Jesus on Judging Others

Text: Matthew 7:1-6

Introduction: There are some verses in the Bible that are well-known not just in the church and among Christians but also in the wider culture among unbelievers.

One of those verses of course is John 3:16. I had the privilege last weekend of sharing that verse of Scripture with people at the North Carolina State Fair. I shared the truth of God's love and the hope of eternal life with God that is only found in Jesus. Thank you for allowing me to be away last Sunday.

This morning we come to another such verse. People may not know the reference as well as they know John 3:16. But they certainly know the words of Matthew 7:1: "Judge not, that you be not judged." Surely, you've heard someone quote that verse who you suspected knew very little about the Bible. In fact, these may be the most frequently quoted words from the Bible in our day.

The truth is that they are also often some of the most misunderstood words in the Bible. No one wants to be judged by other people. So, people quote this verse so as to say, "You can't judge me. My life is none of your business. You do you. And I'll do me."

Of course, Jesus' intent in speaking these words is much more complicated than that. But that's what we want to talk about this morning as we continue our sermon series through the Sermon on the Mount. We want to see what Jesus has to say about judging others.

Go ahead and turn in your Bible to Matthew 7. We're going to be looking at verses 1-6. You can find it on page 762 in the black pew Bible in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, we invite you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read Matthew 7:1-6…Pray)

We're going to see this morning that **followers of Jesus are clear-eyed about sin while extending God's mercy and grace to others.**

So, what does Jesus teach in the Sermon on the Mount about judging others? Well, first we see that…

I. Followers of Jesus reject judgmentalism (Matthew 7:1-2).

"Judge not, that you be not judged."

I've already said that these are some of the most misunderstood words in the Bible. And if that's the case, it's important that we ask the question, "What does Jesus mean when He says to His disciples and the gathered crowd, 'Judge not, that you be not judged.?'"

A. Well, I think we can say with a great deal of certainty that this is not a sweeping prohibition against moral judgment of any kind.

1. **In fact, look down at verse 6. (Read vs. 6) We're going to come back to this verse later in the sermon, but suffice it to say for now, there is a kind of judgment that Jesus is encouraging here.**
2. **Now look down at verse 15. (Read vs. 15-16) We'll get to these verses in a couple weeks. But again, it's clear that Jesus is encouraging a kind of judgment.**
3. **Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about anger and murder, lust and adultery and divorce. He spoke about oaths and retaliation. Jesus wasn't shy about making moral judgments. And He encourages His followers to embrace His moral judgments.**
4. **His judgments are good and right. Psalm 19:9 says, "The rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether."**
5. **Maybe you've heard someone say before, "No one can judge me but God."**

    a. **And certainly, that's ultimately true. But are you so sure that's a good thing?**
    b. **I mean, it's good in the sense that God is just. His judgments are never unfair. Earthly judges can be guilty of issuing unjust judgments. But that never happens with God. He is fully just in every way.**

c. **It's also good that God is our judge because we know that He is merciful and gracious. We've been studying Exodus in Wednesday night prayer meeting and Bible study. This past Wednesday we ran across Exodus 34:6. It contains language that shows up throughout the Old Testament where God says of Himself, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." This was good news for Israel because this was on the heels of the golden calf incident. They needed God's mercy and grace. So, in that sense it's good that God is our judge.**
d. **But also understand that you can't hide anything from God. He knows every action. He knows every word. He knows every thought. He even knows every motive. And we will give an account for it all.**
e. **So, be careful saying, "Only God can judge me," as if it's some kind of get-out-jail-free card.**

6. **I voted on Thursday. I voted NO on the abortion and marriage amendments. And I encourage you to do the same. Was voting NO a judgment? In some sense it was. It was a judgment that what God says in His Word about human life and marriage is true. That human life is valuable and should be protected, even in the womb. That marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman. But was voting NO a violation of what Jesus teaches here in Matthew 7? Certainly not.**
7. **Matthew 7:1 is not a sweeping prohibition against moral judgment of any kind.**

B. **Instead, what Jesus is condemning is a spirit of judgmentalism.**

1. **See, what Jesus knows is that it's very easy for religious folks, including Christians, to adopt toward others a posture of judgmentalism.**

a. **We see it in the Pharisees, don't we? Consider some of the things Jesus said to the Pharisees just in Matthew's Gospel.**

1) ***In Matthew 9, the Pharisees asked the disciples of Jesus, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" To which Jesus responded, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:11-13). There the Pharisees are judging tax collectors and sinners, but they're also judging Jesus. They were the religious leaders, but they had a spirit of judgmentalism.***
2) ***Closely connected to their judgmentalism was their hypocrisy. So, in Matthew 23, Jesus rebuked them for that too. He said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!" (Matt. 12:23-24).***
3) ***Then Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean" (Matt. 23:25-26).***

b. **Maybe you have known and interacted with religious leaders or other Christians who had a spirit of judgmentalism about them. Sometimes it's their posture toward those who sin in certain ways. Sometimes it's treating conscience issues as if they are clear black and white issues. We've all known people who claimed the name of Christ who had a spirit of judgmentalism about them.**

c. But what about us? What about you? What about me? We're not immune from this spirit of judgmentalism, are we? We need to hear the words of Jesus to us this morning, "Judge not, that you be not judged."

1) ***Christian, how do you view those who are trapped in sin? With judgment? Or with compassion? It's election season. Our politicians want us to view those who see the world differently than us with judgment. But Jesus is calling us to view the crowds with compassion. As those who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.***
2) ***How about in the church? I deal with this a good bit as a pastor. We have a tendency to have all kinds of ideas about what other people should be doing as they follow Jesus. How they should parent their kids. What they should do regarding schooling their kids. How they should spend their money. How they should spend their free time. Ways they should be serving the church. How they should vote. How they should engage the culture.***
3) ***I'm not saying the Bible doesn't have anything to say about these things. It certainly does. The Bible speaks to all of life. But you are not Lord of your brother's conscience. Only Jesus is Lord. Only God is Lord of the conscience. We will all one day give an account to God for every deed. But you will not give an account to me. And I will not give an account to you.***
4) ***So, Goshen, let's be careful. "Judge not, that you be not judged."***

2. See, rather than adopting a spirit of judgmentalism, of all people, Christians should be the most merciful and gracious.

a. Why? Because of the mercy and grace that we have received from God in Christ.

b. Listen to Paul in Ephesians 2 on who you were apart from Christ: "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:1-3). That's who you were, Christian! So, what makes you think that you can look down your nose at those who are still in that condition?

c. Now listen to Paul in Ephesians 2 on what God has done for you in Christ: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:4-9). Do you hear that? All that you have as a follower of Jesus is because of grace! None of it is because of works. You have no room for boasting. You don't have a leg to stand on in your judgmentalism. Everything you have is because of the mercy and grace of God to you in Christ!

d. And now Jesus is calling you to extend that same mercy and grace to others. He's not calling you to wink at sin. He's not calling you to call good what is evil. He hasn't given us that authority. But He is calling us to a little bit of self-awareness, Christian.

e. Christians, of all people, should be the most merciful and gracious. Because we know from whence we've come. And brothers and sisters, let's

be honest. We know the sin that still remains in our hearts.

C. Now, Jesus gives a motivation in verse 2 for rejecting judgmentalism.

1. **He says in verse 1, "Judge not, [so] that you be not judged."**
2. **Then He expounds on that in verse 2. (Read vs. 2)**
3. **Jesus is saying that we should expect to be judged by God similarly to the way we judge others. If you forgive others, you can expect to be forgiven by God. If you refuse to forgive others, you can expect God to withhold His forgiveness from you.**
4. **Remember that in the Beatitudes in chapter 5, Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy" (Matt. 5:7).**
5. **Then, at the end of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, Jesus said, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15). If we are truly in Christ and have experienced the forgiveness of God ourselves, we will extend that same forgiveness to others.**
6. **NT scholar Chuck Quarles writes, "If a person judges others harshly, he can expect harsh judgment from God. However, if he judges others mercifully, he can expect merciful judgment from God" (Quarles, 284).**

"Judge not, that you be not judged." Followers of Jesus reject judgmentalism. Number 2…

II. Followers of Jesus practice self-examination (Matthew 7:3-5).

A. The truth is that we often have a tendency to see other people's sin much more clearly than we see our own.

1. **But Jesus says… (Read vs. 3-4)**
2. **Jesus uses an absurd example to demonstrate the absurdity of judging others when we have sin of our own that we need to deal with first.**
3. **Imagine you go into the eye doctor one day for your annual eye exam. And the eye doctor comes in and there's a plank of wood protruding from his eye. But he doesn't notice it. He greets you like he always does. He sits down. And he gets ready to begin the eye exam. Then all of a sudden, he says, "It looks like you have something in your eye. What's that in your eye?" What would you think? You'd be like, "Yeah, buddy, there might be something in my eye. But do you not notice the plank of wood protruding from your eye?"**
4. **Jesus says that when we judge others without first dealing with the sin in our hearts and lives, we are like that eye doctor with a plank of wood protruding from his eye trying to conduct an eye exam.**
5. **I wonder if you can think of a biblical example of this kind of thing. An example in the Bible of someone trying to deal with someone else's sin when they should have been much more concerned with their own sin.**

   a. **What about David? Do you remember what happened with David? We studied it not too long ago in our sermon series through 2 Samuel. David sinned grievously against Bathsheba, her husband Uriah, and ultimately and most importantly the Lord. He sinned against Bathsheba sexually. And then he had her husband Uriah killed so that he could cover his sin and take Bathsheba as his wife. And we might have thought that David would get away with this grievous sin. After all, he was the king.**
   b. **But then came Nathan the prophet who told David a parable, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his**

morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him" (2 Sam. 12:1-4).

c. The Bible says that "David's anger was greatly kindled against the man." He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (2 Sam. 12:5-6).

d. David had the big old plank of adultery and murder protruding from his eye, yet he wanted to address the speck of stealing a lamb in someone else's eye.

e. Nathan the prophet said to David, "You are the man!"

6. The point is this, Goshen. We cannot begin to address the sin in the lives of others if we're not first willing to address the sin in our own hearts and lives.

B. In fact, Jesus says that seeking to address sin in the lives of other people without first addressing your own sin makes you a hypocrite.

1. Look at verse 5. (Read vs. 5)

2. Let's be very clear this morning. Jesus is not saying that sin is not a big deal. He is not saying that Christians should turn a blind eye to sin. He's not saying that since we're all sinners, we should all just make ourselves comfortable with sin.

3. That is the message the world wants to take away from Jesus' words here. That is the message that Satan wants us to take away from Jesus' words here. We're all sinners, so what's the big deal?

4. No, sin is a big deal to God. So much so that He sent His own Son to die to pay for our sin. It was the only way for us as sinful men and women, boys and girls to be brought into a right relationship with a holy God. God is holy. God is just. He must punish sin. Sin is a big deal to God. And it should be a big deal to us.

5. But Goshen, we have to focus our attention on dealing with our own sin first. We have to remove the plank from our own eye.

6. Listen again to the words of David in Psalm 139 that were read for us in our Scripture reading this morning, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Ps. 139:23-24). David learned through his interaction with Nathan to examine himself and deal with his own sin first. We need to learn this lesson too.

7. And then we will see clearly to help one another as we fight against sin together. The other text that was read for us during our Scripture reading was 1 Corinthians 5. There Paul is dealing with sin in the Corinthian church. Serious sexual immorality. And the church was turning a blind eye to it. See, there's a danger that we misapply what Jesus says here in Matthew 7. That we think we can never deal with sin because we're all sinners. But Jesus and Paul both teach that we must deal with sin. First in our own lives. And then among God's people in the church.

8. Sometimes as Christians we like to judge those outside the church. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside" (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

9. We have a tendency to get the order all wrong. We want to judge those outside the church first. Then maybe we'll judge those inside the church. And somehow, we never get around to judging ourselves. When Jesus says that we are to start with ourselves.

Followers of Jesus reject judgmentalism. Followers of Jesus practice self-examination. And finally…

III. Followers of Jesus exercise discernment (Matthew 7:6).

Look at verse 6. (Read vs. 6)

A. Jesus is teaching here a kind of judgment.

1. **Discernment. The kind of judgment that allows you to see clearly something that isn't otherwise clear.**
2. **Dogs here are not cute, lovable pets like my goldendoodle Eliza who looks like a big teddy bear. Dogs in Jesus' day often lived in wild packs and roamed the streets. They were scavengers, even sometimes vicious and dangerous.**
3. **Pigs, of course, were unclean according to the Old Testament ceremonial law.**
4. **So, Jesus uses dogs and pigs to refer to wicked people who will despise and mock the Christian message (Quarles, 292).**
5. **And Jesus says… (Read vs. 6)**
6. **Sinclair Ferguson says that this certainly applies to the disciples' work in evangelism. He writes, "The whole world is to be the sphere of the church's outreach (Matt. 28:18-20). There is to be universal preaching of the kingdom of God. Men and women everywhere must be urged to repent and believe the gospel. But that is not a command to engage mindlessly in evangelism. There are those who obviously and stubbornly reject the gospel. They trample the pearls of the message like pigs, Jesus says, and may then do the same to you. You must be sensitive to that kind of response, and recognize the indications that the time has come to offer the gospel to others elsewhere (Ferguson, 134).**
7. **In fact, this is exactly what we see in the ministry of the disciples during Jesus' lifetime. In Matthew 10, Jesus sent the disciples out to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. And then He instructed them, "And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town" (Matt. 10:11-15).**
8. **This requires wisdom. It requires discernment. The ability to make the right judgment as we take forth the message of the gospel.**
9. **We see this same thing in the ministry of the apostles and the early church. In Acts 13 we read, "The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles'" (Acts 13:44-46). Paul and Barnabas were willing to recognize places where further ministry would be unfruitful because of the hardness of the people's hearts to the message of the gospel.**

B. I wonder if you can think of some helpful application to Jesus' teaching here in verse 6.

1. **Maybe you are in a situation with a family member or friend or coworker who doesn't know the Lord and is perhaps even hostile to the faith. You can certainly keep trying to pound them with the gospel. But that's probably not going to be very effective. They'll just trample the message and perhaps even attack you. Maybe you have to trust that person in the Lord's hands. Pray for them. Don't give up on them. But don't throw your pearls before pigs. Don't give dogs what is holy.**

2. **What about social media? I'm sure you have friends on social media who are not Christians. Perhaps some of them are even hostile to your faith. You don't have to constantly keep creating conflict with them by what you post or by engaging them in back-and-forth arguments. This takes a tremendous amount of wisdom. And I certainly don't claim to have all the answers. But it's okay sometimes to choose peace over speaking your piece. Or typing your piece. Sometimes speaking the truth on social media looks a lot like giving dogs what is holy or casting your pearls before pigs.**

Conclusion: We've seen that followers of Jesus reject judgmentalism. Followers of Jesus practice self-examination. And followers of Jesus exercise discernment.

As a follower of Jesus, I want to be rock-solid in my commitment to the Lord and His Word. I don't want to give even an inch on the things that God says in the Bible.

But I don't want to be judgmental of other people. I want to examine my own heart first. I want to deal with the sin I find in my own life first.

And I want to encourage you to do the same, Goshen. Search your heart. Examine your life. Confess your sin to God. Turn from it. Seek His forgiveness.

Because if you confess your sin, He is faithful and just to forgive you of your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.