

Title: Christ is pure gold
Text: Matthew 7.12
Theme: A Godward focus on others
Series: Matthew #41
Prop Stmtnt: Followers of Christ will have a consideration of others.

I met Bob this past week. We congratulated each other on being named "Bob". He agreed with me that every family needs a "Bob." Bob and his wife just got back from Hong Kong 3 weeks ago, where they have been for 4 years. The church he belonged to had members from England, USA, Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong and mainland China. Each group was tempted to hang out with people of their own kind. Initially it is easier that way. People in the west think differently than people in the east. Here in the west when somebody comes up with a new idea or proposal, the first question is usually _____ (why?) Why are we doing that? Bob said, that in the Cantonese language there is not even a word that clearly means "why." Of course, I asked him, "why is that?" We concluded that people in the east are moved much more by relationships than arguments. They want to know "who is doing it" more than "why are we doing it."

Imagine being a member of a church where some of the elders are western and some of the elders are from the "far east" and the group is attempting to develop ministry goals and objectives. Would that not be an enormous challenge? Yes! So, why don't we just split the entire thing apart and create a little church for the Brits, another for the Americans, another for the Singaporeans, another for the Koreans, another for the Hong Kongians and the rest can meet as the mainlanders? Would that not be easier? Yes, and imminently less satisfying because instead of looking like the body of Christ, the church would be looking just like social groups tend to look in the world.

God is calling people from all of the races to be part of "one holy race" called the church. God is calling a people from all of the nations to be part of one kingdom. God is calling a people from all walks of life to be a royal priesthood. But at this point in the ministry of Christ, when Jesus is delivering the Sermon on the Mount, that emphasis has not yet been made. Jesus has made it clear that when you are a follower of his, that you are part of a group, a team, a family and a people. We know this. You are saved from "me" to "we". OUR Father in heaven...Give US this day OUR daily bread and forgive US our debts as WE also have forgiven OUR debtors. And lead US not into temptation but deliver US from evil. But, up to this point, the audience of Jesus would understand the our and the we and the us to be Jews. But Jesus is about to take this international, which he does. Jesus never designed the church to be a Messianic congregation over here made up of ethnic Jews who have come to Christ, and a Hmong church over here made up of people who come from the same region in SE Asia and a edgy, hip, young, trendy, church over here made up of sophisticated types who are too cool for old baby-boomers still singing Maranatha Praise choruses. Christ intended his church, and local congregations to reflect the entire community of believers in that community. Blue-collar, white-collar, educated or not, old, young, and of course as ethnically diverse, as the community is.

Did you know that older people are naturally intimidated by young people and that young people are not really sure how to communicate with older people? Did you know that we tend to fear those who we think come from a different cultural background than we do, even if we share the

same ethnicity? We have a tendency to divide one another into categories. But Christ knows what he is going to do. He knows why he has come. He has come to the earth, in order to live in our place and die in our place. He has come to rip open the curtain in the temple so that there is no longer a separation between God and man. And when that separation is removed, so is the separation removed between people, cultures, races, and backgrounds. Union with God through Christ is evidenced in pursuing union with other believers, whether Jew, Gentile, slave, free, etc. Paul calls these cultural barriers the "dividing wall of hostility" in the book of Ephesians. When Christ died on the cross, he tore that wall down. So, how do we reflect that fundamental unity in the midst of surface diversity? How do we live now, as the people of God in a way that points to what the people of God are going to be? Jesus is preparing his people for that when he says this in Matthew 7.12. This command is essential for the people of God, because it forces us to think more about others than we do ourselves. And (listen carefully), the more that we are with people who on the surface appear to be different than us, the more we realize how selfish and self-centered we really are. But, this command is a gift to the people of God because it is essential to us understanding one another which in turn opens up a level of understanding, love, and unity that is not rooted in social norms, but is actually rooted in Christ and the gospel. And that, my brothers and sisters is glorious, because then the church becomes a taste of heaven.

Read Text:

1. **The Starting Point - Consider God** - "So"

A. **Outgoing**

Davion Only is 15 years old. He has been in foster care his entire life. Recently he was given an opportunity to speak briefly at the St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church in St. Petersburg, FL. He told the church that he wanted a family who will "love me until I die." Davion said, "I'll take anyone. Old or young, dad or mom, black, white, purple; I don't care. And I would be really appreciative. The best I could be." His story was picked up by some of the media and case workers received over 10,000 offers.

Ok, what is it about Davion's story that is so compelling? Is it not the fact that he articulated the very thing that we long for? We long to be loved. We fear being forgotten, neglected, abandoned, and alone. Why? What is it about being loved, and being with others that is so needful for us? Is it not, that we are not complete as a person unless we are in a relationship with others? Others bring out aspects of our lives that on our own would never come out. We were made to be in a relationship, which means that the One who made us, was himself in a relationship. God from eternity past has been in a relationship with himself as God. Father, Son and Spirit have related to, communicated to, loved, honored, glorified, shared, and enjoyed one other in a perfect unity that is completely void of competition, jealousy, strife or division.

We were made in the image of God. We were made with relational DNA. God is outgoing. Creation is itself an expression of the outgoing nature of God. He made, not out of a need for assistance (like minions), not out of need for power (like an army of drones), not out of need for worship, but as a logical expression of his very being. God is outward focused. The Father gives

life, love, glory, affection, and delight to his Son. The Father sends his Son to the world. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." So, let's put this together.

The first word of this statement, "so" means that there is connection between what Jesus is about to say to what he just said. The fact that the Father is good and kind and only capable of giving good gifts to his children, even if they are disguised as trials, they are ultimately good. Therefore, because God is good and outward in his orientation, we are to take this same perspective. So, think of others, as God thinks of others. Think of what is good for others as God thinks of what is good for others. While God thinks of others intrinsically, we, sadly, think of ourselves intrinsically. We need God to change our hearts so that we start thinking of others, instead of thinking of ourselves. We need God, who thinks of others, to dwell in us to help us think of others. Since God is outward in his focus...

B. Giving

God is giving. Giving is the fruit of love. Giving is love's response to both a need and an opportunity. God gives us what we need, and God gives us things we do not need. It is loving for a husband to provide his wife with food and shelter and clothes. But, guys you can do more. I do not only buy things for Cathi that she needs. There are times when I buy things for her that she wants. I want to do that because I love her and while I have a duty to provide certain things, I delight in her as well. God delights in his children and loves to give good gifts to us, which drives us to give of ourselves by considering others and thinking of what they need, or what they like. What Jesus is calling us to do, is to completely re-orient the way that we look at people.

2. The Major Reverse - Consider others - "do also to them"

There are some examples in religious literature of sayings that are similar to this. One of the most famous is found in the Hillel and it says, "Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you." This means that you could fulfill that maxim if you did nothing at all. But that is not what Jesus said. The orientation of what Christ says is OTHERS!

A. Think of yourself in order to think of others.

"whatever you wish that others would do to you"

Wow! This is not some nice little truism or maxim. This is a serious, all-encompassing command. "Whatever" speaks about everything. You constantly desire for others to treat you in a certain way. You are constantly thinking about yourself. Christ knows this. He does not command us to think about ourselves because we are already doing it. He does not tell us to stop thinking about ourselves, he tells us to take what we think about ourselves and apply it to others. Instead of thinking, "what can you do for me" God calls us, and models for us, a view that says, "What would you like that I can do for you?" And Christ calls us to think of ourselves in order that we might think of others. That requires a major reverse in our thinking.

There is a popular marriage book and emphasis called, "Love and respect." The idea is that a wife needs love and a husband needs respect. So, if the husband is not getting the respect that he

thinks he should have, he should work at loving his wife. If he gives her the love that she needs, then she will give him the respect that he needs. And if the wife is not getting the love that she thinks that she needs, then she needs to be more intentional about giving him the respect that he needs. If he is feeling respected, then he will more likely show her more love. So, her way of getting love is to give him respect, and his way of getting respect is to give her love. Now, there is some truth to that to a point. Giving respect and love is definitely an upgrade from cutting comments and hateful speech. But the motivation for it is selfish. What Christ is talking about is selfless. You do not treat the other nice, so that they will treat you nice. You think, not about yourself as the goal, but you think about what you would like in order to treat them that way. Loving them is the goal.

B. Treat others with grace first.

This is not Karma. You know, what goes around comes around. Jesus is not saying that if you treat others the way that you want to be treated that people will treat you the way that you want to be treated. Sometimes it turns out that way. But we do not do this for that reason. Think of it like this. God did not wait for us to love him before he loved us. He loved us first. Even when we were his enemies, he loved us.

My friend Bob and his wife adopted a girl from China. When they were approved, they went to the orphanage where the directors had a little girl picked out for them. Bob said that when he went into the orphanage, all of the children would mob him and hang on him and he would play with them, except this little girl. She would cry and run away, every time. Not only that, but when the directors showed him where the children slept, all of their cribs were lined up in rows. But this little girl slept in a cage because they could not control her. Bob said that adopting her was such an illustration of the gospel. He realized that every time that God came after him, that he ran away. But God got him anyway. And the love of God was so powerful and compelling that Bob cried out to God to save him and of course, he is so grateful that God did not wait for him to love God first, otherwise he would never have come to Christ. In spite of this little girl's fears, Bob and his wife chose to love her anyway, and now, she will not leave his side.

What happens when children, spouses, hockey players and siblings fight? Whenever you investigate you hear, "He started it." "He did it first." And that is exactly what people ought to accuse us of, expect, we should be guilty of loving others first. Jesus said that this is what the OT was all about.

3. The Whole Deal - "for this is the Law and the Prophets"

A. Law

When Jesus uses the term "law" he is referring to the laws that God gave to Israel in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. All of these laws were detailed applications of the 10 commandments. The 10 commandments have two parts: 1) Love God (the first 4 that relate to God) and 2) Love others (the last 6 commandments).

B. Prophets

The prophets are the writings and the sermons of men called by God to warn and encourage the Israelites to not forget to love God and others. So, when Jesus is saying that this command is a summary of the law and the prophets, he is telling us that the way that we treat others is a reflection of how we think about God because that is what the law and the prophets say.

4. A Joy and not a Duty - "for this is the Law and the Prophets"

This command by Christ could be a crushing law if we pursued this apart from Christ. It is impossible for us to do this consistently, much less perfectly. Because we do not do this perfectly, this command can easily become another reminder of our guilt and our failure to measure up. Is that what Christ intended to do to us? No, not at all. Here is why this command is actually a joy and not a duty. Are you ready?

Jesus said, "For this is the Law and the Prophets" right? And, as we saw from Matthew 22 Jesus summarized the Old Testament by saying that they are teaching us to love God and to love others. There is another statement that Christ made about the Old Testament Scriptures that is very, very helpful for us. In the 5th chapter of his gospel, the apostle John records a conversation that Christ has with some of the Pharisees. Christ is admonishing them because even though they study the Scriptures, and know the content, they have actually missed the entire point of the Scriptures. This is what I was illustrating last week from Romans 10. Remember my refrigerator story? I had so many guys tell me after that sermon how that happens to them, that I think we need to start a support group, or at least a Facebook page. But, it's one thing to not see the shredded cheese in the refrigerator drawer, and another to miss out on the entire point of the Bible!

The entire point of the Bible is the entire point of creation. The entire point of creation is, according to Ephesians 1.10 is God uniting all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. In Colossians 1 we read that Christ is before all things and that in Christ all things are held together and that through Christ he is reconciling to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

This means that Christ is not only the source of all things, and the focal point of all things, and the goal of all of things, he is also the means by which all things are going to get to the goal. He is the glorious and good magnet that is drawing all things to come together to be under his reign. So, (back to the conversation that Jesus was having in John 5) Jesus told the Pharisees that "you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life." And you do IF they are properly interpreted. The Bible is not magical. You do not place it under your pillow at night to get rid of a headache. You do not read a chapter a day to get a better grade on your test. You do not learn the stories because if you know the facts and stories of the Bible, to pass an entrance exam for heaven or CLEP out of purgatory (there is no such place anyway). The Pharisees prided themselves on knowing phenomenal details about the Bible. They memorized major portions of it. But they missed the point of it. Which is why Jesus said to them, "they (the Scriptures) bear witness about me."

So, when Jesus says that the Law and the Prophets can be summarized by two commands: love God and love others or they can be summarized in the command, to love others as you would have others love you, can you now see how this very command actually points us to Christ? There is only one person who has ever loved God and loved others perfectly. There is only one who has done to others perfectly, what should be done. But, (and this is the really exciting part) Christ is not just the model for us. He is the fulfillment for us. He loved others perfectly, in my place. He did this for me. When you trust your entire life to Christ by repenting (turning from) of your sin, accepting (believing, embracing) his death as your payment and surrendering your life to his rule (yielding the authority of your life to his control), you become a follower of Christ. At that moment, Christ takes over. Christ invades your life. Christ invades your soul. He now gives you the means to do what he commands. He not only has already done it in your place which counts for your righteousness, but now he is both the goal and the means to follow that path.

People have called this command the golden rule because if, followed it would change the world. But, apart from Christ, it cannot be followed, because Christ is the pure gold. He is the only one who has ever done this and He is the only one who can empower us to pursue this. So, how am I to live out Matthew 7.12? Let's summarize: Christ is the one who fulfilled this, so I need to consistently be considering Christ so I have the right goal. Christ is also the one who did this in my place because I could not in my own strength follow his commands, so I need to conscientiously NOT rely upon my own determination, but instead of cry out to God for both the eyes to see the opportunities before me and to rely upon him for the power to do it. When I am oriented like this, I am radiating Christ. I am reflecting Christ. There are people who wear a certain cologne or perfume. That is a wonderful thing if you like both the person and the scent. You know their presence at times even before you see them and you already are pleased. When we, as a people are thinking and responding like this, we smell like Jesus.

5. **Test-driving**

What do you wish to receive from others? All week, how would this person want to be treated? Great challenge for me this week. Example: college campus, singing new songs, feeling old, feeling "out of it", feeling unfamiliar...meeting kids for the first time, (they probably don't want to talk to me, no, what are they thinking...he probably does not have time for me...etc)

A. **How would you want to be treated in your marriage/family?**

Think on that for a minute. What changes would you make to the atmosphere in your home if you could? Would it be more encouraging? What it be more affirming? Would it be more forgiving? Would it be more open about problems and working on addressing those? Would it be more kind? Would it be more spontaneous? What? Now, you might not be able to change everything, and you certainly cannot change everything instantly, and you may not be able to change anything, except yourself, but you can change the way that your respond. And even if others do not follow, you can please God by reflecting Christ by treating others in a way that you would like yourself to be treated.

B. **How do you want to be treated at work?**

What is it about work that is so stressful, or so difficult? You may not only be unappreciated, you may be a threat. You may be used for someone else's agenda. Your natural response to that would be to withdraw, to defend, to protect yourself so that you do not get hurt and taken advantage of. What one thing can you do at work this week that will carry out this command?

C. How do you want to be treated as a waiter/waitress?

D. How do you want to be treated as a member of the church?

Communion - serving one another. This is ground zero for this command.