

Sermon Text for July 30, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 7:12 *“The Golden Rule”*

At the beginning of 2023 we began with the genealogy of Matthew and embarked on a sermon series that would take us through the Gospel of Matthew and we entitled it the Gospel of Righteousness. We defined righteousness as acting according to the will of God. We have seen a lot together, especially as we have made our way through the longest monologue that we find Jesus giving on this sermon on the mount. And now, as we make our way to the end of the sermon on the mount, but while we are only in chapter 7 of this Gospel, we find Jesus give a single sentence to summarize all that he has said so far, and even summarizes all of his teachings that he will be saying in the future.

This single verse which we will be reading has been called the golden rule both by Christians and non-Christians alike. It is a rule that even those who live in a secular reality and don't identify as Christian are willing to take on as a rule of life for their own ethic. It has crossed all the boundaries imaginable and has left a lasting impression in history as the benchmark for ethical living.

There are some churches where every Sunday you are called to altar to give your life to Jesus. But we recognize that giving your life to Jesus isn't the end of your journey of faith, but it is merely the beginning. Let's be clear, giving your life to Jesus, recognizing that you are a sinner and can't live your life without a Savior is a necessary and vitally important and life giving step. Without making a decision for Christ on your own and without understanding that Jesus has already made a decision for you on the cross, you will not receive salvation. But once you make that decision and once you understand that Jesus died for you even while you were yet a sinner, now what? What comes next?

This life comes next. Our faith is not just for the sake of a free ticket into heaven, it is also the way in which we can experience God's kingdom here and now. Both of our Scriptures today lay out the golden rule which for us summarizes all of Jesus' teachings. It is as if today Jesus is saying to us: if you haven't hear anything which I have said up to this point in Matthew, if you are only going to remember one thing about me, listen to this verse, understand this one verse, live this one verse. Love your neighbor as yourself. Let's read.

READ

In our first reading in Leviticus we find ourselves in the a book of the Bible where you have lists after lists of commandments and rules and laws that the people of the Old Testament, that the people of Israel had to follow in order to obey the commandments that God had established with them. Surrounding this Scripture in Leviticus we find the command that we should not bear a grudge, in this same verse we read that we should never take vengeance. None of this should sound unfamiliar to us who are scholars now on the sermon on the mount. Jesus has said the same thing and so this very much is in line with the Old Testament commandments.

If you look at vs.33-34 you read about the commandment to love the immigrant, regardless of whether they are legal or illegal. The law commanded the people of Israel to remember the time that they too were immigrants, even if it was centuries ago, and to show a love to those who are living in you midst now that reflects the love you wish you had received when you were in the land of Egypt.

The people of Israel had to be taught how to not only interact with themselves as a community, make sure you love each other, but also with those outside of the community. God says you treat those outside of the community no different from those within the community. You don't build up walls to separate yourself from them. In Israel there is a wall that has been built to separate the Jewish and the Palestinian sections. It is absolutely tragic. Many of those behind the wall in the Palestinian section are Christians, even in the town where Jesus was born, Bethlehem, there is a wall separating those who are considered in and those who are considered out. It seems as if Israel has forgotten Leviticus 19:33-34. We are not strangers to desires to build up walls, both literal and figurative all in the excuse of keeping ourselves safe.

Jesus' golden rule is also couched around the longest sermon that he preaches in all of Scripture. The sermon on the mount is three chapters of Jesus giving the crowds directives on how they should live their lives and how to make God their number one priority in their life. This is why it is so important to us today, today as we live in a culture where God is not considered anything more than a good luck talisman that we invoke when we feel like we need a little extra help. But look at how Jesus begins these verses. In everything..., how much is God involved in our everything?

We are used to separating things in our lives in silos and only some of the things, a few of things, in our lives do we allow God to even peek in and take a glimpse. We rarely ask God to get His hands dirty in our lives, just give us a little extra luck here and there and then you can be on your way and I'll call you back when I need you. Seek ye first the kingdom of God. In everything do to others. When God is in our everything then in everything we can have God

dictate and direct our lives. We have talked about before here that it is a full time commitment to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Our journey doesn't end when we accept Jesus, that is only one season of our journey, there is so much more than just an acceptance, there is a live to life and a life to live well as we follow our Savior.

This golden rule, as it is called, uses terminology that would have been familiar to the first century follower of Jesus. In everything do to others as you would have them do to you. 200 years before Jesus walked the earth a writing was produced that was called Tobit, it is considered apocryphal and not part of the canon of the Bible. But in this book there is a statement that goes: Do to no one what you yourself dislike. This is very much in the negative while what Jesus said was in the positive, but people knew this saying so Jesus saying it was not very strange or very new.

The concept was carried further as we could also say if it is hateful to you to starve, don't act in ways that would lead your neighbor to starve. If it is hateful to you to hear slander against you, then don't slander your neighbor. You can carry that as far as you like the next time you are about to post something on Facebook on someone that would clearly not be Christ like, even if it is to get a laugh. Spouses, don't push each others buttons when you know how it will make them feel, just like you don't like it when they push your buttons. Co-worker don't treat others with contempt, teachers don't patronize your students, parents don't anger your children, pastors don't lead your flock astray with unbiblical statements.

This golden rule that Jesus gives us is repeated in a similar way later in Matthew. Turn to Matthew 22:35-40. While in 7 Jesus says others, in 22 he says neighbor. In Luke after he gives this golden rule Scripture says that in order to explain himself on who is my neighbor Jesus tells the story of the good Samaritan. Very clearly Jesus is intending a neighbor to be someone who is outside of our community, who is outside of our way of life, who looks different from us, believes differently than we do, is politically charged on the opposite side of where we are.

This Golden Rule is a summary of all of Jesus' teachings. If you remember nothing more as a child of God about Jesus' teachings, this is the one thing that you need to remember. It is repeated elsewhere in Scripture as well, Paul mentions it a couple of times. Look at Romans 13:8-10, then again in Galatians 5:14. This Sunday is a Sunday where you are exposed to arguably the most familiar, the most important, the one teaching that could change the world if people would just follow it.

What would it look like if we lived out the Golden rule? What would it look like if the church lived out the golden rule? We would treat all people the same, whether you are a member

or not, whether you look like us or not, whether you believe what we believe or not. This church needs to be a place where every single type of person needs to feel able and comfortable living out their faith. We cannot build any walls or draw lines in the sand around any issue which culture or society encourage us to draw. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, if you are a follower, then you are welcome. If you are not a follower or a disciple, you are still welcome and you will hear the Good News of the Gospel which we hope and pray will bring you to a closer walk with Christ.

But if you are a disciple then we are going to expect you to live out the golden rule. It all comes down to living our lives as a reflection of the love that God has for us, we can't help but shower that on others around us. They say that after a period of time on a sports team the coach is able to change the culture of a team. I'm pretty sure that the same could be said for a pastor and a church. My desire is that if someone were to ask you what is the culture of your church, we would all be able to not only say but actually show in our actions that this is a place where the walls of culture have been torn down so that all people can see clearly the love of Christ in their own lives and feel emboldened and even pressured to show that love to others. Live out the golden rule, we have not excuse not to. Amen.