

Matthew 7:1-12 Kingdom Wisdom

Introduction

I am calling this section of the Sermon on the Mount, “Kingdom Wisdom.” How do we practically do well what Jesus is calling us to do? Grace-based humility is fundamental to Kingdom wisdom.

Humility is not the art of putting yourself down. This is not to say you should not mourn your sin and weakness, but with grace-based humility you’re not wallowing in your sin – the evil that is in you – you are thanking God for His grace: that He died for you, that He accepted you, that He has freed you from the penalty of your rightly deserved guilt.

Still, this is only one half of true humility. The other half of true humility recognizes the good. Humility accurately self-assess strengths and weaknesses. If you are humble, you admit that you are created in God’s image, beautifully and wonderfully made. You acknowledge your skills and gifts and the good parts of your personality. You do not do this boastfully. This is grace-based humility. You acknowledge the good in you with gratitude for who God has made you, and for the opportunities that God has given you, and the for the value He places on you.

Humility is fundamental to the gospel and to the attitude God expects us to take as we serve Him in this world. We are not superior to brothers and sisters in the Kingdom. We are not superior to people outside the Kingdom. We are both sinful and made in His image. They are both sinful and made in His image. Jesus died for us. Jesus died for them. We are saved by grace only because God opened the eyes of our heart to see Him; and His offer of grace extends to everyone.

Humility maintains the tension between being poor in spirit and being salt and light. I am sinful. I am also called to image God in the world. I have something good to offer. The gospel promotes both sides of humility. To repeat an earlier quote I used from Tim Keller,

The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.¹

The gospel opposes self-righteousness. That self-righteousness of human religion has been under attack in our previous two sections of the Sermon on the Mount. The sections are titled, “Kingdom Commandments,” and, “Kingdom Piety.” We were forced to return to the beatitudes: poor in spirit, mourning, humble. We have not attained a love for people or love for God, but we have been set free from the perfect standard. We are fully accepted, in spite of our sin. We are enabled to pursue the vision of loving God and loving people that Jesus has laid out here. We may not love God perfectly. And we may not love people perfectly. But we do not wallow in guilt and shame. The gospel declares that God has accepted us, that we are safe in love, covered by His grace. We are in the process of being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, and God will surely complete this process when He brings us home into His eternal Kingdom. We are ready now for the final major section of the body of the Sermon on the Mount. We will have a concluding section after this, but as far as the body of the Sermon goes, we are completing that in this lesson. In 7:1-12, Kingdom wisdom. The specific kind of wisdom we’re getting in this section is, wisdom on loving people. It assumes grace-based humility. It assumes that we’re putting God and His Kingdom first. We are initiating with other people out of love. That’s not easy. It takes wisdom. And Jesus is going to give us some. This short text can be divided into four sub-sections. Each one is a reflection on how to go about loving people as members of God’s Kingdom. We’re going to be told these four things.

In 7:1-5 be self-aware when you help those burdened by sin;
in 7:6 be others-aware when you share the gospel;
in 7:7-11 be God-aware when you pray;
and the summary, in 7:12 be ethically aware by applying one simple rule.

¹ Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. Kindle Ed. (New York ,NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2016) 48.

Kingdom Wisdom: engaging in gospel-based relationships with humble awareness (7:1-12)

Be self-aware when you help those burdened by sin (1-5)

We start with an exhortation to be self-aware when we try to help others who are burdened by sin. This is Matthew 7:1-5,

¹ “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ² “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³ “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ “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? ⁵ “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

In college I attended a few different Christian student groups. One group I got involved with for the primary reason that I had met a girl. I was highly motivated to attend that group. She later married me, so it turned out pretty great. I was growing in Christ and fairly zealous about the responsibility we have as Christians to share our faith. That did not go over well with a number of people in this particular Christian group. I remember one of the students quoting this passage from Matthew to oppose my insistence that we should be taking the initiative in sharing the gospel with other students. “Who are you to tell someone else that they are sinful? Do not judge so that you will not be judged. Why are you worried about the speck in someone else’s eye? You better look after the log in your own eye.”

I am sure there was truth in that rebuke, and it would have been helpful if I could have heard that truth. I was excited about the gospel, which I was really just beginning to understand, and I also tended towards being judgmental in my excitement. But the rebuke was only partially accurate. Yes, I needed to be careful about the log in my eye. But gospel humility does not sink into hopeless inaction. Yes, I am poor in spirit, but I am also supposed to help my brother get that speck out of his eye. Disciples of Jesus are called to be salt and light through godly action and through godly proclamation. Jesus will send out the twelve in Matthew 10:7, telling them, “As you go, preach, saying, ‘The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Jesus also tells us that gospel preaching is an essential part of the mission of the Church. He says in Matthew 24:14, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to the nations, and then the end will come.” This is our mission. His final words to His disciples in the last paragraph of Matthew are the Great Commission, “make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).”

Not taking the initiative with people is not an option if we are seeking first the Kingdom of God by obeying the will of our King. This is His commission. So, how do we both take the initiative to help others burdened by sin, and also apply this wisdom here in Matthew 7:1-5? Let’s observe the flow of thought in the passage.

The principle (1)

We start with the principle in verse 1, “Do not judge, so that you will not be judged.” The Greek word for “judge” here carries a range of meaning similar to the range in English. It can mean to judge as in, “to carry out the responsibility of a legally appointed judge”. It can also mean, “to discern or evaluate.” It can also mean to condemn or be judgmental. The shade of meaning that we are intended to understand from Jesus in this case depends on the context in which the word is being used. We will get to the immediate context in just a minute, as we go through the verses. But here are three points to keep in mind regarding the broader context of the Gospel of Matthew.

I’ve already made the first point from the broader context. Jesus assumes that His disciples will go and tell people that they need to “repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.” They have to tell people the bad news about their sin so that they can understand the good news about their salvation. Whatever “do not judge” means here, it *cannot* mean that there is never an appropriate way to point out the deadly problem of sin.

That brings me to a second point. This Gospel records both John the Baptist and Jesus using some very strong language in addressing the sin of religious leaders in Israel. John the Baptist says in Matthew 3:7, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” That’s a statement of judgment about a coming day of judgment.

Jesus says in Matthew 23:27, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.” That’s pretty harsh. Jesus almost always reserves such harsh words for hypocritical religious leaders. In fact, Jesus’ harsh judgment of the Pharisees is a major theme in Matthew. But in one notable exception, Jesus rebuked His close companion Peter with these words, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” How does that kind of rebuke square with this exhortation to not judge?

The third point, eternal judgment is an essential point of Jesus’ message. John 3:17 is routinely misinterpreted in our day in conjunction with this present text to argue that Jesus would never judge anyone. Jesus is tolerant of all behavior and is completely accepting no matter what we do. “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” Jesus doesn’t judge. But we only have to read one more verse to see that Jesus does, in fact, judge. John 3:18, “He who believes in him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Two chapters after this, John emphasizes the equality of the Son with the Father when he states, “For not even the Father judges anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son... and he gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man (John 5:22, 27).”

Jesus did not come into the world to judge because He did not need to come into the world to judge. Every human being already stands under His judgment as rightful King over all people. Jesus *did* need to come into the world to save us from His own judgment. He is both King who judges and Savior who gives up His life to satisfy that judgment. We need a savior to rescue us from the righteous judgment of God. Jesus is going to depict that judgment day of the King in Matthew 25 as the separating out of sheep from goats. Having approved of the godly behavior of the sheep, the King says to them, “Come you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34).” Then, after recounted the ungodly behavior of the goats, the King says to them, “Depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels... these will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:41, 46).”

We do not need to wait for Matthew 25 to get this idea of a separation between those who will enter eternal life and those who will enter eternal death. It’s right here in the Sermon on the Mount. We just need to drop down 13 verses. We’re going to get to it in our next lesson. There is a narrow way that leads to life and a broad way that leads to death (Matthew 7:13-14).

So this is the conclusion we can draw from the broader context of Matthew: whatever Jesus means by “Do not judge, so that you will not be judged,” it does *not* mean that God the Father and God the Son will not judge. Jesus *does* judge as the rightful King. It also does not mean that Jesus’ disciples will not judge - that is, evaluate or discern - sin in others. That’s part of our mission. We *are* to point out the presence of sin in the world, as we share the good news so that people can be saved from that sin in Jesus.

What then, does it mean to “not judge” in our present text? We are going to see this as we go through the text, but I will go ahead and tell you that I think it means. “Do not judge” here means, “do not be judgmental.” Or as Carson clarifies, “Do not be judgmental. Do not adopt a critical spirit, a condemning attitude.”² Now let’s see if that interpretation fits the rest of the passage.

² D. A. Carson. *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999) 106.

The theological justification (2)

The exhortation, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged,” is followed by this theological justification, “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.” Standard of measure here means, “the weights used to balance your scale.” The weights you use to judge the moral deficiencies in others are the same weights that will be used to judge your moral deficiencies.

I think we can take this in two different ways. First, we can understand Jesus to be saying that, even though there *is* an incredibly high moral standard, as taught in chapters 5 and 6, we can set that standard aside for a moment and instead we can use your own personal standard of judgment. How do you measure up to your own standard? You would think you would measure up well. After all, it is your standard. Let’s do an experiment. Let’s hang a recording device around your neck, a device that only records your own judgments. We will make a record of every time you say make a judgment, like, “I can’t believe he would break in line like that. Listen to how proud she is. That was a stupid answer. Oh, the way he speaks to his wife. Oh, the way she treats her children. No discipline. Too much discipline. Can you believe the way that guy drives? How much did she pay for that? He shows no emotion in worship at all. She shows way too much emotion in worship.” You know, like that. We are just going to record through your whole life every judgment you make. Then on judgment day, we are not even going to bring out the righteous standard of God’s holy character, not yet. We are not going to ask, “Did you love your enemy?” We are not going to ask, “Did you love the Lord God at all times with all your mind, heart, and strength?” No. An angel simply removes the recording device from your own neck, takes it up to the judgment table and play it. This is how we are going to judge you – with your own measure of judgment.

How do you think you are going to do? Do you pass if you’re only judged by the way you have judged others? Of course not. I hope you’re thinking that. Of course not. There is no way I’m coming up close to the way I’ve judged others.

So this is one way to understand what Jesus is saying about being judged by your own standard. He is not saying that this is the only standard that we will be judged by. We will be judged by God’s holy character, but this argument is meant to make us reflect, to think, “What if I’m just judged by the way I judge?” Paul used this argument in his prosecution of sinful humanity in Romans 1-3. First, he condemned the immoral, idolatrous behavior of non-believers. But that was an easy target. He then turned on religious people with this judgment, “Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same thing (Romans 2:1).”

There is another point Jesus is making here. That’s one way to understand it. But there is another way. This formulation, “for in the way you judge, you will be judged” sounds very familiar to other statements Jesus has already made in the Sermon on the Mount. In 5:7 he said, “Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy.” And in 6:14-15 He said,

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Taken out of context, all of these statements can be interpreted as works-based righteousness; this is the standard you have to attain. You have to show mercy to receive mercy; you have to forgive to be forgiven; you have to not judge to not be judged. If you do all of these things well enough, you will be shown mercy, you will be forgiven, you will not be judged.

But that cannot be the right interpretation. We show some mercy. We show some forgiveness. We sometimes do not judge. But we fall so far short in every one of these things. The standard is way too high. We are poor in spirit. We mourn. We humbly receive grace. And then we enter a process of becoming who He has saved us to be. We have not arrived. We are in process, pursuing His vision of righteousness.

So, why formulate these statements this way? Well, I think because these kinds of statements assume transformation and cause self-reflection. When you truly see your sin, see Jesus and place your faith in Him, you are truly born again. The Holy Spirit begins a process in your mind, your heart, and your soul. Rationally, you will have a new perspective, you will see with eyes of faith. Emotionally, you will have a new heart, you will begin to rejoice in God. Spiritually, you will have a new connection to God. He will be guiding you and empowering you by His Spirit. You still have a long way to go, but true faith in Jesus causes something real to happen inside of you that initiates a transformation.

If you show no awareness of what has been done for you, then the question does arise, "Have I really been born again?" If I show no mercy, have I really received mercy? If I'm not forgiving, do I know what it is to be forgiven? Do I realize that the harsh judgment I deserve has been diverted onto Jesus through no merit of my own? Has the Holy Spirit really begun to work in me?

It's a tough question. And the way Jesus states these truths forces us to some internal dissonance. Have I known mercy? To be honest, I am not that merciful. Nor am I that forgiving. And I am judgmental. On the one hand, I wonder at the sin still in me. Yeah, on the other hand, I do see God's work in me. I've known what it is to be forgiven.

This kind of self-assessment is part of the process of becoming who He is creating us to be. When I am feeling a spirit of condemnation, when I am critical, angry, indignant, upset, this is a moment for me to ask, where is the source of that emotion coming from? Is all this judgment in me I putting a burden on others that I have not been able to bear myself? What am I expecting here of my brother or sister, who has failed to live up a certain standard? What am I requiring of them in comparison to what has been required of me?

The example (3-4)

Jesus goes on to give us an example,

³ Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ 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 amazing how natural it is for us to receive grace ourselves and then afterward set ourselves up in judgment over people in need of grace. Jesus is saying, "Look to your own heart." And He may have had Pharisees in mind. You know, that's that harsh word, "hypocrite." It's His favorite designation for those self-righteous religious leaders. And that's why there's such a big contrast between a speck and a log. I am reminded of what Jesus will later say in Matthew 23:23,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Is this me? Do I get hot and critical about the small things, while not even addressing the big things? And remember from our discussion in chapter 6 that there are different levels of hypocrisy. It's kind of like a continuum. Maybe I can truthfully, humbly, honestly thank God that I am not on the far side of the continuum of hypocrisy. But I can also honestly admit that I continue to struggle with hypocrisy to some degree when it comes to judging myself with one standard, and judging others with a different standard.

I see this in myself. There are two kinds of weaknesses I think I tend to judge overly harshly in other Christians. First, I judge those who are weak in the areas of my strengths. My strengths seem so obvious to me, so important, so doable with just a bit of hard work. In the areas of my strengths other people can look like they are really not trying. I am pretty good at regularly studying the Bible. I really enjoy studying the Bible. I am also not bad with positive encouragement to people who are struggling. These are values for me. These strengths fit my personality. So, I can be really tempted to judge people who consistently fail in these areas.

I can also tend to judge too harshly in the area of things I know I am weak at, but I also know am working on. I know I am not good in this area. I have sin here. But I am working on it. I may not be great in empathy or including others, but I see that weakness and I am trying to be more loving in these areas. So, I'm at a party and there are people standing on the fringes and nobody is talking to them or getting them involved, and I don't want to talk to them or have them get involved, you know, that's stretching outside of my comfort zone, but it needs to happen. And so I'm judging all these extroverts at a party for not including others. "Don't they get how important empathy and inclusion are to Jesus? We've got to be better at this." I am saying in my mind, "we need to be better," because, I need to be better. My judgment of myself is spilling out onto others. I see these two things in me. What I judge myself as being particularly good at, I judge others from a position of strength. What I judge myself as being particularly weak at, I judge others from a sense of self-condemnation. Superiority and self-condemnation are major logs in my eye that I need to be aware of.

Now, in-between these things that I feel particularly strong at and these things I happen to know I am particularly weak at, there lies a whole swath of grey area that I'm probably not even thinking about at all. And there can be huge logs in those blind-spots. Now, I don't know what to do with that. I'm not even able to see the log in my own eye.

This is the kind of self-assessment Jesus is driving us to. He is *not* telling us to stay passive when we become aware of sin in the life of a brother or sister. He is not saying, "you're a hypocrite if you do anything." He *is* telling us to look to our own heart. Be self-aware. Acknowledge that you cannot judge as king. Because you are not king. Also acknowledge that you cannot judge as superior. You are poor in spirit, too. This is taking the log out of our own eye. We acknowledge our own struggles, and weaknesses, and temptations, and need. But we also remember that true humility is not only awareness of our brokenness. Acknowledge also your strengths; that God is transformatively working in you; that you have gifts, and skills, and opportunities. And then from this position of true humility – that's a lower position, not a higher position of *judgmentalness* – but from this lower position of humility, where you're aware of yourself, now you're ready to do something to help your brother.

The concluding exhortation (5)

So we come to the concluding exhortation in verse 5,

You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

So, having taken a time out and reflected on sin in yourself that you might at first be missing in the situation; having reminded yourself of your own poverty of spirit; reminded yourself that you have received mercy and forgiveness so far above anything you deserve; having confessed whatever sin God reveals to you as you're reflecting on your on struggles in this situation; having given thanks for the faith and gifts you do have; having asked the Spirit to fill you with God's love – in other words, having sincerely and humbly addressed the log in your own eye, Jesus says that "you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Gospel humility causes us to pause, to look to our own heart, to seek self-awareness, but it does not stick us in passivity regarding the struggles and burdens of the people around us. The point of this exhortation is not, "do not judge, the end." The point of this exhortation is, "Do not be judgmental, so that you *will* be able to see clearly and offer spiritual help effectively." That's the "if, then" of Jesus' statement. If you address your log, you will be able to see clearly. And seeing clearly, you will be able to help your brother or sister get that speck out of their eye.

I love how Jesus frames the issue to turn back on us how we normally evaluate moral situations. My problems are a speck in my eye. We see the sin of others as though through a telescope. What is minor in me is major in them. Jesus is telling us to turn the telescope around. You have the log, they have the speck. Come at it that way. When you see the seriousness of your own sin and understand how Jesus does not condemn you for it, but does want to set you free from it, that knowledge of His grace will help you be much more gracious about sin in others.

Kingdom wisdom requires self-awareness based on the humility of the gospel. We are not superior. We are the spiritually poor, made rich in Christ who do have something to offer.

The next point Jesus makes has to do with this gospel we have to offer. We need self-awareness in helping those who are burdened by sin. We also need others-awareness when we try to share the gospel.

Be others-aware when you share the gospel (6)

This is Matthew 7:6,

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.

The imagery here is striking. Not all dogs were considered bad in ancient Israel. Dogs were positively helpful in herding animals. But I have also been to cities that do not enforce ordinances to control dogs, and I have seen packs of untamed dogs roaming around, and people did not seem to be particularly afraid of these dogs, but they do steer clear of the dogs. That experience gives me some understanding of the negative perspective that dogs tend to get in the Bible.

There is also the problem that dogs and pigs are considered unclean in the Levitical code. Unclean does not mean “evil.” It means, you cannot eat them, probably because they were linked to scavenging trash and dead animals, which was another not particularly pleasant benefit dogs contributed to 1st century society. This theme of death was important in the Jewish food laws. Jews were not to eat those things that ate dead things: vultures, rats, crabs, shrimp, pigs, dogs. They are all scavengers of death. They eat dead things. And along with this prohibition being a pretty good dietary rule – not to eat things that eat dead things - it is one of the laws meant to remind the Israelites of a spiritual principle. Do not be death-eaters. Do not ingest what is sinful and corrupt. This animals were ceremonially unclean, you know, they’re not really evil. But symbolically they’re a reminder of the corruption of sin.

Jesus also used the word, “holy,” in His short statement; “Do not give what is holy to dogs.” You bring that word, “holiness,” and dogs and pigs together in a sermon to Jews, we’re definitely supposed to be thinking about the Levitical code. And it presents quite an unflattering image of human beings. Because He’s not really talking about pigs and dogs, is He. We are not basically good. We are fallen and sinful, corrupt from birth; unclean. The image of God is polluted in us. And this evil at times comes out of people. Don’t forget that. Be aware of God’s grace, but also be aware of the sinful state of people.

Jesus is telling us them, “When you offer the gospel to sinful people, there is some danger involved.” The image Jesus gives us seems to me best understood as four phrases arranged chiastically. The first and last phrase go together, “Do not give what is holy to dogs... [or they will] turn and tear you to pieces.” And the middle two phrases go together, “Do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet.” The dogs bite the hand that feeds them. The pigs trample what they cannot eat.

In the previous exhortation about not judging, Jesus urged us to be aware of our own sin. Here He is cautioning us to be aware of the sin in those we seek to help. Jesus used the word, “brother,” in the earlier reference to the one who has the speck in his eye. And while “brother” could refer to any Israelite, it does suggest that the above exhortation leans towards helping a fellow believer. The use of dogs and pigs here suggests that we are dealing with non-believers. Jesus is not thinking of Gentiles, even though Jews would not call fellow Jews, dogs and pigs; they would call Gentiles, dogs and pigs. That’s a bit of what shocks in this teaching from Jesus, because His primary opponent throughout is going to be *Jewish* leaders and the Jewish crowds that follow them. They are the ones that trample His words underfoot like pearls. They are the ones that are going to turn and tear Him apart.

Jesus is telling us that this kind of opposition, whether it comes from Jews or Gentiles, is going to happen when we seek first the Kingdom of God. If you want to help God's Kingdom come on Earth - if you want to participate in making disciples of nations - you are at times going to experience opposition to the good news you are sharing, no matter how lovingly and clearly you share it. If there's never opposition to the message, something's wrong with the way you're sharing the message.

From the text above, we are not to be judgmental. From the text here, we are not to be naïve. As we already read in John 3:17, people are already judged because of their rejection of God. We could have gone on to 3:19, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."

In the last of His beatitudes, Jesus told us already, "blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10)." Sometimes our words and deeds will do the positive work of salt and light, helping people taste and see the goodness of God. But at other times salt will sting the wounds of the broken and light will sting the eyes of those long used to darkness. Good news will not always be received as good news. The pearl of the gospel will be trampled in the mud. The hand of the loving will sometimes be bitten. Sharing the good news does not always turn out well, and it may have nothing to do with you. You have shared well, you were filled with the Spirit, you were humble, you were loving. Your message may still be rejected. I mean, look how harshly Jesus was rejected, and he's 100% loving, 100% humble, His words are always true. It might have nothing to do with you. And you still might get verbally abused, you still might get physically abused.

And this does not mean that we are not to try, that we do not offer what is holy and valuable to all people. But when you are rejected, you may simply have to move on. There is wisdom here. You may have to witness from a distance. Jesus will give this instruction to His disciples in Matthew 10,

⁷ "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'⁸ "Heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the* lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give...¹⁴ "Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.¹⁵ "Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city (Matthew 10:7-8, 14-15).

We can offer the gospel to all. We cannot ensure they are going to receive it. These first two exhortations of Kingdom wisdom have addressed a tension. Do not judge. Be humble so you can help. At the same time, be discerning. Sin and evil are real. It is not judgmental to acknowledge that reality. Be wise in your witness.

This is not an easy tension to address. It can be very challenging to live in this kind of wisdom, trying to address the sin in ourselves – the messenger – while being aware of sin in others, not wanting our method of offering help to be the problem, but still seeing that we need to do something. We can't just stay silent.

So we need help. And when we ask for help, we need help trusting the One we are asking.

That's what Jesus is going to tell us next. In His next exhortation He is going to encourage us to pray, but not only to pray. He is also encouraging us to be aware of the character of the One to whom we pray.

Be God-aware when you pray (7-11)

This third exhortation is in Matthew 7:7-11,

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.⁸ "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.⁹ "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?¹⁰ "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?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!

I have most often applied this promise in evangelism, together with Matthew 6:33. That's where we're exhorted to, "Seek first the kingdom of God..." so you put these together. "Seek first the kingdom of God," and, "if you ask, it will be given to you; if you seek, you will find, if you knock, it will be opened to you." And then we can go to Revelation 3:20 - God's willingness to open the door and come in and eat with whoever will open the door, and I don't think it matters too much that in the context there Jesus is the one knocking, and the door He is knocking on is the door of the Church. He is still speaking to individuals. It's about God's willingness to meet with you. To anyone who hears, "if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with me." God desires fellowship with anyone who seeks Him, who invites Him in. If you ask, He will help you to see Him.

I think this is a great prayer for the seeker who honestly wants to know God. Having said that, as I have been studying the Sermon on the Mount, I have realized that the way I would normally use this prayer doesn't do a great job, considering the context in which the prayer occurred. In the context of this sermon, seeking first the Kingdom of God is an exhortation for believers to live as though God really is the highest priority in life. Love Him. Love people. That is what it means to store treasure in Heaven.

So this seeking of God's kingdom places loving people as one of our very highest priorities. And we're getting some instruction in this section of Kingdom Wisdom about loving people. We are to resist being judgmental. We are to offer help humbly. We are to be wise when interacting with people who reject our help. Kingdom wisdom requires love, humility, and discernment as we reach out to others in messy, painful, and difficult circumstances.

This is the present context of this prayer. And I'm not saying that we can't use this prayer in other circumstances. In fact, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus repeats this exhortation in the context of prayer in general. But right here, in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is urging us to ask for, seek out, knock on the door of God in the context of loving sinful people, and helping people escape the deadly bonds of sin. This is a prayer to pray as we're actively engaged in seeking the Kingdom of God by loving God and loving people.

We need help because, to be honest, we are not that loving and we are not that wise. We are constantly finding ourselves in situations where we do not know the whole story. We do not know what is going on in the hearts and minds of people we want to help. We are not even sure what is going on in our own heart and mind. Who am I to try and help others with their sin problems when I barely have a handle on my own? Right? How am I going to have the courage to share the gospel when you just told me I might be rejected and treated badly? And when they do reject the gospel, how do I know it wasn't my fault? Maybe I was unclear, maybe I was too forceful; maybe I was not forceful enough; maybe they have been hurt by other Christians, and I didn't even consider that; maybe they had a bad day; maybe I could have asked better questions; maybe I could have given better answers.

This is hard. It is not easy to help people see Jesus and escape sin. This awareness of the difficulty inside of us and the sinfulness in other people, it drives us to our knees. We need help in every aspect of this. So what do we do? We ask. We seek. We knock. We keep asking, we keep seeking, we keep knocking, because we want to live for God, and we want to see fruit in living for God. And we are going to keep asking even when we don't see the results we were hoping for, and even when things don't happen in the timing that we really want. We keep asking.

Why do we keep asking? Well, because of this truth Jesus has reminded us of. Because God is good. God delights in giving us good things. He will not always give us what we want, and that can throw us off. We might doubt that God is in this. Maybe we're wondering about whether we are praying enough or whether we're praying with faith. But then that just shows that our eyes are really on

ourselves. I think Jesus is saying, “Take your eyes off yourself. Take your eyes off your circumstances. Ask, seek, and knock because God is good. Look at God.” Everybody, just stop and look at God. Remember who you are talking to. Remember that He is good; remember that He loves you; remember that He loves people; remember that He wants you to love people, He wants you to try. So looking at Him, ask yourself, do you trust Him? In your request, do you trust that He hears you? Do you trust that He is good? Do you trust that He is answering your prayers? Sometimes and in some ways, but He is answering. Do you believe that He is giving you good things, just not necessarily every good thing you want when you want it?

Jesus exhorts us to persevere based on our belief in the goodness of God. You are going to struggle. You are going to be opposed, you’re going to be rejected. Don’t give up. Trust that God is working in you and through you. Even if you do not see the answer you want, trust that God is giving to you good things as you seek first His Kingdom. It’s hard so you’re going to have to trust Him. Loving people is hard. Trust Him. Don’t give up on God.

I just looked at the version of the prayer that Luke quotes and I saw something really interesting. That version in Luke 11:9-13 is almost word for word the same as this version that Jesus gives during the Sermon on the Mount, but at the end of that version Jesus does not say that God will give you good things. Instead, He emphasizes a specific good thing that God is going to give you. Like, if you will ask, seek, and knock. In that instance Jesus said, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

Now, that’s interesting. Because I was thinking, you know, I’m asking, “take the speck out of their eye”; I’m asking to help this person receive the gospel message. That’s what I’m asking for. And that’s a good thing to ask. But that has to do with other people. And God is working His own process in other people. I can’t know what is good for other people. But I can know this – God always wants me to be filled with the Spirit. He wants me to be spiritually abiding in Jesus. And this good thing He’s going to give me every time. Like, every time I ask, I seek, I knock, He is filling me with His Spirit. And that means He is giving me help seeing the log in my own eye. He is giving me help to be humble and loving. He is giving me courage to speak. He is helping me to be faithful in a way that honors Him. He is doing all of this by filling me with His Spirit. And He is also, He is also through that Spirit in me working in the minds and hearts of those I am trying to help. I can trust Him with that. More is going on here than what I see. I can trust God. I can leave the results to Him.

Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. He is a good, good Father and He delights in giving you good things.

Let’s sum up with the last verse. As you strive put his Kingdom First, remember this Golden Rule.

Be ethically aware by applying one simple rule (12)

This is Matthew 7:12,

In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

This is why we need to pray. So, that we can treat people the way we would really want them to treat us. This is not different from what Jesus has already been saying. With this one statement He is summing up this section on Kingdom Wisdom, but really He is actually summing up the whole body of this sermon. This sermon has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction is 5:1-16. That established Kingdom Values with the beatitudes and the exhortation to salt and light. The conclusion that’s coming up is in 7:13-27. That’s going to be a call for us to make a Kingdom Decision. The body of the Sermon of the Mount is made up of these three sections I have been calling Kingdom Commandments, Kingdom Piety, and Kingdom Wisdom. This reference to Law and Prophets here at the end of Kingdom Wisdom creates an inclusio with one other reference to Law and Prophets that was at the beginning of the Kingdom Commandments section. So that’s the beginning of the body of the sermon. And that was 5:17 with this assertion from Jesus, “Do not think that I came to abolish

the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” It may be right to understand this as a whole theme of the body of the Sermon of the Mount. How is it in the New Covenant that Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets?

Jesus did not fulfill the Law and the Prophets by providing an upgraded version of the Old Covenant. He Himself *is* the fulfillment of the ceremonial code. The whole ceremonial code pointed towards Jesus, is fulfilled in Jesus - and being fulfilled has ended. Jesus also ended the civil code of the Old Covenant. One of the really new things about the New Covenant is that the people of God are no longer organized as a geo-political theocracy. In this, the New Covenant is a very new wineskin. There is no need for a law of government in the New Covenant, because we are not a nation. We are the Church, a spiritual remnant of God’s Kingdom living among the nations of the world. So the civil code is also fulfilled and ended.

What has been fulfilled but has not ended? The moral code. Jesus *has* made payment for the moral code. That is done. As the lamb of God He has taken away the sin of the world, once for all on the cross. But fulfillment in the case of moral code is not only about satisfying the legal demand of justice that Jesus does on the cross. It’s also about enabling God’s people to begin living in a way that images; that gives witness to God’s holy character. We are released from the standard of righteousness, so that we might be empowered to pursue the vision of righteousness. This is an “already/not yet” fulfillment. We are declared righteous when we believe in Jesus; we are being made righteous as we walk with Him in the Spirit; and we will be completed in righteousness when the body of sin is done away with in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Jesus’ promise to fulfill the Law is a promise to fulfill the Law to its fullest extent. He is making us into the kind of people who will eternally love the Father, all the time, with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole soul, our whole strength. That’s what kind of people we’re going to be. He is also making us into the kind of people who truly love – to love neighbor, to love foreigner, to love enemy, to love rich, poor, man, woman, child, slave, free. This is who we are becoming in Jesus.

Just as Jesus began the body of the sermon in Kingdom Commandments with loving people, so also He is ending the body here in Kingdom Wisdom with one ethical command, to love people. This does *not* elevate loving people over the greatest command to love God. The call to love God alone and reject all idols came in the middle of the sermon, in the section of Kingdom Piety. God is our greatest treasure. His glory, His Kingdom, His will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven: that is the one great focus of our existence. That’s our purpose, to love God.

It is our love for God that drives loving people. It is that love that drives this whole section on Kingdom Wisdom. We cannot leave people trapped in sin. We are compelled to help our brother remove the speck from his eye. We are compelled to share the good news with people, even if they might reject us. We are compelled by the love of Christ to love.

So now, in summing up the whole, Jesus chooses to focus on the second great commandment, which implies a total commitment to the first great commandment. We cannot truly love others - we will not - if we have not first truly loved God.

So Jesus says,

In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

This was a known principle in Jesus’ day. Formulations of this rule already existed in Judaism and outside of Judaism. Confucius said something like this. Confucius and the rabbis formulated the rule in the negative sense. They said, “Do not do unto your neighbor what you do not want him to do unto you.” Some scholars argue that it really makes no difference whether we say it with an emphasis on not doing, “do not treat people how you do not want them to treat you,” or whether we say it with an emphasis on doing, “treat people the same way you want them to treat you.”

I think there is a huge difference. The righteous vision Jesus calls us to certainly includes, “do no harm” – the “don’t do.” And He raises that bar very high. “Do not murder” for Jesus includes not taking life with words or thoughts, as well as action. But Jesus does not stop with, “do no harm.” He goes on to require positive action. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” That’s a whole other level of moral expectation. Do not be a life-taker, that’s one thing. Be a life-giver, that’s another. I’m not only supposed to avoid sin. I’m supposed to actively, actively work towards the benefit of other people. And not just anybody. He says, “Love your enemy. Pray for him. Greet him in the street.”

With this one statement Jesus is getting very practical. It sounds so simple. People love to repeat it. But wow! – to reflect on it and do it? Seriously, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” And how would we really like to be treated? We would like others to cut us some slack when we are grumpy or inconsiderate. We would like others to take into account when we have had a bad day. We would like for others to help us out when we have a need or when we are in trouble. We would like to be asked, “Can I help you?” without having to always ask ourselves for help. We would like others to accept us, and respect us, and be kind to us. We would like others to love us. We would like other to love us according to *our* love language, not just according to their love language. We want others to truly care about our well-being and to show us that with practical acts of kindness.

This is what we would like. This is how we want to be treated.

And Jesus is saying, “dwell on that. Reflect on that. Live that.” You are really good at wanting good to be done to you. Use that awareness - and turn it around, and offer it to other people. How you want them to treat you, you treat them.

It’s not *nearly* as easy as it sounds, is it? Well, ask, seek, knock. If you’re going to try to do this, you’re going to need to pray. Keep praying to your heavenly Father to help you live for Him. And when you fall down and you don’t do this, confess it, get back up. Remember that you are in process and God is for you in this process. He is a good, good Father. He knows you have a long way to go. And He is with you now; He’s not leaving you, and He’s going to get you home. That’s guaranteed.