Announcements

Summer camp
Softball

Series introduction: Last time in Matthew for a while (Ecclesiastes series coming up)….

Prayer for illumination: Please join me in prayer…

Sermon introduction: Have you ever been totally overwhelmed?

Maybe you a college student…
Maybe you’re a mother of four small children…
Maybe you trying to get your business off the ground…

There is just too much to do and you are totally overwhelmed.

This is probably how Jesus disciples felt at this point in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount describes the demands of the kingdom of God. These demands are overwhelming…

Matthew 5:11 Jesus tells us to rejoice when persecuted
Matthew 5:22 Jesus tells us that if we are angry with our brother we are guilty of murder
Matthew 5:28 Jesus tells us that if we have lusted we are guilty of adultery
Matthew 5:39 Jesus tells us that we must not resist evil people
Matthew 5:44 Jesus tells us to love our enemies
Matthew 6:15 Jesus tells us that if we don’t forgive others God want forgive us
Matthew 6:16 Jesus expects us to fast
Matthew 6:19 Jesus tells us to give our money away generously
Matthew 6:25 Jesus tells us that we must not worry about anything
Matthew 7:1ff Jesus tells us that we must never sinfully judge others

Imagine hearing these words for the first time. You too would have been overwhelmed.

Do you ever feel overwhelmed spiritually speaking? Do you ever wonder how you are going to find the strength to love, serve, give generously, put to death lust, read your Bible, pray, work for justice, and do 1000 other things???

Here is the main idea of this morning’s passage-

In light of the demands of the kingdom we can feel overwhelmed… fortunately God offers help.

God helps us obey by answering prayers
God helps us obey by summarizing his demands

First, God helps us obey by answering our prayers
How many times does God tell us he will answer prayer? Seven times!

Matthew 7:7–8 (ESV) — 7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; (1) seek, and you will find; (2) knock, and it will be opened to you. (3) For everyone who asks receives, (4) and the one who seeks finds, (5) and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Matthew 7:11 (ESV) — 11 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!

Jesus tells us seven times that God will answer our prayers. Like the text last week we have several divine passives in this passage. God is not mentioned in this passage because he does not need to be. His presence is strongly implied in the context.

Christ’s point is simple. God will answer your prayers. He tells us this not once, twice, or even three times. He mentions this seven times.

Application:

Sweet… does this mean that if I ask God for a bigger house, bigger muscles, a slimmer waist, or a new Ferrari he will give it to me? No! (Joel Osteen)

That is not the context of this passage. “A text without a context is a pretext” Kent Hughes

The prayers God promises to answer in this context are prayers for wisdom and power to apply the demands of the kingdom of God found in the Sermon on the Mount.

God does not answer all our prayers.

Aren’t you glad that God does not answer all of our prayers? Think of the some of the prayers you prayed in high school, college, or maybe even two months ago.

Lord I pray that I would get into Harvard!
Lord I pray that you would help us find a church building in central Spokane!

I’m glad that God has not answered all my prayers but he does promise (7 times) to answer certain prayers. Which brings us to the next question.

How many times does God tells us he will answer our prayers? Seven!

What types of prayers will God answer? Needy persistent prayer!

Matthew 7:7–8 (ESV) — 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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Lets break down the words needy and persistent…
Needy!

We are only going to ask for something, seek something, or knock on a door consistently if we are really convinced we need something. Our central struggle is that we don’t realize our need. Sure we know intellectually that we need God’s help to obey his commands but 90% of the time we try to obey his commands on our own strength.

Our problem is that we don’t really understand the doctrine of sin, the power of the Devil, and the weakness of the flesh. This is why God allows us to fail over and over again until we finally realize we need him to help us.

This takes us back to the first beatitude. Blessed are the poor in Spirit…

We are very needy.

Illustration: Henry by the water feature. He naively thinks he can play in the water on his own without dying. He does not think he needs my help.

We are talking about needy persistent prayers.

Persistent!

Asking, seeking, and knocking are all present imperatives meaning Jesus commands persistent action. Keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. The key idea is persistence. Don’t ask once, don’t seek once, and don’t knock once. It is hard to underestimate the persistence aspect of these encouragements to pray.

A passage in Luke highlights the importance of persistence in prayer.

**Luke 18:1–7 (ESV) —** 1 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ ” 6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?”

Persistence is the key.

Illustration:

“As a young man, Walt Disney was fired from the Kansas City Star Newspaper because his boss thought he lacked creativity. He went on to form an animation company called Laugh-O-Gram Films in 1921… However, he made a deal with a New York distributor, and when the distributor went out of business, Disney was forced to shut Laugh-O-Gram down. He could barely pay his rent and even resorted to eating dog food. Broke but not defeated, Disney spent his last few dollars on a train ticket to Hollywood. Unfortunately his
troubles were not over. In 1926, Disney created a cartoon character named Oswald the Rabbit. When he attempted to negotiate a better deal with Universal Studios -- the cartoon’s distributor -- Disney discovered that Universal had secretly patented the Oswald character. Universal then hired Disney’s artists away from him, and continued the cartoon without Disney’s input (and without paying him). Later he was told Mickey Mouse would fail because the mouse would “terrify women.” Distributors rejected The Three Little Pigs, saying it needed more characters. Pinocchio was shut down during production and Disney had to rewrite the entire storyline. Other films, like Bambi, Pollyanna and Fantasia, were misunderstood by audiences at the time of their release, only to become favorites later on.” (www.growththink.com)

Why did Walt Disney succeed? He never quit, he persisted, he kept asking, he kept seeking, and he kept knocking on doors.

Christ’s point is very simple. If we feel overwhelmed by the demands of the kingdom we must pray persistent needy prayers.

Application:

Is there a sin you have struggled with for a long time?
Do you struggle to read the Bible consistently?
Have you battled anger for years?
Are you sick of being anxious all the time?

Persistence in prayer is the key.

My own experience praying for meekness….

BTW… When we think of persistence we should not think that God is reluctant to hear us or answer our prayer but we finally wear him down so he answers our prayers to get rid of us.

This brings us to our next question.

*How many times does God tells us he will answer our prayers? Seven!*

*What types of prayers will God answer? Needy persistent prayer!*

**How do we know God will answer our prayer? He is our Father!**

Matthew 7:9–11 (ESV) — 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?
10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 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!

Here is the scenario.

A young boy runs up to his father in Palestine and says, “Dad, I’m starving. Can you give me some bread to eat?” The dad reaches into his bag and pulls out a stone and says, “here son, bight on this!”

Or the son says, “Dad I’m starving, can I have some fish”.
The Dad says, “Sure, and then he hands him a snake.”
Of course this is absurd. No father would do this. (most father’s would not do this)

Jesus goes on to say, “If you then, who are evil, (that is corrupted by sin) 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!”

Once again Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater. Earthly Fathers give their kids food when they ask for it. How much more will our Heavenly Father, who is a perfect Father, give us the things we ask for?

Not only is he our Father, he is omnipotent. Therefore he has unlimited power to give us what we ask for.

What specifically will he give us? The parallel passage in Luke tells us and it lines up well the context of the SOM.

**Luke 11:11–13 (ESV)** — 11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The point is simple… God our father will give us the Holy Spirit to help us obey the demands of the kingdom when we are overwhelmed.

**Application:**

Lloyd Jones- “If you should ask me to state in one phrase what I regard as the greatest defect in most Christian lives I would say that it is our failure to know God as our Father.” (Lloyd Jones, 202)

Because God is our perfect Father he will only give good things to his children. They may not seem good at the time but everything that happens to you is happening to you for your good and God’s glory. What an amazing promise… It is impossible for the Father to give us anything evil.

Earthly fathers may think they are acting in the best interest of their children only to realize later that they made a mistake. Our Father in heaven never makes such mistakes.

God has given us every resource we need to obey the demands of the kingdom. The greatest resource is the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**2 Peter 1:3 (ESV)** — 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,…

**Romans 8:31–32 (ESV)** — 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Our heavenly father helps us obey when we are overwhelmed, by answering our needy persistent prayers.
BTW God only hears the prayers of his children, that is those who have put all their trust in Jesus.

First, God helps us obey by answering our prayers.

Second, God helps us obey by summarizing his demands

Matthew 7:12 (ESV) — 12 “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

This is one of the most well known verses in the Bible.

This verse is often referred to as the Golden rule.
It has been called the Mount Everest of Ethics (Barclay)

To understand this verse we must look at it in its context.

The word “so” in verse 12 or “therefore” in other translations is a key connector to what comes before. This is not a stand-alone statement but must be viewed in the context of the Sermon on the Mount specifically what immediately precedes it (judging others).

Instead of judging others we must treat them like we want to be treated. This not only sums up Matthew 7:1-11 it sums up the entire sermon on the mount and it sums up how we are to interact with all people everywhere.

Isn’t this wonderful?? I love the simplicity of this command. We are often overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of commands in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Bible for that matter. But God in his kindness sums it all up with one command because he wants to help us obey.

JC Ryle writes, “This truth settles a hundred different points, … it prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases.” (Ryle)

When we are unsure about how to act towards someone else we should ask this question, “How would I want to be treated?” This is the primary kingdom ethic.

Application:

So what does it actually mean to treat others the way we want to be treated?

One of my sons recently asked me if he could put lipstick on his brother while he was sleeping. I’m glad he asked me first, but I asked him how he would you like it if his brother put lipstick on him while he was sleeping?

When you get up in the morning would you like it if someone made the bed for you? You should make the bed for them.

Do you like sitting in the best chair in the living room than you should offer to someone else.
Do you like doing the dishes? Of course not… than you should do them for someone else.
If you don’t like it when others interrupt you, stop interrupting them. If you don’t like it when others don’t listen to you, then you need to listen to them.

We should always ask

What are the things I like?
What encourages me?
What are the things that please me?

When we have answered these questions we can do these things to others.

On the flip side…

What do I dislike?
What makes me feel uncomfortable?
What brings out the worst in me?
What really discourages me?

We should not do these things to others.

When we don’t act this way all the time we are sinning. This command is a present imperative. In other words, we must always and in every situation treat others as we would want to be treated.

If the church actually lived this out the world would be forced to stop and take notice.

The problem is that we are too busy thinking about ourselves.

We are narcissistic. This term comes from a Greek fable about a man named Narcissus. He fell in love with his own reflection in a pool. He lay by the pool hour after hour staring at his own reflection. Eventually he turned into a flower known as the Narcissus.

We all have some of this at work in us. We are always concerned about ourselves.

We need to repent of our self-centeredness and ask God to give us power to treat others the way we want to be treated.

The point is that God in his kindness does not overwhelm us with a thousand things to think about. He gives us a simple command in order to help us obey the demands of the kingdom. Treat others as you want to be treated.

Gospel:

I am thankful that God simplifies things for us but I still struggle to treat others like I want to be treated. How am I going to do this?

Only by looking to the cross. Fortunately Jesus did not only teach us about the demands of the kingdom he lived them out perfectly.
On the cross he considered our needs more important than his own and he suffered and died for us. He was fully human and he knew how he wanted to be treated so he treated us in that way by dying for us.

Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus not only can we be forgiven for all the times we fail to keep the Golden rule we also find motivation and power as we consider how much Jesus loved us.

1 John 4:19 (ESV) — 19 We love because he first loved us.

With all that said…. We need to be very careful with the golden rule.

The golden rule is not the essence of Christianity as some liberal Protestants have taught. We don’t become Christians by obeying the golden rule. We become Christians by trusting Jesus. When we trust Jesus we begin to obey the golden rule automatically. Christianity is not good advice about obeying the Golden rule it is good news about what Jesus has done for us.

**Conclusion:**

Next time you feel totally overwhelmed by the demands of the kingdom you must remember that God is eager to help.

He helps us obey by answering our prayers  
He helps us obey by summarizing his demands

Lets pray…