

## Matthew 7:1-6

*“<sup>1</sup> Do not judge, or you too will be judged, <sup>2</sup> For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup> 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? <sup>4</sup> How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. <sup>6</sup> Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”*

This is the third message in the series I’ve called *First Things First*. In the first message we looked at Zechariah 9, which says that God’s cleansed people were the jewels in His crown. And we said that discipleship should be our greatest aspiration in life and our highest priority as God’s church. Last week we looked at Deuteronomy 6 which records the First Commandment—to love God with all our heart and soul and strength, and we said that in order to become disciples, we must be people who love God more than anything else, and that we must persistently fan the flames of our love for God. Both of those things have to do with loving God, and that’s important, because our life of faith begins with loving God.

But it’s impossible for us to become disciples and fulfill our life’s highest calling, without being plugged in to the community that God has established here on earth, which we call the church—impossible. And some people just can’t come to terms with that—“why would I need anyone else in order to love God? I can love God all by myself!” And the answer to that question is, because God has said that in order to love Him properly, we must love other people, especially those in our spiritual family. If we don’t or we won’t love other people, we are failing to love God and we’re being disobedient to Him. John sums it up best when he

concludes, *“If anyone says, ‘I love God’, yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen (1John 4:20).”* John said that if a believer claims to love God and doesn’t love the person sitting in the pew next to him, he’s a liar.

Okay, so what’s the problem with loving other people? Why would we even try to love God without loving people? People can be difficult to love sometimes. People are imperfect, and thus hard to love—but God is perfect, and therefore easy to love. People will fail you—but God will never fail you. People let you down—but God never lets you down. But if loving God without loving other people is a pipe dream—if it is really impossible—then how do we bridge that gap? How can we love people in spite of their failures? How do we love them when they let us down?

The answer is mercy, and that’s what I want to talk to you about this morning. I believe with all my heart that if we as individuals and as a congregation want to mature into everything God wants us to become, we must be people who freely give and freely receive mercy. I want to refer to several passages this morning, but I want to focus on Matthew 7:1-6 and what Jesus has to say about the relationship between judgment and mercy.

### ***Do Not Judge! (vv. 1-2)***

There are two critical facts we should know about the first two verses of Matthew chapter seven: one, what it means to judge, and two, what it doesn’t mean to judge. When Jesus tells His disciples not to judge another person, He is telling them not to bring condemnation upon another person, not to sentence them or pronounce judgment on them, not to declare what their punishment will be as though we know the facts of the case. That is a two-step process—the first step is noticing a fault or failure in someone’s life, which is not a problem in itself, the second is to pass a sentence on them or to condemn them for that fault. In other words, simply noticing a fault or failure in someone’s life isn’t wrong, nor is it a sin, but passing judgment on that

person, or condemning them, or declaring them to be separated from God and cut off, is a problem, and it’s a huge problem.

James said this, “There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor (Jas 4:12)?” Or Paul says, “Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his reward [or condemnation] from God (1Cor 4:5).” God can see what we cannot see and so we must reserve judgment for Him. In fact, to judge another person is to usurp God’s authority, to claim to be in His position!

Now, the Bible is filled with verses that call for God’s people to exercise judgment, that is, to evaluate and discern the actions or character of another person. Verse six of this chapter calls for judgment—we must discern who is capable of receiving that which is holy, and who is fit to receive the pearls. Jesus told His disciples to judge between true and false prophets based on their fruit (Matt 7:15-20). Matthew 18:15-17 calls for members of the church to confront each other based on their dealings with each other, and to do that we must discern what things are right and wrong. But the difference is that we don’t pass judgment or condemn someone—we reserve that judgment for God alone, especially when God has not granted us the authority to stand in that position. What’s the result of being people who judge and condemn?

The result of being someone who judges, or condemns, is that we will be judged and condemned, and that condemnation takes two forms. One, we will find ourselves in a vicious cycle of condemnation and pain and misunderstanding, because others will naturally treat us the way we treat them. And so we’ll live a life of wounding and being wounded.

But two, we will find ourselves condemned by God, because God has forbidden such behavior. When we condemn someone else, we claim to stand

in God’s place and we diminish His glory. We set ourselves up against Him and His authority, and in so doing we stand under His judgment, and that will not go unpunished. And here’s the scary part—not only will other people treat us the way we have treated them, God will treat us the way we have treated them. Listen carefully—when it comes to showing mercy vs. receiving judgment, God does not treat us the way we have treated Him, He treats us the way we have treated other people. So we must come to terms with the fact that to a large extent we are setting the standard by which we ourselves will be judged by God. Do you want mercy or judgment?

But not only is it spiritually dangerous for us to judge others, it’s also extremely difficult for us to do it with any level of accuracy, because our own failures pervert our perception. That’s what Jesus talks about in verses three through five.

### ***Examine Yourself (vv. 3-5)***

This is an analogy that came straight out of Jesus’ own wood shop—the speck and the plank. Jesus said that it’s difficult for us to size up anyone else’s problems because our own problems almost completely distort our ability to see. The speck Jesus is talking about is just one of those minute pieces of sawdust that flies up into your eye and is a real source of irritation—your eye starts watering and you stop everything and try to get it out. The other word refers to a beam, or even a rafter, like what you would use to build a roof. Jesus wasn’t talking about a 2x4, but something larger. In other words, Jesus was exaggerating. You can’t walk around with a beam in your eye, and you certainly can’t see anything with a beam in your eye, and that’s just the point. We are so blinded by our own failures and faults and sins, and so blinded to our failures and faults and sins, that we can’t possibly have the sight that’s required to help someone with something as small as a speck—it’s laughable.

But Jesus doesn’t say that it’s impossible to help your brother with a speck, He just says that you must first deal with your own rafter. Because once we deal with our stuff, then it might be possible to

help others. In fact, that's what we're supposed to do. So what's the bottom line on mercy, judgment, and helping a brother or sister with their issues? The bottom line is, unless we have come to terms with our own need for mercy, we are worthless to help anyone else. If we don't recognize our own need for mercy, we are spiritual infants and have missed one of the most basic and foundational truths of the spiritual world, that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory and therefore we all desperately need His mercy, and we will continue to need of His mercy until the day He heals us once and for all in His presence. I think that's why Paul said in Galatians 6:1, "*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*" The spiritually mature person is a person very aware of his own need for mercy, and therefore qualified to help another person with their need for mercy. (TS: Why is mercy so hard for us as humans?)

### **The Trouble With Mercy...**

Why is it so hard for us to show mercy? There are many reasons, but let me share just a few. One, in our sinful condition we are blind to our own faults and therefore really believe that we are better than others. Paul said, "*We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise* (2Cor 10:12)." It's so difficult for us to think of ourselves with sober judgment. Two, we're afraid that if we don't judge people they're going to get away with sin. We're afraid that somehow they're going to fly under the radar and escape any consequences, as though the God of the universe doesn't notice or doesn't care, or that it's even possible for humans to sin without suffering consequences. Three, if we condemn others, or if we can get everyone to focus in on the speck in someone's eye, we think that they won't notice our own rafter quite as much. If we condemn others, we think, then we'll make ourselves look good. And so all our fears and insecurities lead us to judge and condemn other people, which doesn't help them at all, rarely actually makes us look better, results in

others judging us, and makes our own future judgment even worse. There's a better way, and it's mercy.

### **Mercy Is...**

Mercy is not treating people the way they deserve to be treated. Mercy is not pretending there has been no offense, in fact you can't have mercy unless there has been an offense. Mercy is allowing God to pass judgment in His own time and in His own way, with no unsolicited help from us. Mercy is loving someone for who God created them to be, not what sin has turned them into. Mercy is treating someone in light of the fact that God loves them in spite of their failures, just like He loves us in spite of ours. Mercy is taking our hand off someone's throat and trying to see them the way God does. Mercy is loving people in spite of their failures, even when we confront them with inappropriate behavior or offenses. Mercy is the strong bearing with the failings of the weak, and not to please themselves.

It's so unfortunate that Christianity, a religion which is, at heart, a religion based on mercy, has become so equated with a lack of mercy. It's so unfortunate that even though James declares that mercy triumphs over judgment, so many times judgment is all people see. It's so unfortunate that we aren't able to rejoice in God's mercy and declare His mercy more than be the spokesperson of His judgment. But make no mistake, the power of mercy is far greater than the power of judgment...the power of mercy draws people and shows them the God who does not treat them as their sins deserve. And if we will come to terms with our own need of mercy, then we can become people who help others with their need for mercy. We can be ambassadors of God's mercy. Can you imagine? What a great job!

You all know I like motorcycles, and of all the people who are famous for riding motorcycles, Evel Knievel is probably the most famous. He's famous for his bone-breaking stunts, for which he actually holds the Guinness Book of World Records for the most broken bones—443. He is also famous for

living an unbelievably and unashamedly immoral life. But God's mercy got a hold of Evel, and his life was changed. His last interview was with some macho men's magazine, and in the middle of his interview he broke down crying because of the mercy God had shown him. He said that he wanted to go back and live a life devoted to God, but he couldn't, and yet God had been so merciful to him.

Before he died, he shared his story of God's mercy at the Crystal Cathedral before that church and hundreds of bikers who came to hear him. And in the middle of his testimony, people began to weep and repent because of the story of God's mercy and the realization that they needed His mercy as well. There was no plan for an altar call that morning, but Pastor Schuller felt that there may be some who wanted to give their hearts to God and be baptized on the spot. So they gave an invitation and they estimate that on that Sunday morning between 500 and 800 people put their faith in Christ and were baptized, not because of the fear of judgment, not because of the pronouncement of judgment, but because of the power of God's mercy.

### **Conclusion**

This morning I simply want to allow God to deal with our hearts. I have three simple questions:

- Do you need to repent for passing judgment on another person?
- Do you need help showing mercy to another person?
- Do you want to put your trust in God's mercy displayed in Christ?

