," "receive"—"whatever we ask we receive from Him"—but that's not a period, that's a comma—"because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." Don't be asking God for things if you're not willing to *do* something about it (Prov. 28:9). Don't ask God to make you a better spouse if you're not willing to change; God *will not* make you a better spouse by changing the other person! He's going to work in you; and it might be *hard* work.

Another guardrail: The motive has to be right. God *does not* obligate Himself to answer selfish requests—carnal requests—form His children; as James put it—and I think I pointed this out to you back in Chapter 6 as well—James 4:3—"You ask and do not receive"—Uh-oh! Something can short-circuit the connection between that command and that promise: "Ask" and "Receive." What can be the short-circuit? "You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." "God, I want what I want because I want it, because I really, really want it, because I like it, because I think I'd be better off with it!" No..."God, I want what *You* want, because I know that You know best." *That's* when He answers!

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Another guardrail: You have to be submissive to His will (1 Jn. 5:14). We have to subordinate *all* our requests to what we know that the Father knows is best (Matt. 26:39). The end of James Chapter 4—"Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit" (vs. 13); but he says, "You don't know if you're going to be *alive!*" (cf. Prov. 27:1) But say, "*If the Lord wills*, we will live and also do this or that" (vs. 15).

This leads to the positive side of Jesus explaining why we can and should "Ask" and "Seek" and "Knock" with patience and diligence and perseverance. So, Point #1—Ask, Seek, Knock (vss. 7-8). Point #2—Why You Can Ask.

Very simple illustration: Verses 9, 10, and 11—"Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" It's not hard to interpret; the message is pretty clear! Your heavenly Father, who is the source of all goodness—He will give good things to His children who address Him with humble petitions.

Now, again, a couple of observations there. Notice: God will never deceive His children. God will never give you something phony or worthless. There are lots of counterfeits in the world that can lead you astray, but that will never come from God. He won't give you something other than what you need.

And: God never disappoints His children. His gifts are always good (Jas. 1:17). Now, understand: this does not mean that God always gives you exactly what *you* thought you needed; He gives you what He knows that you need. He'll never give you anything that is bad for you. And when He doesn't give you just what you ask, it's because He knows that that other thing is better. And sometimes it might sting to realize *how far off base you were* in asking for that thing, because you just didn't see the big picture, the eternal picture that He knows (Ps. 147:5; Is. 46:10). What earthly parent is foolish enough to give children everything they ask for? (cf. Prov. 29:15b) That's a disaster to do that! So would we expect a perfect, infinite, all-knowing, all-loving Father to give us everything we *ask for*? (Rom. 8:26) Of course not! That's not hard at all.

Now, the punchline. Ask, Seek Knock. Why You Can Ask—Because your heavenly Father is good, and He has your best interest in mind. Now, Thirdly—The Conclusion: The Golden Rule. Verses 7 through 11 form a perfect bridge between those rather stern commands of Verses 1 through 6 and this beautiful, positive command that we have to obey now; we've come to call it "The Golden Rule." It's Verse 12 of Matthew Chapter 7: "In everything"—stop there; the Greek means "everything." There is *no relationship with another person* in which this does not apply, okay? That's pretty easy. "In everything, therefore"—oh my goodness, there's a "therefore"! You're not understanding the Golden Rule if you're extracting it from any sort of connection to anything else! "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

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Now, in the way that I was taught the Golden Rule as a child, I recognized right away: It's a good thing; it's a good idea to live that way—but the point was that if I lived that way, it would be better for *me*! People would treat *me* better. Now, that's true, in general—but only *in general*. Understand: in Chapter 7, Jesus is not *unsaying* what He said in Chapter 5—"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me" (vs. 11); He has *promised* that there will be persecution for living the right way (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12). And *now*, He has the audacity to say: Living the right way is to treat other people the way you want them to treat you! You won't always be getting exactly what you want from that other person. You won't always be treated well in that way. You *will* be mocked; you *will* be persecuted. *That doesn't mean* that it isn't the best way to live! Do you understand that?

Not everyone will treat you well, no matter how well you treat them. But if you treat others kindly, if that is the pattern of your life—if you treat other people the way you would like them to treat you—you're going to have more friends than if you didn't. You're going to have a happier life than if you go around abusing people and treating them badly (Prov. 11:17; 15:1). God built that into the world of mankind; *He* is the one who designed the principle: You reap what you sow.

If you've gone out to your garden and you've gotten a *terrible* crop of potatoes—*none of them* turned out right—and in fact, you planted only corn...we know what the problem was! You do reap what you sow. And then God *extends* that principle in Galatians Chapter 6:8—"The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption."

This version of the Golden Rule is different from all the others—which are stated negatively, where this one is positive; *and* they're selfish. Jesus did not say, "Treat other people well *just so that* they will treat *you* well." Notice, He says: "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you"—*He doesn't say*: "and you'll get more good treatment." He says: "for this is the Law and the Prophets"—and *there* is the key to understanding the divine purpose of the Golden Rule! Don't *just* treat people well when there's a good chance that they will be able to reciprocate. Treat people well *because it's the right thing to do*! Treat people well *because* when you do that, that's how you show that you love God! (Matt. 5:44-45; Lk. 6:35; 1 Thess. 3:12)

You are becoming an illustration of what Jesus is like! "Let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10). People should be able to look how Christians see Christians and say, "Wow! Look how much they love one another! I want to be part of *that* group!" (Jn. 13:35; Col. 1:4) That's part of our testimony (1 Jn. 5:1). But individually, we also want to treat other people the way we would like to be treated, *whether or not* anything comes back out way, by way of good treatment. That's how you show that you love God. It's the right thing to do.

Now, I suppose that giving in order to get something is probably better than not giving at all. But at the core of the motives of the heart, giving in order to get something is nothing more than sanctified selfishness. We do this because "this is the Law and the Prophets" (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8)



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Let me unpack that for just a moment, and we'll be done. You're familiar with the incident over in Matthew Chapter 22, Verses 35 through 40. "One of them, a lawyer"—that does not mean a person who practices law; this would be one of the scribes, one of the self-proclaimed experts in the Law of God—"One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him"—remember, this was designed to trip up Jesus. He said, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

And you probably know the background to that: The scribes and the Pharisees not only believed all the details of the Law of God, they added *hundreds* and *hundreds more*—people were *buried* under the weight of law-keeping, because they were taught that works-righteousness system; these people believed that "in themselves...they were righteous" (Lk. 18:9) because they obeyed all the do's and don'ts. And that's why Jesus said that you need a righteousness that far "surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees" or you won't even "enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). You need a whole different system whereby you don't *conjure up* your righteousness, you don't *earn* your own merit—you *receive* what God gives you as a "free gift" (Rom. 6:23b; cf. Phil. 3:9). *That* is the message of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:23-24).

So he asks Jesus, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" The reason for that question is: Understanding that, in reality, *nobody* could carefully keep all of those rules (Acts 15:10), they believed that if you could figure out what was the *most important one*, and you worked *really hard* at that one, God might sort of give you some slack on the rest of them—*completely missing the point* that you must "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48; cf. 1 Pet. 1:16).

So, his question: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And it *was* a test; it *was* a trap—but *on this one occasion*, Jesus actually took him seriously, and answered the question directly: "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.' " But He didn't stop there—He went on: " 'This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." Did you see that last sentence? "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets"—does that sound like anything you've heard recently, as in: "for this is the Law and the Prophets"?

The purpose of the Golden Rule is to give you a quick and easy basis for deciding on the fly, in any situation—like it says: "in everything"—how you might react under pressure. The Golden Rule is a corollary to "Love your neighbor as yourself."

If you're in a situation—maybe you're frustrated, maybe you're confused, maybe you've been attacked, maybe you're unnerved, you're sleep-deprived, you're at your wits' end, and you don't have time to call a timeout and get your Bible and your concordance and go spend an hour seeking to know what to do—here's how you can get a really good start on going the right direction: Just think of how much you love yourself, and how much you would like that other person to treat you in a certain way—that's a great place to start when deciding how anybody else wants to be treated.

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So, the Golden Rule—or, the Two Great Commandments—is like the Cliff's Notes version of your Bible. What was the Bible, what were the Scriptures to them in those days? Well, it was "the Law and the Prophets"—that was one of the ways they summarized the totality of the Old Testament.

Another way you could summarize the totality of the Old Testament is to take the Ten Commandments. The first four of them are summarized with: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Those first four commandments are all about you in relationship to God. The last six of the commandments is summarized by: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." So just ask yourself, "How would I like to be treated, if this situation was reversed?"

The Golden Rule is, without doubt, the best way to live in general—for anybody of any religious bent whatsoever. And I want to emphasize that the benefits of treating other people well are, *in general*—that you will get treated better. But understand: As a child of God, I realize that the benefits of living righteously and generously, and treating others "as more important than" myself (Phil. 2:3), and doing what I would like to have done to me—I'm not necessarily going to *receive* all those benefits, *in this life!* But I will entrust my future to One who judges rightly and makes all things right (1 Pet. 4:19; cf. Is. 54:17). You see, this world is not the Kingdom. But the King is ultimately going to come. He is certainly going to make things right (1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Thess. 1:6-7). Even if you *never* see the results in your lifetime, doing right is the right thing to do, no matter what!

Let me give you one more way to think about this; I've shared this with you before: If you will always ask yourself two questions—or, remind yourself of the *answers* to two questions—you'll do pretty well.

In *any* situation, just ask yourself: Who is the greatest sinner in the room? And immediately, your fingers will start twitching, who you want to point to—especially if there are only two people in the room. You *know* the other person is the greatest sinner in the room. And then you have to repent and say, "Look, I understand. Like the Apostle Paul—the *great Apostle Paul*, who called himself the "chief" of "sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15, NKJV); *he did* do some pretty ugly things; before his conversion, he *did* persecute the church—but if you will maintain the attitude that, "Look, no matter *what* that other person has done, *I have been forgiven* such a *mountain* of transgressions, I don't deserve *anything* but God's wrath!" So who is the greatest sinner in the room? The right answer is always: "Me." Then the next question is: Who is the most important person in the room? And our flesh screams out, "Me! *I am!* Treat me nice!" And the right answer is in Philipppians Chapter 2. The right answer is: "Everybody else."

If, in every situation,--or, as the Golden Rule says: "in everything"—you will always answer the question, "Who is the greatest sinner in the room?" "Well, that would be me." "Who is the most important person in the room?" "That would be everybody else." And if you act accordingly to those two answers to those two questions, you'll get the Golden Rule right. And by the way: You will be fulfilling the relational aspects of "the Law and the Prophets."

Sermon Title: The Golden Rule

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 7:7-12 (Sermon on the Mount #28)

Date: 3-14-21

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And so, again, put it in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus was preaching a *frontal attack* on Phariseeism—showing people how righteous you are (Matt. 23:5), showing how you can pray more eloquently than anybody else (Matt. 6:5; 23:14), showing how much you give (Matt. 6:2), proud of what you do: "I am not like other people...like this tax collector" over here (Lk. 18:11), or sinners, or those kinds of things. Jesus is saying, "No. Come and find a righteousness that *greatly* surpasses that—the righteousness you can't have" (see Rom. 3:10; Phil. 3:9). If you live like that, God is going to get the glory; and He *will* reward you, I promise, because that's the Golden Rule.

Let's pray:

*Our Father, again, how we thank You for Your Word. Thank You for its practicality. Thank You for the fact that it exposes what needs to be exposed, that it leads us in the paths of righteousness when applied by Your Spirit as we come in faith. Teach us to "ask" for the best things. Teach us to "seek" the right things. Teach us to keep "knocking" on the door until we see Your hand unfolding Your will in our lives. And thank You, Father, for Your faithfulness—that You are always good when we are so bad; and You are always faithful, even when we are faithless—and that somehow, You love us with a perfect love.*

*And now, Father, as we wrap up our worship, as we call upon You today, again we want to pray for those who we need to lift up before You, and ask for a special touch from Your hands. We pray for our president. We pray for our congress, our governors, our mayors, and all those in positions of authority over us. Oh, Father, what a marvelous thing it would be to see revival break out in those spheres of influence! But regardless of what they do, please make us ever more godly, ever more humble, ever more pure. We thank You for those who are in those positions of leadership over us now, because, as we say, whatever they do, it gives us a chance to honor You, to glorify You. We also lift up those among us who are grieving the loss of loved ones. We ask Your special comfort on each of them. We also especially pray for our friend Greg Dismuke and his burden of caring for his father Harlan in what appears to be his final days, and all of those excruciating decisions about hospice and doing this thing or that thing and how it could work out; but above all, that Harlan doesn't know You. We pray for those moments of lucidity when Greg and Sherry, as she goes to join them in Hawaii this week—we just pray that You will bless them with an opportunity for the Gospel to redeem that soul, and his wife Judy as well.*

*And Father, we pray for those who are being "persecuted for the sake of righteousness," for believers in so many places in Africa, in Pakistan, elsewhere in Asia, in China, and North Korea. But Father, much closer to home, in Edmonton. We pray for James Coates, and we pray that the powers that be would relent of their stubbornness in arresting a man of peace who speaks only the Gospel of peace, and that You would let him be out of jail and back to the ministry that You have given to him, and that You would vindicate Your people in that way. But thank You for their resilience and their tenacity to obey You, regardless of what has happened to their pastor. Take care of our friend and coworker. Likewise, for all the churches of California that are being targeted in much the same way.*

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*Thank You for the greater freedom that we have here. Make us good stewards of the opportunities before us, and help us to have wisdom to know how and when to return to what we think of as normal for church life.*

*Have Your way with all of us every day, that we might be the kind of people who exemplify the Golden Rule—the summary of "the Law and the Prophets." We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*