

**“Logjam”**  
**Series: Kingdom Culture ~ The Sermon on the Mount**  
**Matthew 7:1-6 and others**  
**August 9, 2009**

I asked you a few weeks ago what you do when you encounter someone on the street who asks you for money. A homeless person, perhaps, or just someone asking for help. Today I want to ask you what you *think* when you encounter this kind of person. Probably lots of different thoughts go through your head. And since I don't want to put thoughts in *your* heads, I'll just be real honest about what goes through mine. I hate to admit it, but very often, I immediately make a judgment about the person. I think that they probably caused their own problem. I think they probably have a drinking problem or a drug problem that has left them on the street. I assume they are unwilling to work, or if they are unable to work, it's because of some bad or wrong choices they have made. What do you think in that split second you have to decide? What judgment do you make in that moment you have to decide about whether or not to give them money or help them in some way?

Today we come to what might be the best-known part of the SOM, maybe the most quoted of all of Jesus' teaching. Matt. 7:1-6. “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” Now this command of Jesus is so often misunderstood and misapplied that I think we need to begin today with what this *doesn't* mean. First of all, “Do not judge,” does not mean we should never make judgments about anything, decide between right and wrong. It does not mean that we should turn a blind eye to fault and sin or that it's somehow bad or wrong to discern between what is true or false, good or evil. Jesus is *not* saying, “Anything and everything goes. Who are you to judge?” Jesus is not saying that. In fact, if we were to believe that, “Judge not,” meant that we were never to make judgments of any kind, we would not even be able to obey Jesus' other teaching in the SOM.

For example, earlier in the Sermon, Jesus tells those who want to follow Him, those who want to experience the Kingdom culture He describes, He tells them that they must be more “righteous” – more right in their behavior and attitudes toward God and people – than even the Pharisees, who were *legendary* for their righteousness. But how could one do that without making a judgment? You can't set out to be more righteous than someone else unless you first make a determination about how righteous they are. You have to judge the level of their righteousness in order to determine how to exceed it.

“Judge not,” Jesus says, but then a bit later in chapter 7 of Matthew, He says, “Watch out for false prophets.” How can we do that without judging? Without determining that someone is a false prophet rather than a true one, how can you ‘watch out’ for them? Throughout the gospels, Jesus Himself constantly judged the Pharisees – called them “hypocrites.” A brood of vipers. That sounds pretty judgmental to me. Does Jesus contradict His own teaching? No. “Judge not” does not mean that we are never to discriminate between right and wrong, true and false. “Do not judge” does not mean we are not to evaluate people and situations. That would just be silly. And it would contradict a lot of Scripture. In fact, in Matthew 18, Jesus says this: Matt. 18:15-17.

Sounds rather, well, *judgmental*, doesn't it? We do not observe this kind of accountability in the church, even though Jesus commands it. In fact, if we dare to suggest to someone that their behavior is "sinful," or even just dangerous, bad, or wrong, we will very often find ourselves on the receiving end of Matthew 7:1: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." That's mostly when we hear this verse quoted, isn't it? When someone else thinks you're judging them or they don't like the judgment you've made. It's a defensive thing. We use it to defend ourselves against someone else's judgment of our behavior or beliefs or attitudes.

But in Gal. 6:1, Paul writes this: "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." Clearly, in order to "catch someone in a sin," we are going to have to make a judgment about what constitutes sin. Even v. 6 shows that judgments are necessary: Matt. 7:6.

At first, this verse seems rather abrupt and out of place. But really, it is a corrective to the idea that "Do not judge," means "Anything goes." "Dogs" and "pigs" are those who have deliberately rejected the ways of God. Jesus says here that His followers are not to continue to share the precious pearl of spiritual truth with those who are unable or unwilling to see its value. In order to obey Jesus here, you're going to have to make a judgment about a person and their spiritual condition. When He sends out His disciples to preach and to heal, Jesus tells them that if people do not accept them, do not accept what they preach, they are to shake the dust off their sandals and move on. If we are going to obey the clear teaching of Scripture, we are going to have to judge.

So what *does* Jesus mean when He commands: "Do not judge"? That becomes clear in the humorous illustration Jesus gives: v. 3. The picture here is ridiculous. Your brother or sister – a fellow church member – has this teeny tiny speck of sawdust in their eye. And so, being the helpful sort of person you are, you hasten to help them to get the painful and potentially harmful speck out. There's just one problem: You have a 2x4 sticking out of your own eye! Which makes it exceedingly difficult for you to see well enough to help your friend. Can you picture it? Jesus is pointing to our human tendency to see the faults of others while ignoring our own.

What Jesus is condemning here is a certain kind of attitude, an attitude of self-righteousness, a feeling of superiority that says we are right while others are not. A harsh and hypocritical spirit that seeks to condemn and denigrate. An attitude that holds others in contempt, puts others down, never ready to excuse or exercise mercy, but always looking to find fault. Perhaps the best picture of this is in the parable Jesus tells about the Pharisee and the tax collector in the Temple. The Pharisee judged Himself to be the "righteous" one of the two. He believed that his prayer and his religious activity "justified" him before God – made him right in God's sight. He had a great plank in his eye. And he was blind to that fact. In fact, those listening to the parable would have made the same judgment: they would have thought the Pharisee to be the righteous one, not the dirty, cheating tax collector. The tax collector had a speck in his own eye. But at least he knew it: "God have mercy on me, a sinner," was his prayer.

What Jesus is really saying with his sarcastic illustration of the speck and the plank is that we shouldn't judge because we are actually not capable of judgment at all. We are not really concerned with righteousness and true judgment at all. Because if we were, we would deal with

it first in ourselves. So often when we judge, we are not really concerned about helping the other person; we are interested only in condemning them. We very often condemn others for their faults while ignoring or denying or excusing our own. This is what Jesus is condemning here: hypocrisy.

What we need is this: to be as critical of ourselves as we are of others, and as generous with others as we are with ourselves. What we need is this: brutal honesty with regard to ourselves and our “planks,” and gentle mercy with regard to others and their “specks.”

When I look at that homeless person asking me for money, I’m ashamed to say that my first response is not usually to feel sorry for him. I do not feel merciful towards him. I do not first seek to understand his situation or circumstance. I make the assumption – the judgment – that he has gotten himself into his own mess. I make the assumption that he will take the money I give him and spend it on alcohol or drugs. We very often make this mistake with people. We impute motives to people when we really don’t know what’s in their heart. And we don’t only do it with homeless people asking for money. Have you ever done that? Assumed you knew why somebody said something or did something when you really didn’t? Have you ever assumed (made the judgment) that someone was putting you down or doing something intentionally to hurt you and then found out that was not their motive or intention at all?

I think this happens a lot between people, and unfortunately, it even happens between brothers and sisters in the church. Listen: Let’s make a deal today, okay? If we are going to judge one another’s motives and intentions in the church, can we just agree to begin by believing the best of our brothers and sisters? Can we just start by believing that their motives and intentions are good? By extending grace to them, rather than assuming the worst? Do you think that would save a lot of hurt and anger between people? You see, the command to “judge not” is not a requirement to be blind. It’s a plea to be generous. Gracious.

Often in the Scripture, we’re encouraged to “bear with” people. In our preparation Scripture: Romans 15:1, 2, 5. Paul wrote often to the church about unity. Eph. 4:2-3. Qualities such as these produce unity in the church: Humility, gentleness, patience. Bearing with one another. Unity rather than division and dissention, criticism and condemnation. Col 3:13-14.

You see, love is the opposite of judgment. The opposite of judgment is not live and let live, it’s not anything goes. The opposite of judging is love. There are four different Greek words for love, but the one Paul uses here is *agape*. It’s the word he defines and describes so beautifully and powerfully for us in his first letter to the church at Corinth. We usually hear this passage read at weddings. But this is not a description of the love between a husband and wife. This is a description of love between followers of Jesus. Between members of the church. 1 Cor. 13:4-7. This is how we are supposed to love each other, church: patiently, kindly. Not envying one another, not boasting about our own accomplishments. Not proudly celebrating ourselves or seeking what we want. Love in the church, Paul says, is not rude and it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. That means no more keeping score of how many times someone has hurt you. No more keeping a list of someone else’s sins.

Listen: We are all – every one of us – sinners saved by grace. Every one of us. I’m fond of saying that if we kicked all the sinners out, there’d be nobody here on Sunday morning. What Jesus is saying here when He says, “Do not judge,” is this: “You may hate the sin, but you must love the sinner.” See, the problem is that when we judge another’s behavior, we are often judging *them*. We condemn and dismiss the *person*, not just their actions or beliefs. We do not judge only their sin, we judge *them*. And that is never our place. God is the only One who may judge and condemn people. Jesus cautions us not to judge because we will be judged in the same way we judge others. Jesus means here that, however we judge others, that is the same way God will judge us. Do you want to be judged by God with the same lack of mercy, grace, and love with which you judge others? I sure don’t.

Someone once shared this with me. It’s a gracious and gentle way to think about a person you might otherwise judge and criticize, and just write off with condemnation and contempt: “They’re walking in the only light they have.” Very often, this is really true of folks we judge and condemn. Now, this is not to excuse or justify or approve of willful rebellion against God. But it *is* to offer mercy, as God has so often offered mercy to us. It is to extend grace, as God so generously extended grace to us. It is to remember that we once walked in darkness, thinking it was light. It is to remember how often we have had huge wooden rafters in our eyes that blinded us to our own behavior but allowed us to judge others for theirs.

“They’re walking in the only light they have.” If this is true, our desire should not be to judge and condemn, but to let the Light that is truly light shine through us. How do we do that? Not by judging and condemning them. By loving them.

To stop judging, this is what we need – love. Because when we love someone, we are less interested in looking for the specks in their eyes. But the planks in our eyes create a logjam blocking the flow of God’s love – both into our lives and especially through us to others. If we are going to love the way Paul describes, we will need to begin by breaking up the logjam of judgmentalism and hypocrisy, of hypercriticism and condemnation by first being willing to honestly judge and condemn ourselves. In order to break this logjam, we need to become so humble and conscious of our own sin and our own unworthiness, that when we find it in another, rather than condemning and judging them, we feel like weeping for them. Rather than criticizing and holding them in contempt, we feel heart-broken and compassionate toward them.

If this is something you struggle with, here’s one way to overcome the tendency to judge and criticize others: Read 1 Cor. 13 every day. Examine your attitudes and behavior towards other people in comparison to what Paul describes. Face the truth about yourself. Recognize the “planks” you may have in your eye, acknowledge the logjam of judgment and condemnation that stops the flow of God’s love both *to* you and *through* you. And ask Jesus to take your planks away. Jesus is the only One who can remove the plank in your eye, because He has nothing in His eyes to get in the way of seeing to remove yours.

Those eyes that saw you and saw me, even as He hung on the cross – that cross on which He suffered and died, made from the planks He removed from our eyes – those eyes have nothing in them but love for you, and for me. Love – not a speck of judgment. Love – not a log of criticism or condemnation. Jesus’ eyes are filled with love. And so must ours be.