

# Judgement!

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Date: 14 February 2016

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, the passage we read from in Matthew chapter 7 is from the Sermon on the Mount. And if you've been with us, you know that we've been working our way through the Sermon on the Mount. And the Sermon on the Mount is about kingdom living.

It's about, it's spoken by Jesus to believers, to the community of disciples, and it's what it looks like to live a kingdom life ethic. It's Christian communal living.

And if you've been with us at all, you know that so far in the broader passage, Jesus keeps introducing these antitheses between two ways of living, two first loves, true first loves.

So you remember from a couple weeks ago, you can have treasures in heaven, or you can store up treasures on earth, right? A clear antithesis there. You can serve God, or you can serve man and stuff, materials, right?

Last time, last week we saw that there's an antithesis between anxiety and peace. Are you anxious? Are you peaceful in Christ? But this week we come to this command, judge not, lest you be judged.

[ 1 : 08 ] A completely negative command. It's quite different actually from the ones that we've gotten so far. And on top of that, it seems like a contradiction, because you saw in verse 6 that Jesus goes on to talk about people who are dogs and pigs, right? You dog, you pig, right?

Is he not just judging? He's done this throughout the Sermon on the Mount. He talked about the Pharisees and the fact that they do all these things to their faces when they fast.

They make everybody in the public square know when they pray really loud, right? And he said, don't be like them. So is this not just a contradiction and command?

Jesus is telling us judge not, lest you be judged. Well, he's walking around judging people, evaluating people, right? And so what do we do with this?

William Perkins, one of the post-Reformation theologians said that the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount could sum up the whole of what theology is. He said theology is the practice of living blessedly before God.

[ 2 : 21 ] But where is that here? Judge not, lest you be judged. What is this passage telling us about living blessedly in the context of the Sermon on the Mount?

And what I want to say to you tonight is that actually in this negative prescription, there's actually something entirely positive that Jesus has already told us in the Sermon on the Mount about living blessedly.

And it's this, blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. In other words, this passage is really about the fact that kingdom people are mercy people, not condemning people.

Kingdom people are mercy people. Okay, so that's what we're going to see. I want to ask two questions with you. And the two questions are this. What does Jesus mean exactly by the word to judge, by the verb to judge?

And then secondly, how do we become people who judge wisely, who judge rightly? So first, what does Jesus mean by judging? Now, you guys know this text, even if you're not a Christian tonight, if you're coming to explore the claims of Christianity, if you're a new believer, you know this text because it's deeply embedded into the popular imagination in our culture, isn't it?

[ 3 : 39 ] Judge not, lest you be judged. This is a favorite Bible verse, pretty much everybody walking out on the streets. It's all over the place. And when we're talking about what does it mean to use a word in a particular way, we're talking about words, words have semantical ranges or lexical ranges, right?

They mean all sorts of things and we use them in all sorts of ways, right? And we all use the word, the verb to judge in all sorts of ways. So there's the political usage, right, which is a reference to

judges as an office.

We know that judges go to courtrooms and they make judgments, right? Or the public use where we go out for a job interview and somebody makes a judgment about whether or not you fit, right? That's a type of judgment. That's one way to evaluate. Or there's a personal use. You make discernments about your own daily actions, your own, your judgments about your schedule, judgments about who to hang out with, judgments about who to have coffee with on what day of the week, right?

These are all types of judgments we make. But one of the probably premier ways that the idea of judgment is used, especially in the popular culture, is the ethical, right?

[ 4 : 56 ] And that's going around and saying, this is right, this is wrong, this is sin, this is not sin. So the ethical way of judgment is the way that's deeply, deeply embedded in the moral order in our society, right?

The way they use this idea of judge not, lest you be judged. It works this way. Human flourishing in late modernity, the world that we live in, is best encapsulated by a live and let live principle, right? You guys all know this. You see this all the time. If you read the newspapers or watch TV or go to movies. So it's, hey, don't tell me how to live my life and I'm not going to tell you how to live your life. In other words, judge not, right? Doesn't Jesus say that? Judge not. Or you're going to be judged. That's what Jesus says. Don't judge me for what I do and I'm not going to judge you for what you do.

Human flourishing is about individuality and that's kind of the sentiment that we've taken on in late modernity. That's what we believe. That's the way this word is used. Now, is this what Jesus means? Is Jesus saying, judge not, get rid of your courtrooms? Obviously not.

[ 6 : 10 ] Is Jesus saying, judge not, don't make evaluations about your daily life or about who to hang out with? Of course not, right? But is Jesus even saying, don't determine what's a sin and what's not a sin? And don't tell people what's a sin and what's not a sin.

Is this what Jesus is saying? Well, even if he was saying this, the problem is that that's a self-refuting principle, right? So if somebody comes up to you because you've done something wrong and they say, hey, Cory, you did this and it hurt me.

It hurts a lot of people when you do this. Don't do it anymore. It's not good. You're doing something wrong. And I say, hey, judge not, man, lest you be judged, right? What have I just done?

I've made a judgment that them coming to me and telling me that something was wrong was in fact them being wrong, right? I've just reciprocated the exact thing I told them not to do. And they judged me and I judged them back for it, for judging, right?

It's impossible to judge not, you see? You have to judge. It's just part of who we are. We have to deliberate. We have to make decisions. We have to judge. We have to decide what's right and wrong and we have to talk to people about it.

[ 7 : 26 ] So look, this isn't what Jesus means. And we know that because he's making judgments all over the place in the Gospels. In Matthew 18, in fact, he comes and tells us, hey, look, if somebody that you know and love is sinning, you need to gather some witnesses and go talk to them about it.

He tells us to do that, right? So this can't be exactly what that means. So what does it mean? Well, when we're talking about evaluating words, we have to go to the context and we have to go to other places in the Bible that these types of words are used.

And if you think about the way the word, the verb to judge, is used across the Bible, it's most preeminently, most of the time used in one particular way. And we see it all across the Old Testament and it's this, that God is the judge of all the earth. God is the judge of the nations. God is the judge who says in the day of the Lord, the day in the future that the Old Testament saints talked about, and the final day of Jesus' return that we see in the New Testament. God is the judge who's coming to judge the righteous and the wicked, to vindicate the righteous and to punish the wicked, to condemn, right?

And so the way Jesus is using this word is the way that any first century Jew would have known to use this word. And that's in relation to judgment, judgment as either vindication or condemnation.

[ 8 : 54 ] In other words, it's the role of the ultimate judge, the final judge, the judge that decides people's status. Okay? And I think that's what Jesus is getting at here.

You know this because in the book of James, Jesus' brother's book later in the New Testament, he's clearly thinking about this passage, and this is what he says, James 4-12.

There's only one law giver and one judge, and who are you to judge your brother? So you see that he says there's only one law giver, one judge, God. Who are you to become the judge of your brother?

In other words, he's saying you're not the ultimate judge. God is. But in other words, we don't pronounce judgment on the wicked. It's not our job. It's not our job to be the gatekeepers of the kingdom.

We don't walk around and get to point at people out and decide who's in and who's out. That's God's role. That's God's gig, right? But there's even more, I think, in this command, judge not.

[ 9 : 56 ] And we get it actually from Paul in Romans 14, and this is what he says in 14-10. He asks the same question that James does. Why do you judge your brother?

Okay, what do you mean, Paul? What do you mean by that? He says this, why do you look down on him? Why do you look down on him? In other words, when Paul's reading Jesus in Matthew 7, what he thinks it means is it's an attitude problem.

It's an attitude problem. Why do you look down on your brother? In other words, it's treating people in confrontation as if you're the one who has it all together.

You're the big brother. You're the one who's got it together and he's going to set people right again. Set things straight again. And look, we do this all the time.

We do this in the way that we talk about other denominations collectively. It's an us versus them mentality. We're the ones that got the theology right and they are the ones who don't.

[ 11 : 06 ] Every time I get a chance to debate, I set those guys straight. But we do it even closer to home than that. We do it in alternate friend groups, even amongst our own little community.

That's that part of the church. We don't hang out. They're a little bit different. They're a little bit weird. But even closer to home, we do it with our own friends.

And the way this actually works out is that we don't usually condemn or confront people to their faces in our culture, but we love to do it behind their backs. We love to talk about old John and we get home.

And this is what Jesus is talking about. It's standing in a position of haughtiness and pride and looking down, even at our own friends. Now, the beautiful thing about this text is that Jesus gives us the illustrations so I don't have to make them up.

And I always love that. And he gives us two. And the first one you'll see in the text is about an eye. Verse 3. Why do you see the speck that's in your brother's eye, but don't notice the log that is in your own eye?

[ 12 : 17 ] It actually says plank or beam. How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye when there is a log in your own eye? Now, if you remember from a couple weeks ago, Jesus had used another eye illustration about materialism.

If you're a materialist, you walk around wearing basically materialist, tenet goggles, and you see the world with a materialist lens on your eyes.

And so you can't tell that you're a materialist. Now, the same thing, a very similar thing is actually happening here. So what's going on here? Well, this is an absurd illustration.

It's actually supposed to be funny, I think, if you read it without all the seriousness with which we always read the Bible. If you read it, I think, in the context, I think Jesus is actually making a bit of a joke here.

Because here's the thing. Number one, if you're walking around and trying to find a speck in somebody's eye, how do you go about that? Well, you can't. You can't see specks in people's eyes.

[ 13 : 23 ] It's not something you can see. How do you know when somebody has a speck in their eye? Their eye starts watering, they start rubbing it, they say, I got to go to the bathroom and wash this thing out. You know what it feels like to have a speck in your eye? It's miserable.

And then the other thing is this. The word that he uses for the plank in the other person's eye is literally a word that refers to a massive beam of wood used to lay like a wall foundation, to attach it to the foundation and a house and construction.

It's like a 20-foot beam of wood. Jesus is giving them an absurd picture. He's saying, look, you can't see specks in people's eyes and you also can't literally have a plank running through your eye, running through your head.

It's an absurd picture. So what is he trying to say with this? He's trying to say that if you're a person that's walking around and doing the activity of condemnation, of haughtiness, of looking down at people, you've got such a big issue with your eyes, with your ability to see that you can't actually see what's wrong with you.

You're going around trying to pull specks out of people's eyes, but the problem is you're the one that needs to be confronted. And you can't see it. You're really confrontational, but you have no idea.

[ 14 : 49 ] You have no idea. You're completely blind to it. And so here's two things from this illustration I think he's saying. Number one is everybody right now probably in the room is thinking about that person, right, that they know that's just like this.

You've got him or her in your head right now. Man, my roommate is exactly like this. This is exactly what she does. But here's the thing that Jesus is saying. He's saying, are you not this person? Can you not see yourself in this way? The first thing is that we need to be self-examining. Are we oversensitive to other people's sins?

Are we willing to pronounce judgment on them that fast? And look, this kind of a thing arises from deep-seated bitterness, from long-term grudges.

It's literally an anxiety that stuck in your soul like a plank of wood would stick right through your body. You need help to get it out. That's the point.

[ 15 : 59 ] You can't get beans out of your eyes and you can't get specks out of your eyes by yourself. You have to have somebody else to help you. So the second thing is this, is that we are people that need to be confronted.

We need to be confronted. And so the question tonight is, are you a person that can be confronted? Are you that person?

Are you that person that you know who you are and you know your sins and you know that people need to come and talk to you about it? Are you helped in that way?

Are you willing to let people do that? And the second thing is this, how do you confront somebody? How do you go about it? And Jesus is telling us something really interesting here.

If you go to the doctor and you have a speck in your eye, I had an American football coach. I remember when I was in high school, that was mowing our football field with a really nice, huge fancy mower.

[ 17 : 02 ] As they do. And he hit a piece of metal that was stuck in the field and a piece of metal chipped off. A tiny little piece of metal and it went right in his eye. And he couldn't get it out, obviously, and it was killing him.

So he goes to the doctor and look, how do you think the doctor went about getting a little piece of metal out of his eye? Very carefully. That's how.

With gentility. Tenderness. With love. Here's the point. How do you confront somebody? Like getting a speck out of somebody's eye.

Very carefully. With wisdom and with lots of love. Being gentle. So here's the point. When Jesus says, judge not, the issue is not confrontation.

He's not saying don't be confrontational. What he's saying is don't be a person who condemns. It's confrontation, not condemnation.

[ 18 : 08 ] What's the difference in those two? Confrontation deliberates with people in love. For their sake.

It's not a coincidence that the very next passage after this one is the summary of the whole law. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Condemnation on the other hand judges people instead of their actions. You see, when we confront people we go because of an action that has been committed that needs confronting.

Right? It's not the person that we're judging. We're not determining their status before God. We're going to talk to them about an action. But when we go in condemnation we actually judge the person and not the action.

You see the difference. Look, confrontation like this is an absolute requirement of friendship. Let me be a bit provocative and ask this.

[ 19 : 11 ] Do you have a true friend? And how do you know? Well, do you have people in your life that are willing to confront you?

And that's one of the ways you can know if you're in any true, real, deep friendships. Are you a true friend? Are you a person that's willing to both be confronted and to confront in love?

And so the difference here is that confrontation, the way Jesus is talking about, speaks the truth in love. It sees the person as the end goal.

They're changed. They're good. And look, here's the biggest difference. Confrontation is willing to stick it out for the long haul because it's risky to confront people.

You never know what's going to happen, but you go willing to stick it out. You know you truly love somebody when you're willing to confront them and stick it out for the long haul, no matter how they respond. Condemnation dismisses the person.

[ 20 : 15 ] It's not willing to stick it out. It's not willing to stay after dismissing. All right, so the second image is this. Dogs, pigs, pearls.

All right, this is a crazy illustration that's really difficult to understand, so we'll give it our best shot. If you come with me to verse 6, Jesus illustrates it in a new way.

Do not give dogs what is holy and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. Okay, again, Jesus is being a bit humorous here.

He's being hyperbolic. This is a really extreme illustration. So what's going on here? So if the eye illustration teaches us to confront by speaking the truth and love instead of condemn, this next illustration begs us to ask this question, how do we do this with wisdom?

How do we confront people? How do we speak the truth and love to people in wisdom? How do we become wise judges? And he goes to talk about dogs and pigs, to help explain it. So look, dogs and pigs were domesticated animals in the first century for the most part.

[ 21 : 31 ] Now you might be wondering what in the world are pigs doing as a domesticated animal in ancient Israel, being people who don't eat pork, right? Well, they're living in a Roman Empire, right?

And there's tons of Romans, tons of Gentiles. People are eating pigs, okay? And so there are pig farmers and pig herds all over the place. And this is what they're living around all the time, so he uses this as an illustration.

If you're an owner of a dog or a pig or a group of dogs or pigs in the ancient Near East, how do you feed them? Well, you feed them scraps, the stuff that you might eat an animal and you use all the leftover parts in the scraps and you throw it to the dogs and pigs, right?

That's the normal way. That's how you feed them, right? You feed them your leftovers, okay? So Jesus is playing off of that image, which he uses a couple of times in the Gospels, and he's saying this.

If an owner goes out and throws holy things or precious things before dogs and pigs who are made to eat scraps, eventually the dogs and the pigs are going to turn around and attack the owner and eat the owner.

[ 22 : 39 ] Now why? Well, look, because it's real simple. Pigs can't eat pearls, right? Pigs, if you eat a pearl, a pig's just going to choke and it's going to throw it up.

And eventually what he's saying is if you're an owner of animals and you keep doing this, eventually the animals are just going to attack you and eat you up. Now what in the world is Jesus saying about confrontation and judgment in relation to this?

Well, here's the deal. Let's focus on the pearl and the pig. How does Jesus use the idea of the pearl throughout the Gospels? Well, in Matthew 13:45 he says this, he says another parable.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who seeks fine pearls. Where do you find pearls?

Oysters, right? You go and you dive down into the ocean and you get oysters and you open up the oyster and you dare to hope that inside it is going to be a pearl.

And if you're a poor first century pauper and you're diving for pearls and you're daring to hope that when you open that thing up there's going to be a pearl in there. A pearl of great price.

[ 23 : 49 ] Look, the pearl in the Gospels and in the Bible, it is the Gospel itself. It is the kingdom of God. It is in fact Jesus' person.

Okay? He is the mystery that has been revealed. When you break that oyster open and there's a pearl inside, Jesus is saying, look, that's me. I am the pearl of great price.

I am the precious gift. And so what he's talking about here is that an owner who throws holy things, who throws the Gospel, who throws kingdom love, speaking the truth and love, that type of confrontation to dogs and pigs, better expect that they're going to hate him for it.

Okay? So there's two people he's talking to here. One is the owner. Look, here's his point. If you go around without wisdom and try to practice godly confrontation, speaking the truth and love, throwing holy words before pigs and dogs, people that aren't ready for it, in other words, they're going to do nothing but choke on it and hate you for it.

In other words, he's saying, look, when it comes down to confrontation, you've got to be wise. You've got to be wise. You've got to discern, is the person that I'm about to speak something to about something they've done ready for this?

[ 25 : 18 ] Can they hear this? Can they hear this without me ruining the relationship and it being pointless? Right? In other words, he's saying, you've got to be a discerning person.

You've got to have a balance between understanding when to speak the truth and love and when to keep your mouth shut. You see? That there are times for both. One of my favorite illustrations for how this works out is in the life of Rosaria, Champagne Butterfield.

If you know anything about her book, I think it's Confessions of an Unlikely Convert. She was, you know, as anti-god, Northeast American university professors, you could possibly get.

I mean, as left as possible, whatever that word might mean to you in America, that's kind of what it refers to sometimes. I mean, just everything about her was, she hated God.

She had a whole newspaper column about it. This Presbyterian pastor wrote her a letter and he challenged her on a couple of her assumptions. And all he did to her was he said, look, I'd love to have you over for dinner.

[ 26 : 26 ] And he invited her over for dinner and when he got there, he knew something about her that she, number one, was a big environmental conservation. So he cut his air conditioning off in the middle of the summer, which in America is a terrible idea.

Burning hot, right? They were just dripping sweat the whole dinner. And the second thing he did was he knew she was a vegan, so he served a really nice vegan meal. Now, this guy was the pastor of the local church.

And for one year, every week, or a number of weeks, he invited her back and he loved her and he loved her and he loved her and slowly but surely she stopped hating him.

And after a year, he invited her to church and she finally could not get over the love this man had for her and his wife so much so that she sought after the reason they loved her and that was because of the gospel.

But she writes in her confessions of an unlike a convert that, look, if they would have invited her over for dinner that night and thrown the gospel in her face and said, this is what you need to believe, you're wrong, you're wrong, right?

[ 27 : 33 ] She said, look, I would have ran out of there and hated God even more than when I walked in. Jesus' point is that we've got to have wisdom when it comes to confrontation. But on the flip side, he's also talking to the pig.

Okay, he's talking to the pigish person. We read from Proverbs, if you confront a wise man, he will love you. If you confront a haughty fool, he will despise you, right?

Look, here's the problem with the pig. The pig doesn't realize that what's been thrown to it is a pearl. You see, he can't see the preciousness of the jewels that are laying in the muddy trough.

And so here's the question that Jesus is getting at. Not only are you a responsible, wise friend, do you do relationships well with wisdom, but also, look, are you the pig?

Are you the pig? And the answer, if you're deliberating on that right now, is yes. We've all been the pig. We've all not handled it well, right?

[ 28 : 44 ] We were born into this world in this manner, condemned because we want to do nothing else, but condemn others. We've all been the pig. And so second question, and very brief, that was the long point, this is a very short point.

How do we become self-aware, confronting but not condemning, loving rather than leaving kind of people? How do we become like this? And the simple answer is this, look at the judge and look at the pearl.

Look at the judge and look at the pearl. Jesus identifies himself in two ways in this passage. The first way, when he says, judge not lest you be judged, for with judgment you pronounce, you will be judged.

Well, the point is that somebody's got to do that judging on the people that do this type of judging, the bad type of judging. Normally we would think of that as God, but listen to what Jesus says about

himself later in the Gospel of Matthew.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all his angels are with him, he will sit on the glorious throne. He will discern and judge the people of every nation.

[ 29 : 51 ] They will be gathered in front of him and he will separate them as a shepherd, separate sheep from goats. Here's the point. Look, Jesus is saying, I am the ultimate judge. When I tell you judge not, leave condemnation for the true ultimate judge.

It's me. It's the one sitting right in front of you. Look, at the incarnation, we all were judged by the very fact that God became man.

God said to us, the world is not the way it ought to be. You see, the incarnation is a judgment. And at the crucifixion, when Jesus Christ dies, and stick with me right here, stick with me right here, the judge of all the earth became the one judged so that we wouldn't be ultimately judged for all of our bad judgment of other people.

You see that? The judge of all the earth became the judged one so that you wouldn't have to be ultimately judged. If you want to know how to become a wise, confronting, true, godly friend, you need forgiveness for the ways you haven't been by the judge who is judged.

You need to be vindicated. Look, that's an invitation. If you're here tonight and you're coming to explore what this is all about and what this Jesus character is all about, that's an invitation that Jesus gives.

[ 31 : 26 ] By faith, you can know what it is to be forgiven, to be vindicated, to be free of condemnation, to be free of the way you've condemned others. And the second thing, the final thing, and will be done, is this.

After you see Jesus as Savior, you need to see Jesus as an example. Jesus laid down his right to judge the earth in order to show mercy.

C.S. Lewis said it this way. I can't finish a sermon though, I see a Lewis quote, so here's mine. Instead of condemnation, Christian friendship is willing to forgive the inexcusable in people because God has first forgiven the inexcusable in you.

We lay down condemnation only because we know we have been shown a greater mercy. We speak the truth in love because we want to show the mercy to other people that helps them change. Jesus is both Savior and his example when it comes to this. So, when you hear the phrase in the popular culture and the social imaginary, judge not, lest you be judged, hear this instead.

[ 32 : 47 ] Blessed are you when you show mercy instead of condemnation, when you love someone enough to seek their good, and when you stick it out with them to the end.

Blessed are you who show true friendship, for you will be shown by the true judge, mercy, who became your great pearl of costly price.

Look, this is the hope of having a happy community. If we can create this type of community, this true friendship, this true Christian friendship, we will truly become what Jesus calls us in this passage, the light of the world, the city on a hill.

Our Lord and our God, we ask now that you by your spirit would make us people who want to be like this, who are humble enough to be confronted, and who are loving enough to confront lovingly. And we ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.