
INTRODUCTION

Today is the fifth of six sermons on THE *Sermon on the Mount*. And the first thing I want to say about the Sermon on the Mount is that it is **hard**. It is a hard portion of Scripture. But what do I mean when I say that this or any “Bible passage” is hard?

1. The text is hard to understand
2. *Therefore* the text is hard to explain
3. The text is hard to put into practice (Be ye *doers* of the Word!)
4. *Therefore* the text is hard to preach

Hard to understand; hard to *teach*.

Hard to practice; hard to *preach*.

The Sermon on the Mount, for the most part is not that hard to understand and, therefore, not that hard to explain or to teach. Putting it into practice, however, is another thing. It obviously is *hard* to do all the things Jesus commands. Again and again, Jesus says: *You have heard but I say...*

And Jesus uses that phrase again and again because he is calling the disciples to a higher standard—higher than the Pharisees, the Sadducees, etc.

Among his *Sermon on the Mount* **hard sayings** are:

*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

*But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

*And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

Doing what Jesus says is hard. So preaching these texts is hard too. Because preaching aims at a response. Preaching hopes to persuade. Preaching assumes we all need to change our minds and change our hearts so we can be on God’s wavelength and part of His program—*Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness!*

Jesus’ Sermon also is hard because it is dense teaching and concentrated with many subjects AND it is full of imperatives... Today we are studying the first half of chapter 7—this section summarizes earlier lessons. Matthew 7 (part one) has four sections or four **sums**. And I’m going to start with the last one and work backwards. The last sum or summary passage about being a Jesus-disciple is the famous **Golden Rule**. Do you know it by heart? Can you say it?

Not exactly. The so-called Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12 begins with the word, “*therefore*.” That little word makes a huge difference. I’m sorry that the NRSV inexplicably left that word out. They flubbed up big time with this omission. And the Sermon’s Golden Rule verse ends with—*this sums up the Law and the Prophets*. That’s huge also. The prelude and the postlude of verse 12 are important. The postlude emphasizes how important it is to treat others well. Loving your neighbor is what a disciple does AND such kind and loving conduct sums up the teaching of the entire OT (the Law and the Prophets).

And the prelude (the *therefore* or *so*) connects this Golden Rule to the passage that precedes it. And now we are working backward. What is the preceding passage? It’s about **prayer**. Ask. Seek. Knock. **Ask** and it will be given to you. **Seek** and you will find. **Knock** and the door shall be opened unto you. The initial letters of **ask**, **seek** and **knock** form a little acrostic (A-S-K) that help us remember to ask, seek, and knock.

Example: advised to pray for a parking place at MCV

In the Sermon Jesus goes on and gives an example from the world of parenting. What parent will give a hungry child a stone when he asks for bread; or who would give a child a snake when she asks for a piece of fish? Explain the context of the first century (cf. Lamsa, *Gospel Light*).

If parents who are evil (imperfect, selfish) know how to give good gifts, surely your heavenly Father will give even greater gifts to those who ask... Do you give good and wise gifts to your family?

Example: taking my kids to Hardees for biscuits (not healthy)

This is perhaps the most encouraging word on **prayer** you will read in the whole of Scripture. It seems to promise (almost unconditionally) that God gives good gifts to those who ask. It does not promise we will get everything we ask for—we know we can ask unwisely and selfishly. But Jesus almost begs us to knock on heaven’s door for God’s blessings.

Do you have lots of prayer requests you think about or talk about but you never get around to asking for them? Do you have concerns and things that weigh you down that you don’t want to bother God with—you think your needs are too tiny for His care and concern?

*O what peace we often forfeit; O what needless pain we bear.
All because we do not carry; everything to God in prayer.*

Now what is the link between the Golden Rule (therefore) and this teaching on Ask! Seek! Knock? Could it be that we are entreated to pray because God is *generous* and that His generous care for us leads us to think and act *generously* toward others?

You and I cannot *do unto others* graciously without God’s help. We cannot turn the other cheek without God’s grace. We cannot learn to seek first the kingdom unless grace gets

into our bones and transforms us into gracious, merciful and peacemaking people. And that grace will not have its way with us unless Jesus is our Savior and our Teacher. *What a Friend We Have in Jesus!*

Now we still have two sums to go as we work our way back to the head of chapter 7. The second sum is the strange and enigmatic word about *dogs* and *pigs*. *Don't throw your pearls to swine*, etc. I think this means that some people are not ready for the treasure that is God's word. Do not be pushy when you talk to outsiders about God's grace. Don't impose the things of your faith on those uninterested in faith. DO pray for them. Do show them love. Do be patient and do give the Holy Spirit time and room to work.

Finally we come to the first sum. *Do not judge lest you be judged*. Here is the connection to notice. Be **generous** because your heavenly Father is **generous** towards you. In your generosity do not judge others. Show mercy rather than criticism. *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

This admonition against judging is not a word against *discernment* per se. We always are to judge between right and wrong, good and evil. What we must refrain from is judging people in the way that is reserved alone for God's judgment. I hear people say from time to time. "*Oh he is not a Christian. Oh she is not a believer.*" You cannot say that because you do not know. You can say that so-and-so says he is not a Christian. You may say that so-and-so does not profess faith or that she does not attend church. You even can say he or she does not act like a Christian although you should be careful with your critical analysis (don't judge lest you be judged)! Of course we can report what we observe but we cannot look into another human heart with perfect sight or final judgment.

So we must be careful of commenting on splinters in other peoples' eyes when we may have logs in our own eyes. We tend to be more generous about ourselves than about others. So Jesus wisely urges us to cautious.

How would you like to be judged with the measuring rod you use to evaluate and criticize others? It can be arranged. *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.* Do you want mercy from your neighbors? Then show a little mercy. Try a little tenderness!

So in this section of summing up where does Jesus take us? He takes us to the arena of neighbor love a la the Golden Rule. Disciples are merciful and gracious in dealing with others because God is merciful and gracious in dealing with us. That is our experience and testimony from knowing, loving and following Jesus. Right? This implicit teaching on grace in the "ask, seek, knock" prayer section runs throughout the sermon. And taught explicitly in the sermon are all these difficult commands that you and I find hard to do without divine help.

So there are two emphases in this part of Jesus' sermon.

1. Love your neighbor generously or do to others as you would have them do to you.
2. Pray boldly or ASK our generous God for whatever you need.

Story: Barton Parable (*THE UNRECKONED GIFT*)

Judging Others

‘Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, “Let me take the speck out of your eye”, while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye.

Profaning the Holy

‘Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

Ask, Search, Knock

‘Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

The Golden Rule

‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. **Matthew 7:1-12**