

Matthew 7:1-12

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[0 : 00] Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7, the passage that was read for us. We'll look together at verses 1 to 12. The endless cycle of idea and action, endless invention, endless experiment, brings knowledge of motion but not of stillness, knowledge of speech but not of silence, knowledge of words and ignorance of the Word.

Where is the life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

T.S. Eliot writing in 1934 in a play called *The Rock* questioning whether the advances in technology and communication that he saw going on around him in 1934 were actually improving things.

And here we are, the best part of a hundred years later, the best part of a century since those words were written and these questions sound more reasonable than ever.

We have access to facts about just about everything with a click. But are we any wiser? I doubt it.

[1 : 28] We may have more knowledge but do we know how to live well in the world? Have the technological advances, the progress of society made us better people?

Kinder friends, better husbands and wives, more thoughtful parents, more selfless citizens? Probably not.

Stronger marriages, better families, healthier communities because of all of this information that we have at a click? No. That's not what we see around us.

I don't need to code the statistics. We know it's the case. Having knowledge as a thing in itself doesn't lead people inevitably to live well.

You will know of terribly smart people who may indeed be terrible people and make terribly foolish decisions with their lives.

[2 : 24] What we need to live well in the world is wisdom. That's why Eliot asked the question, where is the wisdom that we have lost in knowledge?

When you come across someone who is wise, there's a quality about them that is profoundly attractive. They usually have a poise. They know how to handle tricky situations.

They know how to deal with that complicated person or answer that perplexing question. And they come into their own, don't they, wise people, when there are no clear yes or no answers.

When there's no rule book to follow. And that is why wise people usually aren't young. Wisdom comes with experience. The Bible expects us to honor older people because they are usually, not always, but usually, the source of this invaluable but somewhat elusive good, wisdom.

So why do I say all of that? Well, I want us to think about our passage this evening through the lens of wisdom. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been holding out this vision of the good life, the way of human flourishing.

[3 : 29] He's been laying down the principles. He's been establishing a vision of what it means to live the blessed life, the life of the kingdom, the life that we should live as those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what we found is that it's a life that is actually shot through with wisdom. So Jesus' followers don't just not murder people, they root out anger from their heart.

They don't just not cheat on their spouse, they deal with the root cause of lust. In each case, they take away the desire at source. Very wise.

We saw last week that when it comes to the Christians' engagement with the world around them, they don't run after the world's treasure. They don't calibrate their joy and happiness to the things that the world calibrates its joy and happiness to.

Why? Because that kind of materialism, Jesus was very clear, ultimately leads to anxiety. So we don't do that so that we don't end up anxious. Again, very wise.

[4 : 28] To embrace the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, I hope we've been able to see as we've gone through it over these Sunday evenings, is to embrace wisdom for life. It is to embrace a vision for life that helps us to live well and wisely in the world that God has made.

But this evening, we see that there is a specific need for wisdom in the regular run of life for Christians. Because did you notice Jesus presents us with two competing commands?

Verse 1, Jesus says, judge not that you be not judged. And then verse 6, he asks us to make a judgment about who we do and don't give the holy perils of the gospel to.

Do you see that? Judge not that you be not judged, verse 1. Verse 6, essentially he's saying, make the right judgment. To get this right, we need wisdom.

So how does this work? Well, what I want to do is look first at the substance of the two commands and then we'll see how we can get the wisdom that we need. Sometimes I have two point sermons, sometimes three, sometimes one.

[5 : 34] Tonight it's four. Four points. The first command is one of the best known phrases in the sermon. Judge not that you be not judged. Now far and wide from the river to the ends of the earth, this verse is used as Jesus' validation for mind your own business.

Isn't it? A mind your own business approach to life. I can do whatever I want and I can say if I say the words from Jesus' lips, judge not. You're not allowed to say anymore.

Well that's not what he's saying. But they are strong words. So what is he saying? Point number one, he's saying don't judge unfairly. Don't judge unfairly.

Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged. And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Now we know that Jesus isn't ruling out all kinds of critique or judgment because as I've said, verse 6, his hearers have to judge who is a dog and who is a pig.

We'll come to that in a moment. For you to read on, verse 15, they're told to judge who is a false prophet and who is a true one. And this is the task that's given to the church in Matthew 18 as we're expected to judge whether or not someone's profession of faith is credible.

[6 : 49] What Jesus is referring to is speaking about others in the church. Do you notice? Verses 3 to 5, the reference to brother.

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye? Or how can you say to your brother? This is our attitude to people in the church. He's saying don't have this attitude towards people in the church as if you have the authority to condemn them.

What he's doing is forbidding the attitude that puts us as individuals in the judgment seat that belongs only to God. Now, what we realize is he's continuing to press the point that we've been actually considering for a while in the sermon.

So the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's Prayer. And do you remember that world-changing reality that opens the whole Lord's Prayer? Those words, our Father in heaven. The Christian lives under the fatherly care of God. We can call him our Father and therefore we receive all of the love and protection and care that a Father gives.

[8 : 00] And not only any Father but our Heavenly Father. Our Father who has all power and authority and majesty. So we have, we saw back in chapter 6 verse 15, his forgiveness.

And we have his provision, we saw last week. What that means is we are completely in right standing with God and he will meet all of our needs.

If you know that God is your Father entirely by grace, so you've done nothing to earn that. You've done nothing to earn the forgiveness. It was purchased for you through Christ's death and resurrection.

You've done nothing to earn the provision. It all just flows from God's Fatherly generosity. Well, if you know that, what happens? You rest in his acceptance and love.

That's what we've been seeing. When you know that your salvation is completely undeserved, you rest in your Father's acceptance and love and you don't look down on others.

[9 : 05] You did nothing to achieve it yourself. Therefore you're no better than anyone else. However, if you are insecure about your Father's love, well, you've got to outdo others.

You've got to outperform them so that this love you can earn it. Of course, one of the ways that we do that is by cutting other people down.

One of the ways that you can outdo people is outperform them. The other way that you can outdo them is criticize them and tear them down. I noticed that you did this or that.

You shouldn't do that. That's pretty bad. You should probably consider whether or not you're a Christian, actually.

Or worse, you say to someone else, John did this, you know, don't you? Which means he had this motive in his heart.

[10:07] Probably a sign he's not converted. Insecure people are critical people. And vice versa. Critical people are critical because they're insecure.

They judge others as a way of saying, at least I'm better than them. Well Jesus explains that this is both unwise and unfair.

First of all, it's unwise because verse 2, can you see, if you insist on treating others with this kind of graceless pride, God will apply the same metric to you when he comes to judge.

For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged. And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. That's the way that you want to treat other people.

That's the way God will treat you in the end. He will pour over your life in the same unforgiving way. None of us want that, just to be clear.

[11:07] None of us want that. It's unwise, but it's also unfair because it's hypocritical. Verse 3, why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye when there's a log in your own eye, you hypocrite? First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Now those are well-known verses, and we could park here and we could have a sermon on the sin of hypocrisy, but Jesus is talking about the specific kind of hypocrisy.

The kind of hypocrisy that judges other people's sin, that writes them off before God because of something they've said or done, despite the fact that we are equally sinful. And in order to get our attention, Jesus describes it in absurd terms.

You're like somebody walking around with a huge plank jammed in your eye, picking up people about the great evil of sawdust in theirs. You've got a tree, you've got a massive tree sticking out of your eye.

Every room you walk into, that tree goes in ahead of you. And yet you spend your time going around saying, I need to turn this way, sorry.

[12:20] I think there's a bit of sawdust in there. Can I just speak to you about that? That's very, very wicked. Jesus has been hot on the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the day all the way through.

Those who put on a religious performance, you remember, with their showy prayers and their fasting so that people can see and all that kind of fuss. And despite all of that, their hearts are far from God.

They're one person on the outside, they're another person on the inside. They speak against stealing while stealing themselves. They teach about love while exploiting others. It's rank hypocrisy. And Jesus says that this kind of judgmental spirit towards others is just as bad.

Condemning someone for their sin. Now, I've already said Jesus isn't talking about being uncritical and watching on any kind of behavior and saying, you know, well, you do you, that's fine.

Condemning someone for their sin in light of the sin in our own hearts.

It's like campaigning for free speech and then refusing to allow people who don't agree with you to be heard. It's like promoting family values while cheating on your spouse.

[13:32] It's that twisted. It's hypocrisy. It's unfair. Before we move on, I think it's worth saying that whilst this judgmental attitude is toxic and it's condemned by Jesus here, the idea that we should be involved in seeking to help and encourage one another to see our sin and repent of it in our lives, it's all over the New Testament.

Giving and receiving godly correction should be a normal part of healthy church life. You'll often hear it said Christianity isn't a self-help movement.

And that's right. We can't get right with God by our own moral or religious efforts. We get right with God only by the grace that he offers in the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, our growth in holiness depends on the involvement of others in our lives.

In that sense, Christianity, it's not a self-help movement, but it is a you-help movement. We need each other. We need each other to help us see our sin and to repent of it and to grow.

So let me say, if someone musters the courage to speak to you, we're not defensive. We don't think, well, how very dare you. We're open to correction.

[14 : 45] We can be open to correction, remember, because we are secure in our Father's love. Even if that person is wrong, even if they got their tone wrong in the way they sought to do it, they're well motivated but they got their tone wrong, it doesn't matter.

Because ultimately there's only one opinion that matters, and that is the Father's. And he is already clear that he loves us. We're secure in his love. So don't judge unfairly.

Don't judge unfairly. But then, verse 6, do judge discerningly. Judge discerningly. 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.

So, verse 1, it can't be a blanket ban on any kind of judgments because Jesus is calling for it here. He's describing how we should interact or not interact with those who are hostile to the things of God.

Dogs and pigs were terms that were used to describe those who were outside the people of God. They were pejorative language that was used in the culture to describe unclean Gentile people.

[15 : 54] So in this case, he has in view those who are stubbornly rejecting the gospel. He's taking the language that was used, and he's applying it to their language, and he's applying it to this group, and he's saying, don't give it to them.

Don't give them the gospel. Now, that's quite a thing to say. That's quite a thing to say, and it sounds alien to any evangelistically minded church culture.

Surely we should go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Surely we should proclaim Christ indiscriminately to all people. Yes, we should. And we should probably do it a lot more courageously than we do.

But just as when Jesus sent out his first apostles telling them that if people didn't receive the message, they should shake the dust off their feet as a sign of God's judgment on their hard hearts and move on to the next town.

So here he's saying we should be discerning about how and how often we hold out the gospel to those who persist in rejecting it. Those who disparage what we say.

[17 : 04] Those who cheapen what we're offering them. Sinclair Ferguson puts it like this. He says, men and women everywhere must be urged to repent and believe the gospel.

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 do the same to you.

You must be sensitive to that kind of response. You could say discerning. And recognize the indications that the time has come to offer the gospel to others elsewhere.

We don't stop evangelizing. We're discerning about who we give this beautiful message to. I've been thinking about this looks like and how this strange metaphor applies in my evangelism.

And I think that the sort of behavior that he has in mind is very common today in our culture. People just don't see the worth of the gospel that you're holding out to them.

[18 : 07] As far as they're concerned, there is no difference between the pearls that you are offering and the promises of the good life that the culture makes. You're offering them good news through Jesus Christ.

They hear the good news of the culture that says if you have this thing, or you choose to get to this level in life, or you go this direction, you'll be able to find happiness, joy, peace, and fulfillment.

No difference. They treat what you're saying as if it's just another way to find personal happiness that works for you. If that works for you, that's fine, but it's no more precious than the mindfulness that I use, for example.

We don't need to be reminded that our message, and even ourselves, will be rejected in our culture. We're seeing plenty of the sort of trembling that Jesus talks about here in our day, but we do need to be reminded to be discerning about how much we persist with people who see nothing special in the gospel, rejecting it and rejecting us.

The question is, how do we decide? How do we know? How do we know who to judge and who we don't? And when we persisted for long enough as somebody, there's no chapter or verse that answers those questions for us, which is where wisdom comes in.

[19 : 29] And that is why Jesus says what he says next. The wisdom we need comes only from God. So, don't judge unfairly. Two, judge discerningly.

Number three, in order to do that, we need to depend faithfully. Depend faithfully. Seven, ask and it will be given to you. Seven, seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? Here we have more verses that are often very badly handled.

Taken by prosperity preachers is a blanket promise that God will give you anything you want if you simply ask often enough, seek diligently enough, and knock hard enough. These verses are not talking about God giving you anything with the certain promise that he will give it to you.

[20 : 35] Sorry, that you can ask God for anything and the certain promise that he will give it to you. However, did you notice there is certainty in what he says?

Ask and it will be given. So what is he promising? Well, again, I think in the context of what Jesus has been saying, I think he's talking about wisdom. The wisdom that we need to not be hypocrites and to be discerning in our evangelism.

These are good things that our Father will give to us if we ask him. How else can we explain the certainty of the promise? Seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.

God is generous. It's the same thing that James says in James chapter 1. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. We can't navigate the path of wise discernment if we trust in our own abilities. But if we faithfully depend on our Father, if we ask, seek, and knock, he will give us the wisdom we ask for.

[21 : 47] And again, God's fatherly care here is what drives this. When we forget that God gives better gifts than evil fathers who know how to give great gifts in lots of ways, we start to trust in ourselves.

We start to depend on our own wisdom and make our own decisions about how to do life. We don't need to do that. That's a huge burden for us to have to carry. I've got to know how best to navigate this situation on the strength of what I kind of have managed to discern over how many years I've been alive to live in this world.

We don't need to do that. We have a generous Father who gives wisdom to any who come to him in faith without doubting his fatherly care.

When my children need something and they ask for it, I will give it to them, and I will probably give it to them, in the best version that I can actually manage.

I will. I do. And I'm selfish. And I'm wicked or evil, it says here. How much more will our perfect heavenly Father give us exactly what we need?

[22 : 58] So the way that we get the wisdom we need to avoid unfair judgments of others and to be equipped with the discernment we need for mission is to depend faithfully on our Father.

When that situation feels beyond us, let's go to him. Ask him for wisdom. When we just don't know what to do, what next step to take, go to him and ask for wisdom.

He promises to give it. When you're trying to navigate that difficult situation in the workplace, when there is pressure from different sides to compromise on your Christian faith, you don't have the ability to discern what's right and what's wrong.

You need to go to him. Ask, seek, and knock. He will give you wisdom. And when we depend faithfully on our Father, this in turn enables us to follow Christ's concluding instruction, which is that we must then go and love biblically.

Number three, depend faithfully, which enables us, number four, to love biblically. Verse 12. This is probably the conclusion, actually, to the wider section going all the way back to 5 verse 17, where the topic of the law and the prophets was introduced.

[24 : 25] As Jesus says, So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. It's the so-called golden rule, which we should actually see as a pregnant summary of the wisdom-saturated life of the kingdom.

As you would wish to be treated, so treat others. As you would wish to be treated in your interaction with other people, so treat others.

It doesn't come naturally, does it? When you think about the way that we do relationships, we have what we could, one example is what we could call the tin rule.

The tin rule. I will treat you the way you treat me. If you're nice to me, if you're kind to me, I'll be nice, I'll be kind back. If you're nasty, I'll be nasty back. Our culture actually broadly operates by that rule.

You think it's fair. You treat me a certain way, I'll treat you the same. Well then there is the silver rule, what we might call the silver rule.

[25 : 43] It's a bit better. I wouldn't do anything to you that I wouldn't want done to me. So I'll avoid wronging you. I'll, yeah, I'll just, I'll just not be bad to you.

It's better. It's not quite so transactional. The tin rule, the silver rule, Jesus demands more. He demands an approach that is driven by the other person.

If I was in their shoes, this is what we're asking, if I was in their shoes, how would I like to be treated? That's what I'll do. Jesus says, this is what it means to fulfill the teachings of the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, regarding our relationship.

It's actually what it means to love one another. And it's, when you stop to think about it, a simple vision for life.

One commentator has said, for Jesus, the word of God is not an impossible complex of rules and regulations placed on men's shoulders as a heavy burden. Rather, it is an outworking of this principle.

[26 : 55] Grasp this, and everything falls into place. Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. And, we grasp, it's not just that we grasp the idea, but, we grasp the posture, as we see.

See, you grasp this, he says, how do you do that? Well, it's not just that we grasp the idea, we grasp the whole kind of way of being, by resting, in our Father's love and provision.

You see, when, when we recognize, that in our Father's love and provision, we live in a place of security, that enables us to depend on him for the wisdom, that doesn't, simply help us to navigate the complexity of life in this world, but it's from there that, it also turns us into the kind of selfless, servant-hearted people, that embody the wholehearted righteousness, that Jesus calls for all the way through the sermon.

Kind of wholehearted righteousness, that is the embodiment of wisdom, the wholehearted righteousness that befits citizens of Christ's kingdom.

May God help us, let's pray.