

Matthew 7:7-12

The Generosity of God

Introduction: If you're joining us for the first time - Welcome. We're currently teaching through Jesus' most famous teaching known as the Sermon on the mount.

Contrary to what some may think the Sermon on the Mount is not teaching us how to get into the kingdom of God- the Bible makes it clear that entrance to God's kingdom is only through grace - by the sacrificial work of Jesus.

The sermon is also not teaching us how we stay in the kingdom. Rather it is a description of the character and conduct of those who already belong to God's kingdom.

The Sermon is not a call to repentance, though that may be involved at times, it is a description of the expression and evidences of true repentance.

Though anyone can listen and learn from this sermon, and respond to it's offer of the fulness of life, it's primary audience and focus is the disciple of Jesus. It describes the life that necessarily results from genuine salvation; it describes what God is doing in us and wants to do in us. What he is making us into by the work of his spirit and grace upon us.

This sermon of Jesus has been used for centuries to shape and form God's people into the way of Jesus and we are believing that this is what God will do with us as well.

Last week we looked at the teaching about Judging wrongly or harshly. We looked at the need for self examination, humility, and God's grace toward us in our judgments.

In our section for this morning Jesus speaks of petitioning the Father - In asking, seeking, knocking (metaphors for petitioning prayer) he insists that we should be sure of answers and results based on the character of God our Father.

Do we believe that? Do we believe that God is more willing to give than we are to ask or receive? Do we believe that God is that Kind?

At first glance this passage doesn't seem to be connected with what comes before, but seems to be a stand alone exhortation on prayer....

As I looked more into this though it seems rather that Jesus is continuing to talk about judgment or evaluating correctly but now in regards to God our Father. In the same way that we wrongly or harshly judge other human beings, we also wrongly, and harshly judge the character of God. Jesus is determined in this Sermon to get into our hearts and minds the gracious character of God. Therefore this should be a distinguishing mark of Jesus' people - That we believe and practice the generous Love of the Father.

1. Character Assassination

1. **“Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”**

1. As I mentioned before it seems that Jesus is really making it a point in this sermon to lay out for us the character of God as the gracious loving Father.
2. Jesus appeals to the kindness of earthly fathers that are obviously flawed and sinful - yet a father would not give his hungry child a serpent instead of a fish or a scorpion instead of an egg. Even when we hear shocking stories of gross child abuse in our days, part of the shock is - How could a parent treat their own child this way? Jesus argument here is from the lesser to the greater - If the best of earthly fathers give good gifts and show loving care to their children - how much more our Father in heaven.

2. So then why the character assassination of God?

1. This suspicion of God goes back to the very dawn of history. It was the Serpent that first suggested it to the Women, Eve.
2. Sally Lloyd-Jones put's it like this - *“As soon as the snake saw his chance, he slithered silently up to Eve . “Does God really love you?” the serpent whispered . “if he does, why won't he let you eat the nice, juicy, delicious fruit? Poor you, perhaps God doesn't want you to be happy .” The snake's words hissed into her ears and sunk down deep into her heart, like poison . Does God love me? eve wondered . suddenly she didn't know anymore . “Just trust me,” the serpent whispered . “you don't need God . One small taste, that's all, and you'll be happier than you could ever dream...” Eve picked the fruit and ate some and Adam ate some, too, and a terrible lie came into the world. It would never leave. It*

would live on in every human heart, whispering to every one of God's children: "God doesn't love me ."and it wasn't a dream . it was a nightmare." -Sally Lloyd-Jones, The Jesus Story Book Bible

3. This lie lives on with us today, and if we aren't suspicious of God's good intentions for us we often turn God into a religious tyrant who only cares about pious acts of religiosity devoid of joy, emotion and life.
4. It seems to me that the reason we judge others harshly and wrongly (Matthew 7:1-6) is first and foremost because we have wrong ideas about God. Skewed ideas about what God is like, what God cares about, what God desires from us and for us.
5. But as we've been seeing throughout our studies in the Sermon on the Mount - Jesus has shown the Father to be full of Grace and love, the author of all good and incredibly gracious to both the righteous and the unrighteous, the deserving and undeserving. God, the Father, not only wills but pursues our happiness and flourishing - our good. Remember the Bible's favorite verse - where God tells us who he is and what he is like - **"The Lord passed in front of Moses, calling out, 'Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty.'" - Exodus 34 NLT**
 1. Inherent in the character of God is mercy and kindness; he doesn't just show mercy, it is part of who he is. It is the first thing God tells us about himself. A hugely defining characteristic. Though we often make caricatures of an angry, wrathful god, or a god that is solely concerned with piety or holiness. God himself tells us that he is first and foremost full of Mercy.
 2. Paul in Titus 3 gives a similar description of God's character in response to human sin and evil - **"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy."**
 1. *We must understand that God does not "love" us without liking us - through gritted teeth - as "Christian" love is*

sometimes thought to do. Rather, out of the eternal freshness of his perpetually self-renewed being, the heavenly Father cherishes the earth and each human being upon it. The fondness, the endearment, the unstintingly affectionate regard of God toward all his creatures is the natural outflow of what he is to the core - which we vainly try to capture with our tired but indispensable old word "love".” - Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

3. As I've mentioned before I think the Parables give incredible insight to Jesus teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. Do you remember the parable Jesus told about the two sons?
 1. **“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Then Jesus told them this parable:”**
 2. Jesus first tells the parable of the lost sheep, and how the shepherd leaves the ninety nine to look for the one, and when he returns with the lost sheep he invites his friends to celebrate with him.. The Jesus tells the parable of the lost coin and how the woman looks for it, sweeping and cleaning her house and when she finds it she calls all her friends together to celebrate with her because what was lost is now found...
 3. Jesus continued: **“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way**

off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

4. We call this parable the Prodigal Son and there is definitely a lesson to be learned by focusing on him, but we often fail to see what else is going on in this parable - The Father, and the Older Brother.
 1. First, both sons seem to be shocked by the actions and character of the Father - one lived a life of rebellion to his father - being suspicious of his father’s intentions and the family way of life and was shocked when the Father graciously and generously restored him to his place, running to receive him, embracing him and kissing him, putting the family ring and garments on him and of course slaughtering the fatted calf to celebrate his return.

2. The second son, the older brother, is also shocked by his Father receiving his younger brother so readily - he has always kept the rules and done what is right and yet he says, "Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"
 3. Could it be that though the older son keeps the rules he also is living outside the love of his father - The father responds - 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.' It's almost as though the Father is saying - 'why did you not ask? Everything I have is yours.' See because the older brother has wrong ideas about the father, that shows in his disdain for his younger brother, he also has been kept from enjoying the blessing and riches of this relationship.
 1. It says that Jesus told these parables in response to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttering, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." - These religious leaders don't get the generosity of God the Father, and it shows in their disdain of others.
 4. For many of us the reason we judge others harshly and wrongly is because we really don't understand the graciousness and generosity of God the Father - we have judged him wrongly, our assessment of him is wrong, which in turn keeps us from asking, seeking, and knocking for the good things we need - we too are kept out of the love of the Father. We don't really think the Father wants to give us good gifts.
- 4. The Golden Rule.**
1. Jesus wraps up these two teachings on judgment with -**"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."**
 2. The Golden rule is not so much a rule but a vision that Jesus is calling us into. It is an invitation to virtue by giving a vision of how to relate to other people. It is a practical out working of the teliosity (Wholeness) and greater righteousness that Jesus has been teaching us.
 3. Some of you see the role of a Christian as the moral policemen of culture - denouncing, rebuking and even punishing evil. But often when we see this as our first and foremost calling we end up using force and violence to do God's work. Doing God's work

with the devil's means..commands, rules and punishment might feel effective but it has no power to change the life to transform the heart... You are the older Brother of the Parable

4. Have we forgotten that the Gospel begins with kindness? How did God treat you in your brokenness and rebellion?
5. In a world and culture that is full of "younger brothers"; a world so obviously in rebellion against God - experiencing the fallout, brokenness, emptiness, and disillusionment that comes from trying to live on our own and in our own way in God's world; what will keep us from being religious pharisees, self righteous older brothers, and harsh judgy people is this law of love found only through the Gospel - Jesus is the true and greater older brother who went out looking for us and gladly spent his inheritance to bring us into the incredible, generous and gracious love of of the Father. To treat others as we would want to be treated, to love our neighbor as ourself or rather to treat others how God in Christ has treated us this is the Gospel by which we have been saved. To live any other way is to deny the Faith by which we are saved.
6. God is calling us to be a community where the the generosity and graciousness of the Gospel is the vision and relationship that forms all other relationships - God's mercy and kindness toward us through Jesus' life death and resurrection.

Conclusion: *"As the surrounding society loses it's connecting glue, the most important response is to build local, small scale forms of community, teaching our children and congregations how to re-establish strong, life giving relationships in a world falling apart: "What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the dark ages which are already upon us." Our families and churches must become centers of civilization that reach out beyond themselves with a model form of community.*

The strongest Christian communities (families, congregations, groups of singles) are those driven by a larger vision - a sense of ministry. If God has given you a dependable income, a loving spouse, a strong church community, a reliable group of friends, those gifts are not just for you. They are to equip you to reach out and draw in those who are broken and searching. God is giving you the opportunity bring hope that Christianity is real and not just words - to put flesh and bones on the message of hope

and healing. Christians must be prepared to minister to the wounded, the refugees of the secular moral revolution whose lives have been wrecked by its false promises of freedom and autonomy - we are at a unique moment in history where we have an incredible opportunity to become safe havens where people witness the beauty of relationships reflecting God's own Commitment and faithfulness." - Nancy Pearcey, Love Thy Body