

ST. MATTHEW PRESENTS THE CHRIST

HOME STUDY: TUESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2023

INTRODUCTION

It's been said that the act of judging others is our "favorite sin." There is some truth in that statement. Some of us are experts at judging others in the world around us. We wonder why others can't be more like us. We judge them for their shortcomings and failures, or even for the way they look or dress or talk. We judge others for their weaknesses while we ourselves are often guilty of doing the same things. The speck in someone else's eye that Jesus talks about is often so obvious to us.

TODAY'S READING

In your Bible, read Matthew 7:1-6. As you are reading this section, make a note of any items that surprise you, or jump out at you in some way.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is addressing our relationship with fellow members of the family of God. We know this because of Jesus' consistent use of the word "brother." He wants his people to look inwards before they look at the people around them. This isn't to say that the disciples are never to make moral judgments about the actions of others. Rather, Jesus condemns a harsh and censorious attitude toward others. What does it mean to judge others?

Starting in verse 1, and continuing throughout the whole section, Jesus uses the word "judge." The word often carries the connotation "condemn," and it is in that sense that he uses it here. In verses 1 & 2, Jesus confronts this critical attitude of judgment. He explains that such an attitude can at least be expected to be judged with equal harshness by other men or women. What does it mean "or you too will be judged?" By whom?

We tend to be quick to judge others. We all do it. Deep down we know how broken and sinful we are; and we resort to judging others in order to hoist ourselves up over other people in a moral sense. We want to make sure we are better than others in any way. We do it all the time, and at times it is almost a reflex. That is why Jesus' words in verses 1-5 are *urgent* words.

Notice how he shifts from speaking about the world as a whole in verses 1-2, to speaking specifically about our relationship with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in the following verses.

In verses 3 & 4, Jesus uses an illustration drawn from a carpenter's workshop. Jesus affirms that our fellow believers do in fact have faults. He compares these faults to a "speck" in a person's eye. Then he says that we have a "log" in our own eye. Ouch! What do the speck and the log represent?

Jesus isn't speaking in this section about our general sins, or general faults. He's zeroing in on those moral judgments that we tend to make. He's speaking of a moral perception which may be slightly wrong in one person, and totally wrong in the other.

This is where Jesus continues on to accuse his listeners of hypocrisy. In verse 5, “hypocrite” is applied to a disciple (in general) rather than to Jesus’ Jewish opponents, like the Pharisees. The hypocrite’s error is not in his diagnosis, but in his failure to apply to himself the criticism he so meticulously applies to his brother or sister. But Jesus goes deeper than that. He asks us to clear our own eyes and judgment before we try to lend a hand to another Christian in making some correction in their judgment and faults. How can we avoid being a hypocrite? This teaching will make every believer not only *humble* when approaching another Christian, but also very *slow* to do so.

Jesus’ teaching in verse 1-5 is pretty clear. But this clarity comes to a screeching halt in verse 6. Jesus says, “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.” It might not seem like verse 6 is linked to the message in verses 1-5, but it still is. The “holy thing” and the “pearls” represent other disciples of Jesus. To condemn and reject a fellow Christian unjustly is like giving something holy to be mistreated by dogs. To try to deal with the “speck” of sin in the life of your Christian sister or brother when your own sins are overwhelmingly huge is like hurling pearls before filthy pigs so that they will be trampled and you might end up being trampled as well!

So, in our own lives, we must be careful to judge and condemn other Christians. It is dangerous to be the one playing God and rejecting a fellow believer or group of believers. It’s dangerous for them and us. God is the judge, and judgment is his. How does the knowledge that God is the Judge change the way you see him? Is he just a loving, forgiving, tolerant Being? Is it easy to perceive God as both Father and Judge?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, my/our Teacher and Savior, thank you for the countless ways you have changed my/our lives. Thank you for teaching me/us how to be better disciples and stewards of your Kingdom and Word. Thank you for your death on the cross centuries ago. Continue to work in us through your Spirit to help us lead a godly life and to help others lead one as well. In your name we pray. Amen.