

Disseminating Truth, Prayer, and the Golden Rule

📖 Matthew 7:6-12

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In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, we are discussing the final chapter, Matt 7. In a few weeks we'll finish the discourse and then we will return to the narrative. Recall that Matthew is arranged as narrative followed by discourse. The narrative gives the context for the discourse. As Toussaint said, "It appears Matthew uses the narrative sections of his Gospel as an introduction to and a setting for the discourses of Jesus. Because of this the events generally recede into the background and the discourses assume the important role."¹ Matthew is most well-known for his record of Jesus' discourses. Of all the Gospels Matthew records far more of Jesus' teaching than any of the others. There are five narrative-discourse sections. We're in the first section which is Matthew 1:1-7:29. When we complete this section we'll be turning to the second section in Matthew 8:1-11:1.

Why were the first two sections written? What is Matthew's purpose? To authenticate that Jesus is the King and to authenticate His kingdom message. The third section is 11:2-13:53 and that narrative-discourse will explain the rejection of the King and the consequent postponement of the kingdom program by way of parables. So that's the direction Matthew is going.

Before we get involved in the text of Matthew 7 tonight we want to make two important observations. First, by this time in the discourse Jesus is still teaching His disciples on the hillside but the crowds have begun to filter in. I would argue that in 7:12 His teaching directly to His disciples comes to a close and I would argue that on the basis of the expression in 7:12, "the Law and the Prophets." That expression has been used earlier. Where have we seen that expression earlier in the Sermon on the Mount? Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." When you see that repetitive structure in ancient writings it is a signal that the content in between the expression is a section. In literature they call it an *inclusio* which means the expression serves as a bookend to a section. So 5:17 is a bookend and 7:12 is the other bookend and the content in between is Jesus addressing His disciples and contrasting His teaching concerning the Law with that of the scribes and Pharisees. But the teaching from 7:13 onward is most likely directed to a mixed group of His disciples and the unbelieving crowds. Clearly by the end of the chapter the crowds have gathered

in. How did the crowd respond? Their response is striking. Jesus' teaching was not like that of their scribes. What characterized the teaching of the scribes? The quotation of rabbi after rabbi to support their teaching. Did Jesus do that? No, Jesus taught as one having authority. What did that mean? It meant He did not need to quote rabbi after rabbi to support His claims. Well then, on what authority did He base His claims? On the basis of His own self-authenticating authority. Jesus is the authority. He didn't need to quote someone else to support His claims. If He said it it was true based on who He is. This is why when you read the Gospels and you find Jesus saying, "truly, truly, I say to you," that is a statement of absolute authority. Why is it true what He says? Because He is the truth. So to quote someone else for support would actually weaken His teaching by resting His infallible words on the words of fallible teachers. Infallibility can never rest on fallibility. Therefore we see in this chapter that by the end the crowds have come in and they have recognized the self-authenticating nature of Jesus Christ from His teaching.

Second observation, this chapter is chock full of proverbs related to the theme at hand. What are proverbs? Proverbs are a wonderful way to capture truth. They are short and they are memorable. Here they relate to the theme at hand. What's the theme at hand? Glasscock says, "The theme connecting all of Jesus' teaching since He sat down on the mountain had been the righteous standards of the kingdom, which greatly surpass those of the Pharisees. These final proverbs fit well into that theme."² So His final teaching concerning the righteousness necessary for that generation to enter the kingdom is given in proverbs. And you will see that of all the Sermon on the Mount, you probably are more familiar with portions of this chapter than any other part. That's because they are proverbs, short, pithy, memorable sayings. By the standard by which you judge you will be judged...do not throw your pearls before swine...do unto others as you would have them do unto you...and so forth. The important thing as we study these well-known proverbs is to learn their true meaning. Knowing something by memory does not mean you know the meaning. So the meaning is our focus and meaning comes from context. But once we know the meaning we have these wonderful jewels of truth wrapped up in memorable packages.

Last time we looked at Matt 7:1-5 and here we found Jesus' teaching concerning "judging others." The command is verse 1, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged." We explained that the command is a present imperative and means "stop judging." Implying that they were already judging and therefore needed to stop immediately. We also explained that this is not a condemnation of all judging. Clearly throughout the discourse Jesus Himself has been judging the scribes and Pharisees. What is meant is not to stand in judgment as the scribes and Pharisees. How did they stand in judgment? They were fault-finders. They were highly critical to the extent of even speculating on motives. Jesus' disciples should stop being fault finders. Verse 2 is the memorable proverb that captured the danger of judging that way, "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be

measured to you." If they insisted on judging mercilessly and not giving others the benefit of the doubt then when they stood for judgment they would have to give an account for every little detail. In verse 3 Jesus pointed out that the faults they found in others were typically the very faults they themselves had but to a much greater degree. He asks, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the beam of wood that is in your own eye?" The point is that both a speck of sawdust and a beam of wood are of the same nature; they therefore refer to the same problem. The only difference is the size of the problem. It was inconsistent to judge others for a minor problem when they themselves had the same problem on a larger scale. In verse 4 Jesus points out the absurdity of trying to perform the delicate surgery of helping someone solve their problem when they have the same problem to a much larger degree. "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?" It is ludicrous to think that one would even attempt such a surgery. In verse 5 Jesus refers to such a person as a hypocrite. "You hypocrite, first take the beam of wood out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck of sawdust out of your brother's eye." Who is Jesus referring to as hypocrites in the context? The scribes and Pharisees. So Jesus is addressing the practice of the scribes and Pharisees who were hypocrites to the nth degree. Jesus' disciples should not follow their practice. Instead they were to first examine themselves, identify their own faults and get them straightened out before trying to help others with the same faults. The teaching is that self-judgment must always precede judgment of others. So again, the passage is not teaching against all judgment; the passage is teaching that if we are to be qualified to judge others we must first judge ourselves and make sure we do not have the same sin problem. Furthermore, when we judge we should always give others the benefit of the doubt and temper our judgment with mercy. As James says, "judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). In order to ensure for ourselves a merciful judgment in the future we must show others mercy in the present. If Jesus' disciples did this it would set them apart from the scribes and Pharisees in a notable way and prepare them for a rich entrance in the kingdom.

In Matt 7:6 we come to another proverb, one difficult to understand but commonly known and cited because of its proverbial nature. **Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.** This proverb concerns the dissemination of truth. How should Jesus' disciples disseminate or give out truth to others? Should they give it out with discrimination or not? Should they distinguish whom they should give the truth to versus whom we should not give the truth to? Many would think that Jesus would say give the truth to all men. That is partially true but the whole truth is that once you sense rejection then we should exercise caution and discrimination when disseminating the truth. Coming on the heels of the passage that commands them not to judge should again go a long way in showing that by the command not to judge Jesus did not at all mean to say we should not be wise in discernment,

but rather was addressing the particular situation of the nitpickiness of the scribes and Pharisees who issued scathing verdicts untempered by mercy. Clearly Jesus commands them to discriminate who they give truth to versus who they should not give truth to. Give it not to dogs, throw it not before swine!

The verse is arranged according to a chiasm. A chiasm is a literary structure where the elements of the sentence are arranged such that there is a correspondence. In this chiasm, element one corresponds to element four and element two corresponds to element three. Clearly dogs are not known for trampling things under their feet but rather for tearing things to pieces and swine are not known for tearing things to pieces but for trampling under feet. Thus, Zuck says, "The reference to dogs in the first line is matched with the reference to tearing to pieces in the fourth line. Throwing pearls to pigs in the second line is paralleled by the reference to their trampling them under their feet, in line three."³

- 1 *Do not give what is holy to **dogs**,*
- 2 *and do not throw your pearls before swine,*
- 3 *or they will trample them under their feet,*
- 4 *and **turn and tear you to pieces**.*

Thus dogs tear to pieces and the swine trample. What the swine trample and the dogs tear are **holy** things and **pearls**. What are the **holy** things and **pearls**? Both refer to the teachings of righteousness that Jesus has revealed so far in the discourse. Things concerning reconciliation, loyalty to a covenant, speaking truthfully, bringing peace, loving others, how to give, pray and fast. All Jesus' teachings on these things are the **holy** things and **pearls**. As **holy** they are "set apart" from common and mundane usage. These teachings of righteousness are "set apart" and should therefore not be given to **dogs** that will only react violently by tearing you to pieces. **Pearls** are lumped in with gold and other precious stones in other passages. They are very valuable, even to the point that in some cultures they are up to three times more valuable than gold. Thus, these teachings of righteousness are extremely "valuable" and should not be thrown before **swine** that do not understand their value and will hence trample them under foot.

The question then is who are the **dogs** and the **swine**. They are references to one and the same group. While most often we think of the **dogs** and **swine** as Gentiles here in the context they refer to the scribes and the Pharisees. These terms of derision reveal Jesus' view of the scribes and Pharisees. From His standpoint they were **dogs** and **swine**. They did not realize the value of these teachings. John the Baptist had referred to them as "vipers," another descriptive that points up some characteristic of vipers that reveals the true nature of the scribes and Pharisees. The viper reminds us of Satan and his crafty delusions. So according to John the scribes and Pharisees were little versions of Satan.

What in particular was the dog? How did the Jews view dogs? The **dog**, in Jewish culture, was an unclean animal. It licked its sores and ate human filth. For example, in the OT **dogs** ate all of Jezebel except her skull, feet and palms after she was cast out of a window and splattered upon the ground (2 Kgs 9:10).⁴ By calling the scribes and Pharisees **dogs** Jesus is saying that they were unclean. This is what rendered them incapable of understanding the valuable truth He was disseminating.

And if that were not enough Jesus also referred to them as **swine**. In Jewish culture **swine** are well-known to be an abhorrent and unclean animal. When Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Temple in 168BC he took a pig and offered it on the altar and then sprinkled the blood and the broth inside the temple, rendering sacrifice impossible until the Temple underwent purification. So this term also refers to the unclean. Jesus is using this term to say that the scribes and Pharisees were unclean and therefore did not realize the value of Jesus' teaching.

The two chosen terms are ironic since the scribes and Pharisees prided themselves in their strict Levitical purity. Edersheim in his work *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* points out that the *chasid*, or pietist, as they were known, observed strictly the laws of Levitical purity. The strictest *chasid* would offer a trespass-offering every day just in case he committed some offence that was doubtful. They went so far that one Rabbi would not allow his son to be in the room while he underwent surgical removal of his arm due to the danger that his son might be defiled by contact with the amputated arm. Others went so far as to refuse to rescue a woman who was drowning for fear of touching a female or taking the time to take off the phylacteries before stretching out to rescue a drowning child! The garments worn by the Pharisees even included gloves to protect them from inadvertently touching something unclean.⁵ So with stinging irony Jesus called those who went to such extremes to remain clean, unclean **dogs** that licked their sores and feasted on human filth and unclean swine. Thus Jesus adds to John's description of them as a brood of vipers.

The proverb teaches Jesus' disciples to be wary about giving His holy teachings to the unclean scribes and Pharisees. Why? Because they would most likely **trample** those truths under foot and **turn** against them and **tear** them **to pieces**. In other words, they would not only not receive the teachings but they would turn against the disciples in order to destroy them. Jesus knew this well because of what they had done to John. John came with these teachings of righteousness and what did they do to John? They arrested him and eventually had him put away. Jesus himself had departed into the Galilee because of this very reason (cf Matt 4). Pentecost says, "Christ's sober warning in Matthew 7:6 seems to indicate that He did not expect the truths that He had been proclaiming to be received by the Pharisees. He did not expect them to accept His standards of righteousness as their own."⁶ Jesus perceived that they were thoroughly entrenched in their religious system and that His teachings of true righteousness would publicly expose their teachings as hypocritical. This was a serious threat to the scribes and the

Pharisees. As a consequence Jesus' disciples would be wise to give these teachings with discretion. Toussaint says of this NT teaching, "In their relationships with unbelievers the disciples are to use discretion in giving out the truth (Proverbs 9:7, 8; 23:9)."⁷ This is, of course, as a consequence of their rejection of the truth. He cites several OT proverbs to show that this teaching is not new but old. For example, Proverbs 9:7-8 said, "He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. ⁸Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you." The proverb teaches that discretion should be used when deciding whom to correct and whom not to correct. If the person openly scoffs at the truth and is openly wicked then it is only going to come back and haunt you because they are going to twist what you say and use it to ruin your reputation. The teaching is that when we have given the truth to someone and they openly revile and scoff at it we should no longer give them the truth. The scribes and Pharisees had ample opportunity to respond to the truth but they didn't want the truth so soon the final rejection will come and the truth will be hidden from them by means of parables.

Some think this is the first indication that Jesus already knew that He would be finally rejected by the leadership of Israel and partially blinded. Pentecost said, "He did not expect them to accept His standards of righteousness as their own."⁸ Toussaint, along the same line, said, "In giving this word of admonition and warning, Jesus gives the first intimation of His ultimate rejection."⁹ This is a clear indication of ultimate rejection but to me the first indication is Matt 4:12 when Jesus learned that John had been taken into custody and withdrew into the Galilee. Since Jesus permitted Himself to be baptized by John, identifying with John's message of the 'at hand' kingdom, antagonism to John would now be directed toward Jesus. His departure into the Galilee where the leadership's presence was less prominent was already indicative of His ultimate rejection. So what we see here is simply further confirmation that Jesus' offer of the kingdom will not be accepted.

In Matt 7:7 Jesus gives another proverb. This one concerning prayer. He already addressed prayer in Matt 6:5ff where He instructed His disciples to not pray like hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. How did they pray? They prayed to be noticed by men; as such they stood in very prominent places like synagogues and street corners and went on and on with meaningless repetition as if God did not already know what they needed before they asked. Instead Jesus' disciples were to pray to be noticed by God and in such a fashion that recognized that God already knew what they needed before they even asked. Here the teaching concerns perseverance in prayer. Take note that the Greek does not say **Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.** But rather, **Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. So the issue is persevering in prayer.** For those who have been following the discourse what are they supposed to be persevering in asking, seeking and knocking for? The kingdom to come. Those who claim that the kingdom had already come, for example Progressive

Dispensationalists and Amill Covenant Theologians, clearly miss the point of Jesus' command in 6:33 to "seek first the kingdom and His righteousness" and His instruction in 6:9 to pray in this manner, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If the kingdom had already come in the person of Jesus, as these theologians claim, then there was no need to seek or pray for the kingdom's arrival. But if the kingdom had only come "near" in the person of Jesus then there was need to seek and pray for the kingdom's arrival. Clearly the kingdom had only come near and here its arrival was conditioned on their perseverance in asking for the kingdom, seeking the kingdom and knocking so that the kingdom would be opened to them. That generation of Israel was being given a genuine offer of the kingdom and its arrival was contingent on their human prayer, seeking and knocking. Toussaint says, "The "good things" (*αγαθηα*, 7:11), of the kingdom were near at hand. By consistent and persevering prayer from righteous hearts the good things of the kingdom would be theirs."¹⁰

In verse 8 explanation is given, **For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.** Several points can be made. First, since only genuine believers keep asking for the kingdom, seeking the kingdom and knocking for the kingdom to come then it is clear that these words are still directed at Jesus' disciples. Second, Jesus is putting them on notice that perseverance in praying, seeking and knocking will ultimately result in receiving, finding and having the kingdom opened to them. Importantly, the time of the kingdom's opening is not stated, only the fact of its opening. The actual opening of the kingdom is contingent on Israel's response to the King. Praying, seeking and knocking are human means to be employed to bring about a positive response to the King. The disciples could not control when God answered their prayers for the kingdom to come but they could rest assured that God would answer their prayers and fulfill their deepest longings in due time. By secondary application, when we pray in the will of God we cannot control when God answers our prayers but we can rest assured that God will answer them. Too often we think that God didn't answer our prayers because it didn't happen in our timing. But if our prayer is in the will of God then it will be answered in His timing. God knows not only what we need (cf 6:8, 32) but when we need it. He thus supplies it at the proper time. Third, the verse shows that perseverance in prayer will be rewarded. God does condition some of the answers to prayer on our perseverance. When we persevere in prayer we show God that we really desire something. Perseverance is one condition for prayer to be answered but there are others in the NT. We should not think that perseverance is the only condition for answered prayer. James 4:3 tells us that right motives are a condition for answered prayer and 1 Pet 3:7 tells husbands that living with their wives in an understanding way is a condition for answered prayer among others. Jesus' point is not to herald every condition for answered prayer but the one condition of perseverance to be set alongside all the others.

In verses 9-11 Jesus gives an illustration from everyday life to illustrate the goodness of God in giving His children what is good for them. **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? The point is that even though an earthly father is sinful by nature, because of his relationship to his son, when his son asks for something good his father will not give him something bad. Why did Jesus use the example of a loaf/stone and fish/snake? The request for a loaf or fish is a request for a common food item. There is no particular reason beyond the fact that these are necessary for the physical sustenance of the son. The point is that a father, even though evil by nature, will nevertheless give his son what is necessary to support his physical sustenance.

Verse 11, **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!** What kind of argument does Jesus employ here? The **much more** or *a fortiori* argument that we have seen earlier in the discourse as well as in Paul's letter to the Romans. What's the point of the *a fortiori* argument? To say that if the first statement is true then the second statement is much truer. In this statement if the fathers are by nature evil and yet they know how to give good gifts to their children then it is much truer that the heavenly Father who is not evil but perfectly good will **give what is good to those who ask Him**. The point is that it is in the nature of God to give good gifts. James said it this way in his epistle, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." There is nothing but goodness in God and therefore by an argument from the goodness of evil fathers we see that God will most certainly give good things to His sons. Again, this goodness is the good things that come in the kingdom. They should keep praying for the kingdom, keep seeking the kingdom and keep knocking and with persistence the kingdom would be opened to them with all good things from the Father in heaven.

Finally, verse 12, another proverb, this one an application of the prior emphasis on giving what is good. It is what is known as the Golden Rule. **In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.** And with that expression we come to the termination of the *inclusio* which began in 5:17. Jesus has been giving an exposition of the Law and the Prophets from the standpoint of its true interpretation over and against that of the scribes and the Pharisees. He now terminates that discussion with a summary of **the Law and the Prophets** as it relates to the relationships of one Jew to another.

The summary of **the Law and the Prophets** is this: **In everything...treat people the same way you want them to treat you.** In this very simple saying Jesus revealed His wisdom concerning human beings. Because all humans are made in the image of God they all desire respect, dignity and consideration. The person next to you or down the street is more like you than you might expect. As an image-bearer of God he wants respect like you do. All humans are valuable and significant in the sight of God. In fact, all humans are equally valuable and significant in His sight. Not one of you is more

valuable than anyone else. As a result you ought to **treat all other people the same way you want them to treat you**. Glasscock says, "Christ's followers are to lead the way, to be role models for the world to see." His point there is that believers ought to be distinct from the world in our treatment of others. If we don't treat others as we want them to treat us then what more are we doing than the world? There should be something strikingly different between us and the world. Pentecost notes, "This was essentially what the law enjoined and the prophets exhorted. If people would treat neighbors as themselves, no neighbor would be mistreated. The Jews who heard our Lord teach this would have been forced to acknowledge that this was a summary of the righteous requirements of the law." If Israel had done this they would have fulfilled their role of being a light to all nations! By secondary application we should remember this rule next time we want to treat someone badly. Would we want to be treated badly? Surely not. In context Pentecost concludes, "Thus we find that Christ did not demand the righteousness of the Pharisees but rather the righteousness of the law as the basis for entrance into His kingdom." This entrance, in my estimation, is generational. The generation of Israel that has a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees will be the generation that enters His kingdom. Asking, seeking, knocking and treating others well will prepare the way for that generation to receive their King.

In conclusion there are three proverbs. First, verse 6, don't cast your pearls before swine. This means that if you sense that the person you're giving truth to is rejecting the truth then there's no use giving them more truth because all you're doing is giving them ammunition to turn around and use against you. And you better watch out because these people can get really nasty. Second, verses 7-11, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." These are all present continuatives emphasizing perseverance in praying for the kingdom, seeking the kingdom and knocking that the kingdom might be opened to you. The Father in heaven knows what is good for you and wants to give those things to you but you have to persevere in prayer. Third, verse 12, the Golden Rule, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is simply picking up on the fact that we're all made in the image of God and we therefore all desire to be treated well. This is what the Law and the Prophets taught with respect to interpersonal relations.

And with that Jesus has come to the end of the *inclusio*, which is the main body of teaching from 5:17-7:12. Next week we'll pick up with what I believe are words directed to the mixed group of His disciples as well as the crowds and so there'll be a shift in the theme.

¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 24.

² Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 161.

³ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, p 139.

⁴ Jezebel is an example in history of the ultimate end of those who are the enemies of God. Only on occasion does God make an example of them by causing them to die a most hideous death. Other examples would be Judas Iscariot who hanged himself and then whose body fell and burst on the ground outside the walls of Jerusalem (Matt 27:1ff) and Herod Agrippa I who while claiming to be a god was stricken by worms and eaten (Acts 12). The reason for such descriptive and revolting deaths in Scripture is to remind us that God's enemies will not go unpunished. God is just and while it appears that His enemies are getting away with it He will ultimately judge them. The deaths of such enemies as Jezebel, Judas Iscariot and Herod Agrippa I illustrate final judgment.

⁵ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p 197-98.

⁶ Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 186.

⁷ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 114.

⁸ Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 186.

⁹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 114.

¹⁰ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 114-15.