

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Not Business as Usual, No. 8*

The Only Real Foundation

June 14, 2020

Matthew 7:9-12

*Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup> If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! <sup>12</sup> So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (NIV)*

Have you ever experienced a time when it seemed like the world was just passing you by? I don't mean in specific ways like fashion or morals or whatever, although in many of those ways the world has passed us by, and not for the better.

Actually, the world passed some of us by, with regard to *fashion*, so *long* ago that we're coming back around.

But I mean, in general, that the world has just sort of gone on without you.

We tend to notice that particularly when we're going through something difficult.

I've thought that especially when I've been sick, and it's especially noticeable on nice days, when the temperature is mild and the sun is out. Here I am, sick, lying on the couch or whatever—inside. But I look out the window and see that life just goes on as normal for everyone else. Neighbors are mowing their lawns, washing cars, working in the garden. Kids are out playing. Traffic is moving. There are parties—sports—the normal stuff of life. It all goes right on.

I remember noticing that when my dad died. On the way from the funeral home to the cemetery, traffic went on as normal. People in their cars going shopping—out to eat—here and there, and I'm thinking, "don't they know we're burying my dad today?"

Their lives go on—business as usual, and yet for me it was anything but business as usual.

Nearly all of us know what that feels like.

Yesterday, we buried the body of our friend and brother, Don Joy, up at Blue Grass Gardens cemetery.

Don died peacefully the previous Saturday night, and I know that in those moments, Don and Robbie's world—and the world of their family and friends—did stop, just as I described.

And yet, because of all that is going on in our world in these days, what strikes me about Don's death today is actually just the opposite.

In many ways, it is our world that has stopped, you see? For several reasons.

Because of the coronavirus stuff, certainly. That's a big part of it. Our world has been on pause for weeks now because of that.

Honestly, I think even the wild animals recognize how the human world has stopped because of this virus. I've hit more birds with my car while driving in the last few months than I've hit all together before in my life. Of course, I can't prove it, but I really think that's because they're braver with regard to the roads—because there's less traffic. I think they know our world has stopped.

Same thing with squirrels and raccoons and groundhogs and deer, at least with regard to their appearances on our streets and roads. The rest of the world knows the human world has dramatically slowed down because of this virus.

And then also, of course, the world has stopped, to some degree, because of our awareness of what happened to George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery and others. The racial tensions in our nation right now have, in many ways, put the brakes on our business as usual national life as we come to terms with these things.

So, life in our nation—and our world really—has, in many ways, all but stopped.

And yet Don went right ahead and died in spite of that.

In spite of all these enormous events that have put our world on pause, Don just went ahead and traveled right on into glory last Saturday.

Which is just business as usual in our fallen world.

Worn out and broken bodies give up, and our Heavenly Father receives those in Christ to Himself. That's business as usual in our world. And that goes on even when everything else in the world has stopped—even when everything else in the world is not business as usual.

It's funny how that works, isn't it?

The fact is, there are things in life that just occur, regardless of what else might be going on around us, regardless of whether or not we want them to happen, regardless of whether or not we have time for them. Birth and life and love and death: those things just continue to happen even in the midst of hurricanes, pandemics, national emergencies, wars—and even election years.

And you know, if we'll let them, when they happen, they'll pull us back to reality and remind us of what's really important—and of what's really eternal.

They'll refocus our attention onto that which is really essential.

They're the moments to pay attention to.

If you knew Don Joy, you know he had a big vocabulary. Personally speaking, I remember him using words at times that I had to look up in order to find their meaning, and that was true whether he was teaching or preaching or just talking with you—or praying.

When they were moving from their home on Lexington Avenue to where they are now in Bethel Pointe, you may not know, but Annette, my wife, and I were considering buying that house.

As Don was showing us through, we went to the basement, and he got very serious and pointed to the floor and said something like, "Now this part of the property is very unique and exclusive. This whole area down here comes with a fully installed, atmospheric-dependent, grade-specific, hydro-enhanced surface cleansing system."

And he looked up at us as though we should be impressed. We were totally confused, and Robbie laughed and said, "What he means is, when it rains, the rainwater comes in and washes across the floor!"

That was Don Joy.

And yet, just as it is with most of us, as he aged, he began to settle back on those more elemental things that were so much a part of him.

Robbie told me Don would typically pray at meals, and he would do that extemporaneously. You know, you make it up as you go—or some might say, you follow the lead of the Spirit.

But as time went on, he moved to praying the Lord's Prayer.

And then, more recently, when he'd lead in prayer before meals, as he still did, he prayed the, "God is great; God is good" prayer.

Now, some would, of course, lament that loss of memory and sharpness of mind that so often comes with age.

But you know, the fact of it is, that simple children's prayer communicates all that really needs to be communicated about God and His character and provision, doesn't it?

"God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food. By His hands we all are fed. Give us, Lord, our daily bread."

There are certainly more eloquent—more complex—ways to say it, but that is the essence of a thankful heart.

The same thing is true in songs.

You can sing songs about God that are big or loud or musically or lyrically complicated—or deeply theological—or even some combination of those things.

But really, isn't the song that communicates as fully as any the essence of who God is and what God's done, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so"?

You see, so often, truth—substance—where God's concerned, is usually pretty simple. We're typically the ones who complicate things.

And we need times of not business as usual in our lives in order to remember that—to bring us back to those things that are truly essential.

I think we see that very principle in this morning's Scripture text, which is, more or less, the tail end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

What is the point of this block of teaching of Jesus'?

The point is to describe the Kingdom of God, and the way God's people—Kingdom people—live. This is the way Kingdom people think; this is what Kingdom people value; this is how Kingdom people treat others; these are the priorities Kingdom people set.

If you want to get a picture of what life with God is like, what Heaven is like—what life on earth was created to be like and was supposed to be like, if not for the fall—then this is that picture. Matthew, Chapters 5, 6 and 7: if you don't like the type of thing these chapters describe, then I'm afraid you're not going to like Heaven too much.

This is Jesus' model for a Kingdom-centered, God-centered, society.

Now I know that we look at some of these principles and commands, and we're tempted to say, "I can't do that."

And that's true. And that's exactly why God sent His Holy Spirit to His people—His Church. We talked about that on Pentecost Sunday, a few Sundays ago.

God knows that His people, under the curse of a fallen world, can't live in these ways in our own power. That's what Pentecost was for—to empower His people to think Kingdom thoughts and embrace Kingdom values and engage with others in true, Kingdom love.

You see, this is a system that Jesus gives us here. This is a moral, ethical, spiritual system for life.

Now, please notice: this is not a system to bring us into relationship with God.

Through the ages, some have thought, "Well, if I do all this well enough, if I try really hard and do all this, then that will earn me my salvation."

No, that's not it at all.

Jesus has earned our salvation for us. We are invited into relationship with God the Father, not because of *our* righteousness, but because of the righteous of *Jesus Christ*.

This is not Jesus describing how to enter into relationship with God.

What we have from Jesus here is a description of the way—the only way—that allows us to live successfully in peace with God and with each other in God's Kingdom, you see?

This is not the way *to* the Kingdom of God. This is the way *of* the Kingdom of God.

To put it in more earthly terms, think of the Kingdom of God as an earthly country, a nation that you want to move to and of which you want to become a citizen.

This is not the immigration test that allows you entry into the new land.

This is the law of the land once you enter in, you see? This is how citizens of that land live and think and relate.

As Jesus says there in verse 24, "*... everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock,*" such that whatever comes, that house continued to stand, "*because it had its foundation on the rock.*"

These are the ways of God's people, made possible for actual implementation in our lives by the power of God's Spirit. Of course, much time could be spent picking these chapters apart and looking at these principles individually.

And that's certainly a worthwhile endeavor.

But you know, Jesus also gave us a "for dummies" version of all this.

Not really for dummies, but the essence of these three chapters He presents to us—he gives us as a summary statement—there in verse 12, words that are so well known.

Jesus says, "*In all things, therefore, do to others as you would like them to do to you. This is the law and the prophets.*" [Diddle]

We've called this, the "Golden Rule."

Now, let me say quickly about this: if you pull this statement out of its context, as some have tried to do, the truth is, it can become quite egocentric—leaving people to think that they are the measure of whether their behavior toward others is good or not.

If you pull it out of context, it can quickly degenerate to stand for something like, "If I don't mind it, then they shouldn't mind it either."

And some have tried to do that—to make this fit their own, personal agendas.

But you can't do that with the Golden Rule because these words are given to us in a context—in this very specific context of Jesus' ethical commands, you see?

Now, actually, several English versions of the Bible don't translate the "therefore" that begins this phrase in Greek, and that's unfortunate, because it is there. And it's important to realize that the "therefore" is there, because it's the "therefore" that ties the summary—the Golden Rule—to everything that comes before it.

So, what does that mean? It means that it's as if Jesus is saying here:

You want the abbreviated version of how children of God—of how followers of Christ, of how Kingdom people—think and act toward others? How people treat other people in Heaven? In God’s Kingdom?

Well here it is: In God’s Kingdom, people do to others what they would want others to do to them.

In God’s Kingdom, people think about others the way they’d want others to think about them.

In God’s Kingdom, people talk about others in the ways they’d want others to talk about them.

All according to God’s ethic and definition of goodness and righteousness and fairness and justice, you see: *Kingdom people do to others as we’d want others to do to us.*

It’s not really all that complicated.

It’s a pretty foundational idea, really.

And it’s the only real foundation that can support a healthy marriage, a healthy family, a healthy church and community and society.

With anything less than this very sort of mutual respect and honor and love, you see, it’s only a matter of time before people will not be able to get on with each other, because this is how God designed us—His creation—to live.

This is what God made us to do—this is how He intends us to treat one another. Again, He knows that in our fallen state that’s impossible, so He’s made His Spirit available to us—to change us from the inside out—to empower us to be the people He made us to be.

Because He knows very well that, apart from that sort of transformation, we will not do to others as we’d want done to us.

Apart from Holy Spirit-led transformation, we will use others; we will abuse others; we will enslave others; we will jump to wrong conclusions about others; we will steal from others; we will put others down, and we will call others names—all to benefit us, you see?

It’s true—and you know it is. We’ve done it. We’re guilty of it, every one of us.

The Church is guilty of it.

Our nation is guilty of it. And our race, regardless of what it is, in some place and at some time, has been guilty of it.

As a friend told me just this week, “The thing is, it’s not nearly so much about skin as it is about sin!”

Sin—manifested as pride that I am better than you—is a mortal wound in the life of every human person because of the fall. It will consume us eternally unless we face it wherever we see it, we call it the sin that it is, we seek the forgiveness of Christ and of those we’ve offended, and we open ourselves to the power of His Spirit to cleanse us of it and change us—change how we think, how we act, and how we value from the inside out.

The things that are going on in our nation today, and the things that have gone on in our nation in days past, are all evidence of it.

Whether you believe it or not, in the past and in the present, we’ve all said that someone else doesn’t matter as much as me.

Yet the Kingdom ethic of Jesus says, “You matter to me as much as I matter to me. In fact, you matter more.”

That’s what the love of the cross looks like. That is the way of God’s Kingdom, and it’s the kind of world we all want to

live in. But we don’t get there by denying the past. And we don’t get there by force.

We get there by the power of the Holy Spirit pouring God’s love into us:

so we can see our own blind spots,

so we can truly love others,

so we can all walk hand in hand as true equals,

so we can presume the best of others,

so we can do to others as we would have them do to us,

and so we can be one—in the One—in the only One who makes people one.

As both Tony Dungy and Max Lucado have recently said, in their own words: this is a tremendous opportunity for the American Church—of all colors—to reveal Christ to our broken, divided world.

This is the moment of not business as usual. This is the moment when our world has stopped, and that if we would, Christ’s people can reveal the very essence of His nature and His character. We can show the world what real love—real respect, real acceptance, real equality, and real unity—really means—what it really looks like.

Will we do that as a people—a church?

Prayer:

Father, would You help us, every one of us, to see how important it is to our world, to our nation, to Your Kingdom, and to Your heart, to take up our part in really being and living Christ in these days.

Help us to see with your eyes, to feel with your heart, to align ourselves with all that is right and good, to call for justice where that is needed, and especially so for the sake of the marginalized of our world.

Help us to see that in this day of not business as usual, Your people answering Your call to do justly and to love mercy and walk humbly—to do to others as we would have them do to us—is really the only way forward for our world, and it’s the only real foundation upon which any good society can be built.

Help us take our part in building it—in the power of Your Spirit, and in the way of Your Kingdom, and in the name of Your Son. Amen.

Benediction – a song, a prayer and a declaration:

*Instruments of Your Peace*

Where there is hatred, we will show Your love.

Where there is injury, we will never judge.

Where there is striving, we will speak Your peace.

To the millions crying for release,

We will be Your instruments of peace

Where there is blindness, we will pray for sight.

Where there is darkness, we will shine Your light.

Where there is sadness, we will bear their grief.

To the millions crying for relief,

We will be your instruments of peace

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let your love increase.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Walls of pride and prejudice shall cease.

When we are your instruments of peace.

In Jesus’ name, amen.