

MAKING FIRST THINGS FIRST

WEEK 2 – ATTITUDES (Text: Matthew 7:1-5)

Last week I began our journey through discovering some of the **First Things** Jesus taught through the **Book of Matthew**. We began with the words of Jesus that said:

|| *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*
(Matthew 6:33 NIV)

My objective was to challenge us to consider the **PRIORITIES** of our lives measured against this **First Thing** statement of Jesus (i.e. seeking first His Kingdom). Possibly this week you’ve recognised something that really should be of **secondary importance** which has been occupying the **throne of your life** and you realise it has been unable to **carry the weight of that position**. Maybe you’ve needed to rearrange, even dethrone some things and **re-prioritise** First Things back into their rightful position. Well done!

This week I want to move on to the **second of Jesus’ First Things** found in **Matthew 7:1-5**.

Jesus is speaking to us through these verses about our **ATTITUDES** using a common trait we’ll all easily recognise!

Let me read to you from two (2) different versions/translations:

|| *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. “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, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 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.”* (Matthew 7:1-5 NIV - underline added)

“Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It’s easy to see a smudge on your neighbour’s face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, ‘Let me wash your face for you,’ when your own face is distorted by contempt? It’s this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbour.” (Matthew 7:1-5 The Message)

|| Jesus is giving us **Kingdom keys** to living life victoriously by highlighting a **common behavioural trait** and its **negative outcomes** whilst offering a **lasting attitudinal solution**. Last week he told us to ensure we have the **right priorities** carry the weight of the things we will build upon them throughout our lifetime. Today, he is giving us another **First Thing** that will allow us to **live those priorities** through right **ATTITUDES**.

So he chooses to use something that we all find ourselves guilty – **inappropriately judging others** which he warns will become the measure by which we will be judged.

[Personal examples]

- Dr Bishara Awad – Bethlehem Bible College president, West Bank, Palestine
- Betel Spain – My first experience living in a community of drug addicts

Passing judgement is when we write someone off. When we come to a conclusion, or make a critical pronouncement, or a verdict, that says: **I’m done with you, you’re worthless**. We seem to forget that people make mistakes. Most people aren’t going to remain suspended in their mistakes and be like that for the rest of their lives.

They can still change. **But when we judge them, we pass a sentence on them before its time.** There is only one person that can judge them and it's not you or me!

Jesus **isn't** saying that all judgement is wrong. In fact he, along with other biblical passages, instructs us **to judge** and **how to judge** others (ref: 1 Corinthians 5:3-5; 12-23; Matthew 7:6; 15-20; 18:15-18; 1 John 4:1-6). This specific **First Thing** key is given to us to ensure the **attitude** of our judgement is coming from a **spirit of discernment** and not a **spirit of criticism**.

When we judge someone **critically or harshly**, we are **attitudinally** condemning or censoring them. Often that criticism is coming directly out of our own **un-yielded prejudices**, or a habitual **fault finding attitude**, or even a **critical spirit** that is simply focused on announcing the flaws seen in others. That was the attitude Jesus was focused on addressing because he recognises the **toxicity** it will produce throughout our lives.

Jesus gives a **rare public qualification** in his presentation on this topic where he qualifies the difference between a **spirit of criticism** (judgementalism) and a **spirit of discernment** (wise observation and obedience). He says at the conclusion of this topic:

The **King James Version** says *"...don't cast your pearls before swine"* (Matthew 7:6)

As followers of Christ we are meant to emanate the qualities of heaven by being loving, forgiving, gracious, merciful and also slow to judge. Jesus' qualification on this issue comes as a clarification on **discerning the reception** of heaven's grace. Don't keep giving the food of the King's table to those who continually spit in your face. With the same qualities of heaven, understand when it's time to move on from those people. Don't cast your pearls before swine.

If I connect what we spoke about last week on ensuring our **PRIORITIES** are capable of **carrying the weight** of what will be built upon them – where we have the correct things seated on the throne of our lives – then we need to have the right **ATTITUDE** keeping them there!

Allowing a **spirit of discernment** to lead you on and not succumb to a **spirit of criticism**.

A pastor friend of mine created a **weight loss program** specifically for his congregation when he was trying to shift the level of criticism and grumbling he was hearing amongst them. He invited them to join a class he was calling **|| "Jumping to Conclusions"**. The exercises guaranteed to help them **count the calories** they were using up when they participated. **||** The list included:

- Jumping to conclusions..... 400 calories
- Passing the buck..... 200 calories
- Making mountains out of mole hills 150 calories
- Adding fuel to the fire 150 calories
- Opening a can of worms 150 calories
- Putting your foot in your mouth 300 calories
- Flying off the handle 500 calories

Ridiculous? Probably. But even Jesus used a **ridiculous example** to bring home the importance of this **Kingdom key**. When we judge another person **inappropriately** we always do so from a **warped perspective**. He uses a humorous image of a person attempting to remove a splinter from another person's eye whilst he himself has a lump of 4"x2" sticking out of his own eye! Jesus says:

|| "...**first** take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:5 NIV Bold added)

If we want to keep the **right priorities** on the throne of our lives then we need to ensure we work on the **attitudes that keep them there**. Jesus' **First Thing** statement says we need to:

1. || Start with yourself

Judgement begins with ourselves. The Bible says we are to **examine and test our faith** to ensure it is in line with the **Christ that lives within us** (ref: 2 Corinthians 13:5). Our humanity would have us prefer judging the actions and activities of others rather than looking **first** at ourselves. When we do, we often find it easier to find something to **blame** for our behaviour rather than allowing the **Holy Spirit** to help us examine and test our own hearts (before we try and help someone else).

Blame is a **variant** of judgment. Blame **ultimately robs you** of your ability to change. And my **ATTITUDE** in this is ultimately going to flavour every other part of my life.

Jesus says "...**first**" start with your own eye, your own heart, your own issues, your own attitude. Through the working out of those things in your life, you begin to increase your **level of discernment** (because you've been through it) and the "log" in your eye is **diminished** so that you are able to "see" more clearly.

How can we **practice** that each day?

2. || Practice obedience

Every one of us will be faced with an opportunity to **critically judge** or **wisely discern** something over this coming week. I want to give you a **simple formulae** to consider using as you face that inevitable moment.

Our **objective** is to **practice correct judgement** with the **right attitude**. Gaining a discerning spirit. Here's the progression:

|| The situation → Ponder → Wise Judgement → Obedience = Correct Judgement

There are going to be **situations** that you come to in life where you have to decide what to do. What do you do first? **Ponder**. What does it mean to ponder? It is thinking through the situation before deciding to do anything; thinking through a situation and **mixing with your faith** – that is pondering. After pondering comes **wise judgement**. With faith, you ponder the situation before deciding what to do. In the end, you become **obedient** to God's desire for your path towards correct judgement.

Because the alternative looks like this:

|| Temptation → Consideration → Sin = Incorrect Judgement

For example: **Satan tempted Eve** in the Garden of Eden. Then she **considered** while deciding her response. Enticed, seduced, she fell into **sin**. The more she thought about it (considered eating the fruit) the closer she **moved towards** sinning, until she finally did.

3. || Develop a positive attitude

We all face situations and temptations on a regular basis. They will continue [sorry]. But can we come to a place where we **trust Jesus enough** to care for our lives that we can have an **ATTITUDE** like The Apostle Paul who shows us when he says:

|| *“We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NLT)*

A critical, judgemental heart often **reveals a person who is afraid to trust God**. Imagine the ending of each of these observations by Paul if he was someone who **didn't** trust Jesus enough to care for him?

If we want to develop a **positive attitude** we need to **change our thinking**. We need to deal with the “log” in our own eye first. Scripture tell us:

*“Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by **changing the way you think**. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12:2 NLT Bold added)*

*“**Fix your thoughts** on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. **Think about things** that are excellent and worthy of praise.” (Philippians 4:8 NLT Bold added)*

|| *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13 NKJV)*

|| Closing thoughts

Jesus understood that our **ATTITUDE** would be seen through our actions. He chose to use the common human practice of **judging others** to help us recognise just how susceptible we all are to this kind of behaviour.

None of us really wants to be a faultfinder, a cynic or negative. We want to be known as positive people, with a positive faith and Christ-like nature. We want the Kingdom **PRIORITIES** seated on the throne of our lives to be **properly affected** by the right **ATTITUDES** that will keep them there.

Make a commitment today to allow the **Holy Spirit** to guide, guard and direct your thoughts when that next moment comes when you are asked to make a choice whether to be judgemental or to practice a spirit of discernment.