

## I. Set Up:

A. Today is the fifth and final message from The Sermon on the Mount. We have looked at: the Beatitudes, the directive to be salt and light, the law and – last week – at the command to love our enemies. Today’s text is from Matthew 7, where Jesus says: judge not lest you be judged.

B. .

## II. Introduction

A. There are a lot of people out there, who think that a lot of people out there are wrong. I’m one of them.

1. I’m not saying that I am “one of those other people think are wrong.” I am sure that’s true. I read my email. But that is a different sermon and not what I am saying.

2. What I am saying is, I am one of those who think a lot of other people are wrong.

B. I do not think I am wrong. I believe that my views are right – thoughtful, reasoned and formed from the Bible. I think my views come from God. I’m quite impressed with my views. In fact, I believe the world would be a better place if more people thought like I do. That puts me in Camp Two.

1. And if I’m not careful, I live there, along with, well, a lot of other people.

C. Just to set this up for you, for my purposes today, there are Three camps.

1. Camp One – which is generally associated with the left (I actually developed a very complicated set of camps, based on an X and Y axis, and then realized I was lost down a rabbit hole. So, for our purposes there are three camps.

2. Camp one is where those who say there are no rules land. Those in this camp say everyone is free to do whatever they want, but they end up being very judgmental about those who . You might say, their first rule is that there are no rules. At least this is what they used to say. They were inconsistent in applying it. Some now say there are rules and if you are not on the side of a set of rules you get cancelled.

3. Camp Two is made up of those who say there are rules – and who feels pretty good about how well they keep them. This is where the right tends to land. These are caricatures of both camps. Don’t get lost here.

4. The point is: both of these camps have problems.

a) Those in Camp One say: there are no rules, but end up trying to force a bunch of ever-changing rules on others. By the way, they insist that their views are right and they are intolerant of anyone who disagrees with their calls for tolerance. And by the way, they often do not keep them.

b) Those in Camp Two say there are rules and then not only fail to keep them, they fail to realize they are failing to keep them.

D. As a general rule: the critiques leveled against others by those in Camp One tend to be condescending. And the critiques from those in Camp Two of those who are in Camp One tend to be a bit angrier and mean.

E. Let me note, it is very easy to see the problems with the other side. And also the hypocrisy – the double-standards.

F. , except in ourselves.

### III. Review.

A. This is the fifth message in this series. We have listened to Jesus – the new and better Moses – share his take (which is the right take) on the Law. That has included an exploration of the Beatitudes (a listing of who is blessed), the call to be salt and light, Christ’s comments about the law (which is a gift) and his directive to us to love our enemy.

B. As we have moved through his comments I have been repeating that:

1. This is Jesus 101 and that we need to live in light of eternity.
2. Today we are going to learn about hypocrisy.

C. Today we are told to stop being hypocrites. Rather than sitting in self-righteous judgment of others, we should determine to love others and judge ourselves. It pivots around the verse everyone wants to quote. It used to be that if someone only knew one verse it was John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that He gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Now the passage everyone knows is, “judge not,” and they are quick to judge you if they think you are judging them. (The irony goes in every direction.)

D. Let me read our passage.

**1. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”**

2. **He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.**

3. **“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.**

E. Blind tour guides leading a group of other blind people off a cliff? Someone with a telephone pole sticking out of their eye – the Greek word here is *dokon*, which means, the load bearing beam in a home, so this is no stick. Someone with a telephone pole in their eye making fun of someone else who has a fleck of saw dust in their eye? This sounds more like a Monty Python sketch than the New Testament. Makes you wonder if the initials J.C. stand for Jesus Christ or John Cleese.

IV. But it is Jesus and there are some important things for us to see here.

A. As we start, please understand that this is not a condemnation of discernment, but of hypocritical judging. We have to assess people and situations. We have to make judgements about things. Life does not work if we are not evaluating people and ideas.

1. Think about it, and while you are “thinking about it” realize that the thinking you are doing requires making judgments – you are assessing the merit of what I am saying against other options. There is no way around this. We have to judge.

2. And, by the way, we are told to judge.

a) In Matthew 7, Jesus instructs us to pay attention to the fruit of someone’s life – to assess how their life is working - before we decide to take any of their advice.

b) In John’s Gospel we are told how to judge. Jesus says, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”<sup>1</sup>

c) In I Thessalonians 5:21, Paul tells us to, “examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.”

3. The Bible is full of counsel about our need to be thoughtful and discerning, and Jesus and Paul and others will make lots of assessments about other people’s thinking and actions.<sup>2</sup> We need to make judgments. In fact, we need others making sound judgments. Society doesn’t work without teachers grading papers, coaches critiquing performance, umpires calling balls and strikes and judges issuing just judgments. And we do not get better without others helping us see ourselves more clearly. We need feedback.

4. I've taken a couple painting classes at the Art Center in Highland Park. I changed instructors after a few classes because the instructor I had would not give me any critical feedback. It was maddening. I'm a pretty easy-going art student because: I know very little; I'm aware that I do not have any talent; and my self-worth is not wrapped up in what I paint. That said, my first teacher would not criticize what I did. I'd ask:

- a) Me: What am I doing wrong?
- b) Her: What makes you think you are doing anything wrong?
- c) Me: It's ugly. It's bad. It doesn't look like what it's supposed to look like.
- d) Her: Don't be so negative. Center yourself. Now, how do you feel about your painting?
- e) Like it could be a lot better.
- f) Well, work with that.
- g) Work with what? Can you show me how to fix this? Can you take this brush and show me how to use it to fix this.
- h) I am looking forward to you showing me. I want to learn from you.

5. It was a clash of worldviews. I lasted a few sessions and quit.

B. As we get started, I want you to realize, the problem is not judging per se. Judgments have to be made. We need to be discerning. We need others to be discerning. The problem is that:

- 1. our judgments are flawed – biased, skewed and incomplete;
- 2. and, and this is a big AND, the problem is our judgements are riddled by a double standard.

C. For starters, our judgements are wrong because we are limited. We cannot know everything. We cannot see everything, understand everything, remember everything. We are finite beings, so we are not going to operate on perfect information or perfect understanding.

D. But the real problem is our self-righteousness when it comes to judging ourselves. We need to understand our broken heart's tendency to manage our image.

1. Our big problem is not a lack of information, it's our tendency to skew the information to our advantage. Our big problem is that we are hypocrites. We focus on the flaws of others instead of focusing on our own. We are bothered by the things other people do when we do the very same thing. And – in ways we often fail to see – we highlight the mistakes of others in order to divert attention from our own issues.

E. In the 1999 movie *The Big Kahuna*, there is a scene in which Danny Devito tries to help a young salesman – played by Peter Facinelli - see himself more accurately. It's painful to watch. Devito is a seasoned salesman. Facinelli is a young and naïve and a Christian. They are all trying to land a big account. There's not a lot of action in this movie – it's actually a screen adaptation of a play called *The Hospitality Suite*. The scene I am thinking of follows a fight. Another senior salesman – played by Kevin Spacey - has just stormed out of the room. The scene involves Devito trying to help Facinelli see himself more clearly. I linked it in last Friday's Update.

F. I don't agree with everything Devito says, but you sure get the idea that he can see Bob a lot more clearly than Bob can see Bob. That is the human condition.

G. The term hypocrite is a Greek word that is brought over almost letter for letter into English. It is translated actor and hypocrite. Not that all actors are hypocrites, but all hypocrisy is acting.<sup>3</sup> Ancient actors wore masks, and we often wear masks. We pretend to be something that we are not – we pretend to be better than we are. Jesus is calling us out on this. He is pointing out that we're often two-faced. And as you sit with this – as you think about what Jesus is teaching here – it's obvious he is trying to point out things we often do not see in ourselves. Men and women, we lie to ourselves first. We are often not consciously aware of how skewed our thinking is. Our heart is so self-protective, we are so deep into image management, that we lie to ourselves first. We really do think we are right. We really do think we are better than we are.

H. Some call this the Lake Wobegon effect. Lake Wobegon was Garrison Keillor's fictional town – one that “time forgot and the decades cannot improve.” Where, “all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average.”

I. It's a fictional town, except it's not. We tend to think more highly of ourselves than we should. Study after study shows that we overestimate our knowledge, skills and abilities. Ninety-three percent of American drivers rated themselves better than average.<sup>4</sup>

J. Ninety-three percent of American drivers rated themselves better than average.

K. And here's how deep this runs: some of you are thinking, “those idiots! Can't they see that not everyone can be as good of driver as I am! I can't believe how clueless they can be!” Men and women, self-deception runs deep. We have a very hard time seeing ourselves accurately. It's a universal problem.

L. Jesus calls a foul on this kind of thinking. He is unlikely to be the first. Chances are high that if you're married, have kids – teenagers! – someone has already pointed out a few of your double-standards to you. It hurts, but it's helpful. And we have to see it.

V. Thankfully there is a third way. There is a third camp. And that is what we are called to. It is a camp that says, there are rules and I fail to keep them, therefore, I need humility and I need Jesus. And I need to interact with others from this position. It is not a position that says there are no rules.

A. Remember, one of the reasons for the law – for the Ten Commandments - is so we can see ourselves more clearly. It is to help us realize that we fall short. We need to recognize that and be humbled by that and then do two things:

B. First, believe the Gospel. Embrace Jesus. This changes everything.

1. Many people in this room still think that you are good enough – or close enough and your plan is to work towards being a bit better. You are deceived and misled, and your view will not only keep you from running to Jesus, it will likely make it so you cannot take an honest look in the mirror. Which oddly enough will make you a harsher judge of others. Part of your situation is that you will keep lying to yourself – justify a lot of bad behavior because having an accurate view of yourself is too painful. You think everything hinges on being good.

2. There is great freedom that comes from understanding that God knows the worst about you and accepts you as you are. God knows the worst about me and He is so good and gracious that Christ died for all of that. Once I get that, once I confess – “co-fess,” agree with God that I'm that bad – then there are no hidden secrets. I don't have to pretend to be good. And there is such freedom there (release, joy, security) that I can stop hiding and start extending grace to others.

3. The first thing we have to do in order to follow Christ into the new community he is setting up, is embrace the Gospel.

C. The second thing we need to do is assume the log is in there.

1. We need to start with ourselves. We need to stop trying to fix others and starting trying to fix myself – not so God will love you, but because He does and this is the right way to live.

2. Let me pause here to say again that it's very hard to have an accurate view of ourselves. Our hearts are so deceptive that it's hard to see it plainly. When I was a management consultant I came to see that a big part of my work was in helping companies – individuals, departments, divisions, entire companies – see themselves and their performance objectively - which is hard to do. But before you can fix a problem, you have to see it. But often, even with objective data, people would not see it. I'd collect data about their performance – often from customers – and then I'd find a company that was doing the same thing – only better – to benchmark them against. Then I'd present what I'd found and brace for the counter punch. People would attack me, attack my mother, attack the data, attack the other company, attack each other. They would lash out in every direction possible before – finally – looking honestly at themselves. It's hard to do. It may be impossible if you do not know that you are loved and safe – but in Christ, you are loved and safe. We have to start with the Gospel.

3. How can you get an accurate view of yourself? There are a handful of ways.

a) For reasons I don't fully understand, we often get a clearer view of ourselves during times of suffering. It doesn't always work, but sometimes it does.

b) Contemplation is another way forward. Sitting in silence - learning to turn off the voice that is feeding us less-than-accurate information.

c) Giving people permission to speak into your life – and then not shooting them when they do. I have a few friends with whom I occasionally go through the 2 + 1 exercise. Two affirmations and a challenge. Affirm me twice but give me something to work on. As I've said before, we pay money to get better for things that often do no matter. I pay an art teacher to teach me how to paint, a golf pro to correct my swing. If we want to get better we invite criticism. Often in those areas where we would profit the most our heart is so defensive we will not even solicit input.

D. Third, treat others in the way you want to be treated.

1. Be kind and gracious to others. Treat them the way you want God to keep treating you! Jesus is clear on this point, people who are relying on forgiveness must extend it to others. People who are relying on mercy need to be merciful.<sup>5</sup> The parallel passage in Matthew says, "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." If we extend grace and love and care – it will be given to us. "Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

E. There is more that can be said when it comes to appropriately judging others. The New Testament has some pretty specific counsel.

1. It should be done on the basis of the truth.
  2. People should be considered innocent until proven guilty. (That's not just an aspect of US law, it's an idea that grows out of Christ's teaching in Matthew 18, where we are told to confirm every fact by two or more witnesses.)
  3. When our feedback is negative, it should be done privately as possible.<sup>6</sup>
- F. There is more that could be said, but let's keep the main thing the main thing. We are hypocrites and it needs to stop. We need to understand how easy it is to be wrong in our assessments of others and of ourselves.
1. We need to believe the Gospel. It starts here.
  2. We need to understand that the plank that is in our eye is so big that in a very real sense Jesus was nailed to it and died in our place.
  3. And we need to be gracious with others. We need to treat them the way we want God to treat us.
- G. This is the way forward. This is the way into the New Community Jesus calls us to.

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<sup>1</sup> John 7:24

<sup>2</sup> In James 4:11-12, James does not prohibit Christians from confronting those who have strayed; rather, he warns against believers who maliciously slander others. Jesus underscored this same point in Matthew 7:1-4. The conclusion many Christians have drawn from these two passages can be boiled down to just three words: Do not judge!

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Tim Keller for this point.

<sup>4</sup> Svenson, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> When William Gladstone was Treasurer of Great Britain, he sent down to the Treasury for certain statistics upon which he was to base his budget proposals. The statistician working there made a mistake. But Gladstone was so sure of the man's accuracy that he did not take time to verify his figures. He went before the House of Commons and made his speech, basing his appeal on the incorrect figures that had been given him. His speech was no sooner published than the newspapers exposed its glaring inaccuracies. Gladstone was naturally overwhelmed with embarrassment. He went to his office and sent at once for the statistician who was responsible for his humiliating situation. The man came, full of fear and shame, certain that he was going to lose his position. But, instead, Mr. Gladstone said: "I know how much you must be disturbed over what has happened, and I have sent for you to put you at your ease. For a long time you have been engaged in handling the intricacies of the national accounts, and this is the first mistake that you have made. I want to congratulate you and express to you my keen appreciation." It took, a big man to do that. It took a merciful, man to do that.

<sup>6</sup> According to a publication I receive, the food science department of Michigan State University, after years of careful research, finally found a way to peel onions without making the eyes water. They claim there will be no tears

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when you perform the chore if you keep your mouth shut! Now I haven't had a chance to test that conclusion myself, but I can say that it points out a good addition to our discussion. If you must "peel the onions" of other men's faults and evil deeds, learn to keep your mouth shut until the appropriate time!