

Jim Gill

June 25, 2017

"The Golden Rule"  
Matthew 7:7-12

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 7:7-12

All this week the children in our Vacation Bible School we were learning about what it takes to be a hero in God's eyes. Each day we focused on a different characteristic that God's heroes have. We had hand signs to go with each one. Those of you who were with us help me. God's heroes have Heart, Courage, Wisdom, Hope and Power. Our theme verse for the week was Psalm 34:14 "Do Good. Seek Peace. Go after it." We had 3 moves that helped us remember that verse. We would hold up one thumb for "Do Good." We would flash the Peace Sign for "Seek Peace." And we would strike a pose for 'Go after it.' In our passage from Matthew this morning we hear Jesus encouraging his followers to Seek Peace and find it in the way we treat each other as we "Do Good," and to "Go After it." This morning's gospel lesson echoes that verse and gives us further insight as to how to go about receiving the strength and power to do that and how we are to treat each other as we do. Hear the word of the Lord from the gospel of Matthew 7:7-12

Let us pray. Lord you encourage us to connect with you through prayer. Help us to better understand that connection as we examine your instructions on how to pray and how to treat others as we respond to this your word. Amen.

\*\*\*

Paul Harvey, a popular radio commentator, once told about a 3-year-old boy who went to the grocery store with his mother. Before they entered she had certain instructions for the little tike: "Now you're not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, so don't even ask."

She put him in the child's seat and off they went up and down the aisles. He was doing just fine until they came to the cookie section. Seeing the chocolate chip cookies he said, "Mom, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you not even to ask. You're not going to get any at all."

They continued down the aisles, but in their search for certain items she had to back track and they ended up in the cookie aisle again. "Mom, can I please have some chocolate chip cookies?" She said, "I told you that you can't have any. Now sit down and be quiet."

Finally, they arrived at the checkout. The little boy sensed that the end was in sight, that this might be his last chance. He stood up on the seat and shouted in his loudest voice, "In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?" (1)

According to a Gallup Poll, 87% of all those surveyed in the United States pray, 50% use prayer for petitions, and 70% claim their prayers are answered. Actually I think that last statistic is a little off --- by about 30%! I believe that

100% of prayers are answered. They're just not all answered, "Yes." Yes, "yes" is an answer. But "No" is also an answer. And of course, another option is, "Not yet." Another is, "maybe" and another is "never." And another is "not if you know what's good for you."

Do any of you remember having seen the movie Bruce Almighty? That was a while ago when Jim Carrey used to get work. (I wonder if he's quit asking, seeking and knocking) In the movie, Bruce Nolan met God and God gave Bruce the power to answer all the prayers in Buffalo, New York. He got frustrated with the number of requests and so he set up a computer to help him monitor the requests. When he got burdened with the number of requests he simply typed "yes." And hit "reply to all." One woman reported losing 20 pounds on the "All Ice Cream diet." (She would love our contest today after church) Everyone won the lottery and each person that played won \$2.95 and the people started a riot! What would happen if EVERY prayer was answered with a YES?

One of my favorite songwriters is Brad Paisley. He has a song about prayer that says, "Make no mistake every prayer we pray gets answered even though, sometimes the answer is No." Remember, even Jesus got, "No," for an answer when he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane for the cup of suffering to pass from him. The apostle Paul tried three times to ask the Lord to remove what he called "a thorn in his side." Three times he received a "No." After the third "No" he heard God say, "My grace is sufficient for you." Paul moved on. Paul moved on still plagued by that thorn in his side. Though he didn't understand why he was denied relief, he persevered. He continued on his mission in spite of being shipwrecked, snake bit, imprisoned and eventually killed for his faith. He didn't give up praying and he didn't give up going after it because his thorn wasn't removed. When he wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," he wasn't talking about winning the next championship, he was talking about surviving the persecution he received for his faith and succeeding in sharing God's love.

Like the children asked the Lord through their song, "Hear us when we pray?" God hears our every request. God answers every prayer. But God knows more than any of us do. God knows when to say yes, no, yes and not yet and maybe and maybe later and not if I know what's good for you. That's why Jesus tells us to ask, to seek and to knock.

It's like another little boy who prayed, "Lord, make me a good boy; and if at first you don't succeed, try, try, again."

That boy captures the spirit of today's passage. We are to pray that God's kingdom will come and that God's will be done—even if it means a change in me to become a good boy. He is praying that God will help him to (thumbs up) "Do Good" not to just receive goodies or "some chocolate chip cookies in the name of Jesus."

The second part of his prayer, "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again," captures the second aspect of Jesus instruction when it comes to prayer—being persistent, persevering in prayer. He is asking God to help him (Flash Peace sign) Seek Peace. And if, having tried and not succeeded yet in making him a good boy to try again (Strike pose) to "Go after it!"

Carveth Mitchell writes, "If someone says, "I prayed for something to happen, and it didn't so my prayer didn't work. No, I suggest that you did not want God - you wanted God to do something, and that's different. You have missed the purpose of prayer. The purpose of prayer is to be in harmony with God, to have a sense of God's presence; to feel the assurance that God is in, around and greater than any circumstance; that, come what may, we belong to him and underneath are the everlasting arms. Prayer is not a trading post, but a line of communication". (1)

William McGill once wrote, "The value of persistent prayer is not that He will hear us but that we will finally hear Him."

A little five-year-old girl was watching her mother in fascination as she was rubbing cold cream on her face. She said, "Mother, why do you do that?"

The mother replied, "To make myself beautiful."

Well, to the little girl's amazement, in just a minute the mother began removing the cream with a tissue she had just put on. The girl said, "What's the matter, giving up already?"

I sometimes believe that God looks at our puny prayer lives and asks the question: "Are you giving up already?" Believe it or not, there are people both inside the church and outside the church who have given up on God. Some people quit going to church because they give up on God. Some people quit praying, they quit witnessing, they quit financially supporting the church, because they give up on God.

Jesus tells his disciples to Ask, Seek and Knock. Who is he telling to do this? Those who love him and are following him and asking and seeking and knocking for things that Jesus would want. He's not telling them to ask for a personal Jet. The example he uses is of children asking their father for one fish or one egg not a fishing lodge on a lake or an egg farm.

You will also notice that each one of these verbs calls for more effort than the previous one. "Ask" implies simply making a verbal request. "Seek" involves going beyond talking to actually looking for an answer. "Knock" involves not only asking and seeking, but going to a specific place and knocking on a specific door trying to find a specific answer.

The starting point of prayer is asking. The greatest problem with prayer is not unanswered prayer, but unasked prayer. James 4:2 says, "You have not

because you ask not." Asking expresses dependence. When you pray you are acknowledging that you are totally dependent on God. When your kids reach a certain age, like mine have, the IRS will no longer allow you to declare your children as "dependents." Well, as Children of God we are always a dependent of God. You never get so rich, or so strong, that you don't depend on God. A heart attack can tell a rich person very quickly how dependent he or she is on God. One cancer cell can tell a young bodybuilder how dependent he is on God.

The next step is seeking. Seeking expresses our desire. You see, there are times that we need to pray even when we do not know what to pray for, or how to pray. Seeking is a deeper level of praying than just asking. When you ask, you know what you are asking for ....but when you are seeking, you're not sure and you're trying to find what it is God is wanting from you, or God is wanting for you. In Romans 8:26-27 the apostle Paul talked about that type of praying when he wrote, "The Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us...according to the will of God." Finally, there's the discipline of knocking. Knocking expresses our determination. Knocking comes because we have been asking and seeking and are at the door.

Why are we to keep asking, and keep seeking, and keep knocking? Jesus says everyone that asks receives. They may not always receive the same thing they are asking for; they may get something better. Jesus says that everyone who seeks, finds. They may not find it at the time they are looking for it, but in God's time they will find it. Jesus says that for everyone who knocks, a door will open. It may not be the door that they thought would open, but it may well be a door to something much better.

The reason why we ought to pray is not because God will always give us what we want, but He will always give us what GOD wants. God does NOT want us to Hoard Goods, Sue for Peace and Wait for things to come to us! God wants us to Do Good.. To Seek Peace. And to Go After it! How are we to treat others as we do that? We do so by following what Jesus taught that has come to be called, "the Golden Rule".

One cynic described the Golden Rule by saying "those who have the gold make the rules." Although in today's society some of the 99% might agree with that statement. Certainly those in the non-first world countries see things that way.

While the Golden Rule that Jesus lays down here is probably the best known statement of the things that Jesus said, what is so unique about how he said it is that it is expressed in a positive form. Now there are many who stated this same truth in a negative form: Socrates, Aristotle, Confucius, Buddha, said this, but they put it in a negative way—like "don't do unto other what you wouldn't want them to do to you." Last week I found a chart that shows that every world religion has a version of the Golden Rule. I shared 3 of them on Monday night when I visited the Mosque here in Baytown to observe them observing Ramadan. I

wrote about my experience in our Faith Lift Newsletter and in Friday's Baytown Sun.

I read from the Hebrew writings, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." I read from the Quran "Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself."

Not doing to others or wishing for others however are not as strong as what Jesus said, "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you"

May the Lord, teach us to be persistent in prayer, even when we don't get chocolate chip cookies in the name of Jesus. May we be persistent because we want to be in relationship with God. We not only want God to hear us but we want to hear God. May the Lord teach us not only pray, but also to work together to be a part of the answers to the prayers we pray. May the Lord teach us to keep on asking, seeking and knocking, and may the Lord give us the "Heart, the Courage, the Wisdom, the Hope and the Power to live by the Golden Rule."

Let us pray.

Lord, we come asking to know you and be known by You. We come seeking your peace that is so wonderful it is beyond our understanding. We come knocking, hoping and knowing that what you have in store for us is far better than we can imagine. We come seeking your Love, your Courage, your Wisdom, your hope and your power to be able to live lives pleasing to you that are beneficial to others.

Your love is unconditional. Your courage is unfathomable. Your Wisdom is unfathomable. Your Hope is undeniable Your power is undeniable. Your grace is sufficient.

We pray for those unto whom you would have us do good. We pray especially for the food that the children brought this week that will be good for those in our community who are hungry, especially this summer when the school lunches are not available. We pray for those who have the offices and the ability to seek peace between nations and for those of us who have the calling to seek peace between our brother and sisters in this world. We pray for those who have the vision of what must be done to help those in need that they will have the motivation to go after it.

We thank you for this year's Vacation Bible School, for all the students and their families that came, for all that are here with us this morning, and for all who helped make it a wonderful outpouring of your love. We ask your blessing on the food we will share and the fellowship we will enjoy as we sit down at tables together. These things we ask in the name of our Lord. Amen.