

Speaker 1:

Well again, we welcome you to remote worship. Thank you for joining us here online. I know it's not the ideal situation, but at least we have technology to do this and know that we as your clergy team, we as part of the church are praying for you and thinking about you and doing our best to stay connected. Let's be an attitude of prayer together.

Eternal God, we know that we cannot do this thing called life without you, especially during these times. And so, we ask for your continued guidance that we would continue to sense your strength and your spirit within us. May it guide us, and may it remind us that again, apart from you, we can do nothing. And now, Lord, you've given me the amazing privilege and responsibility of preaching your word to these my friends and your servants. And I ask you to speak to me and through me in such a way that all of us here receive a word from you that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Today I want to talk to you about the most important rule in the universe. Now, I know many of us don't like to follow rules. I'm one of them. I really don't like to follow rules. In fact, I might consider myself a bit of a maverick in that sense. If anybody knows me well, they know that if I feel forced to do something or controlled to do something, I'm going to do the exact opposite just because. Now, sometimes that's a good thing and sometimes that gets me into trouble.

Carl Jung was right. There's a shadow side to everything. But one thing I have learned is that if there is one rule that should be followed by everyone every single day, it's the rule I want to talk to you about today. In fact, this rule is so powerful that if we follow it every single day, it will change our lives. It will improve our relationships, it will improve our marriages. It'll make life a lot more satisfying and peaceful. I'm telling you, if we follow this rule every single day, our lives would improve dramatically. This rule is that powerful. But the opposite is true as well. If we don't follow this rule, we'll continue to be weighted down with pain and strife and conflict. Marriages die when this rule is broken. Businesses suffer when this rule is broken. Relationships suffer when this rule is broken. Lives, individual lives spiral out of control when this rule is broken.

And we have a choice every day whether or not we're going to follow this rule. In fact, I would say that most of the strife and bloodshed in the history of the world can be traced back to people in power not following this rule. So what I'd like for you to do today at this moment is to think about the relationships in your life. Are you estranged from a loved one? Is your marriage in trouble? Is there someone in your life or at work you can't seem to get along with? Are you personally unhappy? I think I just described most people.

That's all of us, but there's a cure to all of it, and that's what I want to talk about today. There's a cure for all of it if you simply follow this rule. Now, the funny thing is most of us, if not all of us know this rule very, very well. In fact, we've known it since childhood, but we think it's so simplistic, so naive that we simply don't follow it. And if that's how you feel today, if you're easily led into something that you think is too naive, let me ask you this question.

That pain in your strife in your life that you continue to feel, that pain and strife in your relationship that you continue to experience. What are you doing right now to get out of it? Is it working for you? If it's not working for you, I would beg you today to follow this very rule I'm going to proclaim to you today because I promise it is the cure. So if you want your relationships to be better, if you want your life to be more satisfying, if you want more peace in your life, you will follow this very rule. Now, what I want to do in order to get to this rule is I want to go, well, come up from the back end to show you the power of it. Now, this rule is not unique to Christianity, at least not the source of it. In fact, the original source of it

can be traced all the way back to Confucius. And most world religions have some sense, some version of this rule.

This is how the rule originally appeared. Don't do to others what you would not want them to do to you. In other words, for a long time, this particular rule was basically in the passive sense, the defensive sense. Just don't do to others what you would not want done to you. Don't be mean to others because you wouldn't want another person to be mean to you. Don't say hurtful things to another person because you do not want another person to say hurtful things to you. Now, that's not bad. In fact, there's a lot of wisdom to that. In fact, I remember as a kid taking long trips with my twin sister in the old station wagon. Some of you may remember what station wagons were. And when we took long trips, my sister and I would be in the first backseat. Remember, there was a back back that I often was relegated to, but a lot of trips we would sit in the first backseat, and after a while we would not get along very well.

And I would bug her and she would bug me, and we would just start fighting and bickering. And finally my mom would say, "Nancy, Charlie, you see that crease, that line between the two of you in the car seat there? Charlie, that's your side, Nancy, that's your side." You know what I did just to bug the tar out of my twin sister? I would inch my hand closer and closer to that crease, to that line so much that Nancy would tell on me, "Mommy, mommy, look what he's doing." And my mom would scream out, "Charlie, keep your hands to yourself." Well, that was the original intent of this particular rule. Cease fire, keep your hands to yourself. Don't harm anyone. And right now, that's a good rule to follow in the sense of, I know we want to be connected to people physically, but let's follow this rule in terms of not harming anyone. We don't want to be exposed to the virus. No one does. So practice that rule and keep everyone safe.

But along comes Jesus. And Jesus does a very radical thing to this particular rule. In fact, it is so radical that it really changes civilization. It's so radical that Jesus takes this rule and turns it into gold. That's right. I'm talking about the Golden Rule. It appears in the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon that was ever preached. And of course, it was preached by Jesus. And this is how Jesus put it. It's Matthew 7, verse 12. So in everything do to others what you would have them do to you for this sums up the law and the prophets. Now notice what Jesus did to this age-old rule. Until Jesus, it was always in the defensive sense, always in the passive sense. Don't do this, don't do that.

But Jesus comes along and radicalizes this rule by saying, no, you don't stand back. You go out and you do to others what you would want them done to you. You go out and be kind to people because you would want them to be kind to you. You go out and love on people because you want people to love on you. Wasn't just get along, don't make waves. It is to go out and to be proactive and live out this rule. Now that was radical, but Jesus does another radical thing. I don't know if you noticed when you read this verse or heard this verse, but Jesus said this golden rule sums up the law and the prophets. What does that mean? Basically, it means this. You know all the stuff in the Bible, all the things the prophets said, all the laws, what they said, everything you read in scripture, Jesus said, you want me to sum all that up for you in one sentence?

It is this. Do to others what you would want done to you. Jesus will put it another way in the greatest commandment. To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself. This sums up the law and prophets. Do unto others what you would have them do to you. Now, Jesus says, this sums up everything. This is what it means to be a Christian. It is a powerful rule. In fact, Peter would remind new Christians and 1st Peter, a book of the Bible, in training him in this way. In fact, this particular book was written to new Christians who are about to be baptized in the faith. And Peter was honest with them. He was telling them, listen, you're going to be persecuted. You're going to be hated because of your faith, but I want you to remember this.

And he inserts the golden rule in this passage. Listen to this. 1st Peter 3:9. He says this, do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing. Because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. Peter was saying, the best way to diffuse hatred, the best way to diffuse anger is to not treat others the way they have treated you. Instead, you treat them the way you want to be treated. And Peter says, if you do that, you will receive a blessing. What kind of blessing?

Well, he would later reveal this blessing by saying this in verse 15, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. The blessing will be, people will wonder when you treat them this way, if you've lost your mind. In other words, they will wonder what's gotten into you. Why are you acting this way? What causes you to be so kind when I've been so mean to you? What causes you to love me when all I've done is hate you? And the blessing will be you will have the opportunity to say it is because of Jesus Christ and what he's done for me.

Someone once said that Christianity in its early years when it spread like wildfire, it grew so rapidly, not because of coercion, but because of fascination, because so many people were so curious, were so amazed at these people who were covered in love and covered in peace, and they wondered why. So here's my version of the Golden Rule. You ready for it? Here's my version of the Golden Rule. Here it is. Treat others in a way that amazes them. Treat others in a way that makes them say, have you lost your mind? That's what Christ calls his followers to do. Treat others not the way they've treated you, but the way God has treated you and the way you would like to be treated. That means maybe for some of you, after you've finished watching this service today, you turn to your wife, your spouse, your husband next to you, and you say, you know what? I'm tired of fighting. I love you. I'm sorry. I want this to work. And your spouse just may faint and fall over.

For some of you, that may mean calling up that person you've been estranged from or that difficult person at work and saying, listen, I'm sorry. I know we haven't really seen eye to eye on everything, but I want to get to know you better. You seem like a great person, and after all this coronavirus mess is over, I want to take you to lunch. And it may be, hello, hello. Are you there? How can you live out the golden rule? Now, some of you watching, some of you listening may say, well, that's nice Charlie, and that's something maybe a preacher ought to preach about. And that sounds good. But isn't it a bit too unrealistic? Aren't you being a bit naive? Well, let me show you a true story that, well, occurred a couple of years ago at a Starbucks and a Starbucks drive-through, which of course right now is very, very busy.

But this was a few years ago, and there was a lady by the name of Susan Basham who lived in Northern California and she had three beloved dogs. And one morning on the way to the groomer, she decided she would, well, bolt into Starbucks drive-through real quick and get a jolt of coffee. Well, of course, the whole drive-through was just packed with cars. And when she got there, there was another big suburban that had really arrived there the same time as she did. And when the cars moved up, Susan looked at the lady in the suburban and said, "Well, is it me or you? Is it me? Is it me or you? I don't know. Do you go first? Do I go first? It doesn't matter to me." Well, it mattered to the woman in this big suburban car because she pushed her suburban forward, rolled down her window, and began to scream out all these cuss words that made Susan blush. In fact, the Bichon in her lap started barking at the lady in the suburban.

And Susan said, "You go ahead. I didn't know who was supposed to go first." Well, the lady didn't believe her, and she continued to berate the lady, call her names, names I can't repeat in a sermon. Well, what do you think Susan did? What would you do? Susan looked at that woman in that suburban, really looked at her, and you know what? She saw herself 10 years earlier. She said, "Her hair was a mess. Her eyes were red and puffy, and she was driving the same suburban I drove when my kids were young. I know it's me. I remember those days. The dog vomits on the sofa. I've ticked off my husband because I

never picked up his dry cleaning before his business trip. The dishwasher is broken. The two kids have strep throat, and I'm going crazy. I remember those days."

And as she was thinking that used to be her, you know what she did? Well, she was behind this lady in the suburban, and she watched as the lady in suburban ahead of her placed her order and then waited, pulled up a little, and waited for her order. And as soon as Susan got up, she said to the attendant, "Listen, I want to pay for whatever drink, whatever coffee the lady in front of me has ordered. Can I pay for that?" She said, "Sure." And I said, "Would you tell her when you give this to her that I hope she has a better day?"

Well, Susan watched as the attendant gave the lady in the suburban her order and she watched money being exchanged. And when the attendant came back, Susan said, "She didn't want me to pay for it, did she?" She said, "No. She said she couldn't believe you wanted to pay for her coffee after all the names that she called you. She said she was terribly sorry. She feels really, really bad." And Susan said, "Would you tell her I hope she had a better day?" And she said, "Oh yeah. She said, thank you. She already was." Now, listen to the words Susan said about that incident.

"As I drove away, I began to cry, not because I had been called so many terrible names, but because God had answered my very recent prayer, which was that he would allow me to see people as he sees them, not as I see them, that I might be able to see the hurting inside instead of just the hurtful outside. And maybe a few tears were of gratitude and amazement that he always shows up with an answer when I sincerely ask." Folks, this happened at a Starbucks on an ordinary day, and it could have just as well happened at the Starbucks in our neighborhood down the road or at the Publix down the street. Susan applied the Golden Rule. She treated that other person not as she had been treated, but the way she would want to be treated. And she amazed that woman with the love of God.

Now, can you imagine if every single one of us, every single day, would apply this golden rule? Can you imagine the marriages that would be saved, the relationships that would be restored, the violence that would be prevented? And imagine right now applying this particular golden rule, I can't think of any better time. How can you apply this rule during this time when so many of us are stuck at home and are afraid? Treat others the way you would want to be treated. Check in on your neighbor and ask them if you can go to the grocery store for them.

If you end up going to the grocery store and you see an elderly person, why don't you say to them, you know what? Why don't you stay in your car and I'll go buy you groceries and I'll bring them back to your car? Donate to a food bank. Keep paying, if you're able, the people in your life that have helped you, the people who clean your home, your babysitter, a health home aid. Many of them are hanging on by a thread. And if you have the resources, keep paying them for the time being. There are so many things you can do right now to apply the Golden Rule, to make this time a little easier, to make people feel more loved, and most of all, for people to see the light of Christ in us. The Golden Rule, it's powerful. What is keeping us from following it? Let's pray.

Eternal God, indeed help us to see others the way you see them, and give us the strength and the patience and the wisdom not to react, but to respond in a way that gives you honor, to respond to others in the way that gives you glory. Help us to see this is an opportunity for us to let our lights shine. Help us to see that during this crisis, other people are looking at us and wondering, well, how do Christ followers act and behave during such a difficult time? Is their faith really real? Is what they profess to believe, is it true? Is how they claim to behave, do they really behave that way? Oh, Lord, during this time, may we give credibility to what we know is the truth. Your love and your grace and your power is real. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. We're going to sing a closing hymn. Hymn Number 381, Savior, like a shepherd, lead us. Let's sing together.

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