

## "THE REWARDING LIFE"

TEXT: "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Matthew 7: 12.

I have often thought that if we were to remove the Empire State Building from New York City, and set it down in one of the small, rural towns of America, we would find it impossible to find words to express our great amazement. However, if we view the Empire State Building, as we do, in the midst of its gigantic surroundings, comparing it with some of its immense neighbors - the Chrysler Building, the RCA Building, the Woolworth Building - the Empire State Building still remains a giant, but it no longer produces in us such a degree of amazement.

And so it is with the Golden Rule. This one verse stands quite alone in the Sermon on the Mount. It's a towering climax to the entire discourse. If we take this verse out of its context, it still remains one of the great landmarks of the human spirit.

Perhaps it is the best known verse in the Bible. Yet, taken in its lofty setting in the sermon on the Mount, it seems to be part of the spiritual scenery. It's in this setting that we need to interpret the Golden Rule. If we remove it from its context, it then becomes a kind of sky-scraper of mere humanistic expediency. It is, on the contrary, a towering religious idea. For it is based on the Master's teaching of the dignity and the worth of every person as a child of God. It's important for us to keep this background in mind as we seek to discover its meaning for us.

The contemporary English scholar, J. B. Phillips has interpreted, in his translation of the Gospels, the Golden Rule in these words:

"Treat other people exactly as you would like to be treated by them - this is the essence of all true religion."

No matter how we simply these words, they still remain a great and universal law of human behavior. If we only had the faith and the fortitude to follow such a simple law, I think that we would soon discover that we had a key to a life of rich rewards. Suppose we consider this morning, three aspects related to the Golden Rule which will help in living a life of rich rewards.

FIRST: A POSITIVE APPROACH TO PEOPLE BRINGS THE BEST RESULTS.

The first thought growing out of the Golden Rule is that a positive approach to people

brings the best results.

It's interesting to note that the idea of the Golden Rule was not original with Jesus. It is found in many earlier religious writings.

| IN Judaism it read this way: "What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men."

| IN Buddhism the same principle is given as follows: "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful"

In Brahmanism it is stated this way: "This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you."

These are all negative approaches to human behavior. Jesus took this old idea and gave it a new, positive content. Jesus was never on the negative side of life. He constantly WARNED men against the destructive influence of fear and hate and anger and doubt. He wanted men to approach life with faith and hope and confidence. Religion for our Lord was never a matter of restrictive duty or careful creed, but rather it was a commitment of life. It was an acceptance of the universe. It was a matter of believing and doing and giving. Moses had a law. Buddha had a principle. Confucius had a system. The stoics had a philosophy. but Jesus had a life. He had an ideal rather than a code. He had an art rather than a set of rules. And it's this that enables us to transform life. It's this that brings rich and lasting rewards to life.

Jesus was never on the negative side of life. In the Golden Rule, he is applying this idea of positive living to the area of human relationships. He says it works like magic in getting along with others. He says that we must be for people rather than against them. We must give them status, make them feel like they count for something. We must build them up rather than tear them down. We must have faith in men and expect the best from them. We need to recognize and respect personalities and not try to exploit them or take advantage of them.

Why? Why do all these things? Why bother at all with people? The answer is quite simple. Because in doing all of these things, we'll discover, in the long run, that they bring better results than hate or deception or force. These are the things that make life richer and more rewarding. All of this may sound a bit stuffy and commonplace, yet, as Harry Overstreet remind us in his book, The Great Enterprise:

"The great enterprise of life is to create life that is friendly to other life....."

It's a great enterprise. It's a great undertaking. But how our world needs this wisdom. We've excelled in mechanics and pushed back the horizons of science, but how we've lagged behind in this fine art of living together.

I was interested to read recently a comment made by Robert Whitney, the president of the National Sales Executives, concerning the use of the Golden Rule.

"Look at it selfishly if you will. The fact is: the more you give, the more you receive. Thinking of others pays off.....Once the formula is tried, we've found the selfish attitude doesn't last for long. There's something about the very nature of "giving" that changes men, brings them a sense of contribution, a sense of peace and satisfaction"

And so it is, that in this Golden Rule, in this positive approach to people we have a formula of great power. As we undergird people with praise, generosity, and confidence, we find ourselves repaid a thousand-fold. It's good psychology. It's good public relations. It's good Christianity.

SECOND: WE GET BACK FROM PEOPLE THE KIND OF TREATMENT WE GIVE TO THEM.

In the second place, we know from experience that we usually get back from people the kind of treatment we give to them.

Jesus is simply pointing out to us that we ourselves determine the way that others are going to treat us. Most of us don't believe it. We like to blame others for our own trouble. But nevertheless, we write our own ticket. We can get any return we want. Our rewards will be great or small depending on the size and the nature of our investment.

Let me give you an illustration to emphasize this idea. Lou Reese is a resident of a small town in Ohio. During the depression, in 1932 to be exact, Lou Reese bought an old, broken down pottery plant. He didn't have much money to begin with, and after he had purchased this old abandoned factory he was left with eleven cents in one pocket and a \$20,000 IOU in the other pocket. But he and seven other penniless pottery workers put their shoulders to the wheel and went to work in the plant. They even lived in the plant to save money. Lou Reese and those who worked with him did wonders to the plant. He treated all employees as members of the same family. He paid good wages for that time, and gave generous bonuses at Christmas. Business began to pick up and soon 850 people in that small Ohio town were employed by Lou Reese in making pottery. There were no strikes, and a spirit of good relations existed within the business. Within fifteen years the company grew from nothing to a business of four million dollars a year, the second largest whiteware pottery company in the country.

But then one night tragedy struck. Fire broke out in the building with the result that the business was completely destroyed. There was no insurance on the building, and it looked like the end of a bright dream for Lou Reese. But the next day, all the employees and just about everyone in the town turned out to help Lou Reese rebuild the business. They offered their own savings. They cleared away the debris. They salvaged the unbroken pottery. They worked without pay to restore the building. Even steel companies, supply houses, and railroads offered Lou Reese special aid in getting started once again. It was a living demonstration of the Golden Rule. Lou Reese, in all the years he had been in business, had treated his employees fairly, honestly and generously. And in the time of need, he got back in return the same kind of treatment. They all prospered. It never fails to work out this way.

The story serves to remind us that in the long run, with all due allowance for human perversity, we get back just what we give. If we deal with good will, we will get good will in return. If we forgive, we will be forgiven. If we are friendly, we will have friends. If we're generous, we'll find generosity flowing back to us. If we trust, we will be trusted. This is all part of the rewarding life.

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

A positive approach to people brings the best results. We get back from people the kind of treatment we give to people.

THIRD: OUR OWN WELL BEING DEPENDS  
ON THE WELL BEING OF OUR FELLOW MEN.

And third: Our own well  
being depends on the well  
being of our fellow men.

We are all children of God. We are all related in some way to one another. When others suffer, we suffer. When others prosper, we prosper. This gives wide dimensions to the operation of the Golden Rule. For as John Donne reminds us:

"No man is an island, entire of itself;  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
a part of the main. If a clod be washed  
away by the sea, Europe is the less....  
Any man's death diminishes me, because  
I am involved in mankind. And therefore  
never send to know for whom the bell  
tolls; it tolls for thee....."

In other words, no one can live for himself and to himself. It means that we must try to bring to others the same quality of life we want for ourselves.

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do  
to you, do ye even so to them....."

It works in family relationships. It works in business relationships. It works in our everyday life as citizens of a democracy. It works in the relationships between countries. A leading economist of India puts it this way:

"To keep your neighbor poor while you  
rise in wealth is now unsound economic  
policy; for without a corresponding rise  
in your brother's purchasing power, you  
will yourself be hit, whatever may be  
your business....."

And so it's true that this principle of the Golden Rule operates for great and rewarding living in every compartment and every area of life. It is a simple, workable, practical down to earth expression of our religious faith. Our glib familiarity with the Golden Rule must not dull the luster of its great possibilities. It makes life a rewarding experience for every person who puts it to work with the help of God and in keeping with the Christian spirit.

A. J. Cronin in his autobiography, Adventure in Two Worlds adds this note:

"Could we put in practice the Sermon on the Mount, all the problems of our poor tortured universe would be solved, all the difficulties which confront mankind would melt like the mist before the rising sun"

There's great truth in his observation. It's especially true of the Golden Rule. It sounds simple. But it takes faith and it takes fortitude. But only as we set our faces toward the goal of Christlike living, only then will we be rewarded with joys beyond all expectation. For we need to remember that:

1. A positive approach to people brings the best results.
2. We get back from people the kind of treatment we give to them.
3. Our own well being depends on the well being of our fellow man.

LET US PRAY:

Dear God, give us the power to rule our spirits so that a negative attitude toward life may never take hold within us. Help us to work with the builders, and not with the wrecking crew. In thy name we pray. Amen