

INTRODUCTION

Did you hear the funny story about a group of prison inmates who enjoyed humor? They only had one joke book in the prison, and they passed it around so many times, everyone had the jokes memorized. So instead of retelling each joke, they just gave each joke a number. They would sit around and one of the older inmates would say, "number 37" and everyone would think of the joke and just die laughing. Another man would say, "number 71" and they would just roll with laughter. A new inmate wanted to get in on the fun so he memorized the joke book. One day they were sitting around and one of the old inmates said, "number 12" and everyone erupted with laughter. Another one said, "number 45"—more laughter. The new inmate wanted to get in on it so he said, "number 52"—there was silence. No laughter. He said, "Why didn't you laugh at my joke?" An older inmate looked at him with impatience and said, "Some people can tell a good joke and some can't." Have you ever thought about Jesus' sense of humor?

What do you think Jesus was really like? Most of our impressions have been shaped by how artists have depicted Him over the last 2,000 years. The early Byzantine painters always portrayed Jesus with a very serious, solemn expression, and He and Mary always are surrounded by the ubiquitous halos. Even the examples of Madonna and Child, picture the baby Jesus with a serious adult face, holding up two fingers to make the sign of the cross. Later Romanesque and Renaissance artists often removed the halos, but still pictured Jesus as a thin, effeminate, serious, sad person. You seldom see any of the characters portrayed in Renaissance art smiling so you can see their teeth. Why? Well, most historical accounts tell us people had such bad teeth we wouldn't blame them for not showing them. Remember da Vinci's Mona Lisa? Art experts have debated the meaning of her enigmatic half-smile—it could be that she just had bad teeth!

I've examined art all over the world and I don't think I have ever seen a painting of Jesus where He is portrayed throwing His head back having a good laugh. Does God ever laugh? Psalm 2:4 says, "The One enthroned in heaven laughs;" Luke focuses on Jesus' humanity—so what kind of personality do you think He had? Jesus wasn't some clown who was constantly silly (as portrayed in *Godspell*), but I honestly believe He had a quick wit and a healthy sense of humor. I don't believe Jesus was some little pale-faced wimp who looked like He would jump if you said, "boo!" I believe He had broad shoulders and rough hands. He had the kind of friendly, outgoing personality that attracted common people to Him. This passage of scripture in Luke 6:39-42 is one of the best places to see His sense of humor.

Remember, this is His "sermon on the plain." It's much like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, but this account is shorter and different. Jesus has just given four universal principles in verses 37-38. (1) Don't judge and you won't be judged; (2) Don't condemn and you won't be condemned; (3) Forgive others and you'll be forgiven; and (4) Give and it shall be given to you. These four universal laws go much deeper than the surface. I preached on them on December 31. If you were away for the holidays, I suggest you get the tape.

Jesus immediately moves from those four laws to use parables to illustrate them. We will look at the first two of the three parables today. Luke 6:39-42, He told them this parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. 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, 'brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? Your hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

That's a good one, eh? Oh, so you've already heard the one about the log and the speck. Or it may be you folks just don't appreciate good Jewish humor. Most modern American humor consists of silly stories or jokes with an obvious punch line. Our humor is so superficial you don't have to think.

Jewish humor was always intellectually subtle; it didn't hit you straight in the face—it would sneak up on you. You had to think about it for a few minutes to appreciate it. Some of our jokes are like that. Here's a quick example: Did you hear the one about the atheistic dyslexic insomniac? He stayed up all night wondering if there really is a dog. You have to know what insomnia, dyslexia, and atheism is before you can chuckle at that joke.

To appreciate Jewish humor you must have a sharp wit. It often employs a play on words, like when Sarah laughed and so she was told to name her child "Isaac" which means "laughter." Can you imagine a 90-year-old woman taking care of a newborn? In the middle of changing a diaper, she probably often thought, "I'm not laughing now!"

The most popular kind of Jewish humor involved describing a ridiculous picture. Any kind of absurd description was considered humorous. One of the best examples Jesus' humor is when he said about the Pharisees, "They strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." That was funny!

THE PARABLE: THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND (39-40)

One use of the word "parable" was as a "proverb." By reading Proverbs you can see many of the proverbs reflect Jewish humor. Proverbs 11:22 says, "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion." What a funny picture!

In our culture it would be considered cruel to laugh at someone who had a handicap. But in Jewish humor, where, unfortunately, blindness was much more common, this is another example of an absurd situation. This didn't happen; Jesus just poses the question. Can you imagine two blind men? Neither of them knows the other one is blind and each one is seeking guidance from the other. And they end up sprawled in a ditch. This parable has survived into our popular vernacular and you often hear people talking about "the blind leading the blind." I heard one preacher comment most churches are so dull and boring it's more like "bland leading the bland!"

It reminds me of the funny story I heard about an airliner approaching an airport to land. The passengers had fastened their seatbelts, raised their tray tables, and returned their seat backs to the full upright position. The approach was rather bumpy and the plane seemed to be weaving a little, and then "Bam!" it hit the runway hard. It was a rough, but successful landing. Up in the cockpit, the pilot turned to the copilot and said, "That was the *worst* approach and landing you've ever made!" The co-pilot said, "Me? I thought you were landing the plane!" That's like the blind leading the blind!

Studying a parable is like peeling an onion. There are several layers of meaning that must be studied. There is the surface picture of the humorous scene of two blind men, but that's not the point. Let's peel off a couple of additional layers.

1. THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE: When someone follows the wrong teacher, they will end up in the ditch

Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount to only His disciples. But at this setting, many of those who opposed Him were present. Many of these scribes and Pharisees were teachers themselves, and they deeply resented this new rabbi in town. Jesus is warning his audience about the danger of following the wrong teacher—including some present company!

History is full of false teachers who have led others into the ditch. Jim Jones led almost a thousand people to Guyana where they drank poisoned Kool-Aid. David Koresh led an innocent group of people to a fiery death because they chose to follow his teachings. The Heaven's Gate cult resulted in dozens of gullible people committing suicide to go meet a spacecraft. In each situation, the blind were leading the blind—and the results were tragic.

Most people aren't gullible enough to follow those teachers. But many unsuspecting Americans are following another teaching equally as dangerous: The popular teaching of our immoral culture.

Our pop culture is teaching a message totally different than the one you hear when you read your Bible or when you come to church. You must decide which teacher you will follow. From every direction, movies, music, television, magazines bombard you with a certain teaching. This teaching often disagrees with what the Bible teaches. It's not a new teaching; it's been around since the Garden of Eden. Satan's first temptation was, "Can you *really* believe the Word of God?" Until we accept Christ, all of us are subject to this teaching. Ephesians 4:18 clearly describes the people who are still influenced by this teaching, "They are darkened [blinded] in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts." the next verse is a precise description of our American popular culture: "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." (Ephesians 4:19)

What a description of America in the 21st century! Why have we seen moral decline in our land? Because instead of listening to the Word of God, most of our people have swallowed this popular teaching that "anything goes." It's sad to say but the sick talk shows like Jerry Springer are reflections of just how blind our society has become to the truth of God.

If you choose to follow this popular teaching, it's like the blind leading the blind. And you won't just end up in the ditch—you may end up in hell! And there is certainly nothing humorous about that.

2. THE PERSONAL APPLICATION: You will become exactly like your primary teacher

In verse 40 Jesus makes a powerful observation. The good news is that you will become exactly like the teacher you listen to the most. The bad news is you will become exactly like the teacher you listen to the most. Whether you admit it or not, you always end up reflecting the philosophy and lifestyle of the one who becomes your primary, or main teacher. It may be your dad or mom. It may be a schoolteacher. It may be a friend. For most of us, we become a combination of several teachers. It may be someone you've never met. When I was studying about shock rocker Marilyn Manson a couple of years ago, I was amazed to discover the number of young teenagers who dressed like him and lived by his every word. They modeled their lives after him.

If you have surrendered to Jesus and you enthroned Him as Lord of your life, then you will study and obey His teachings. If He is your main teacher, you will become more like Jesus each day.

Some of you may be skeptical thinking, "I'm my own person! I think for myself. I'm independent. Nobody influences me. I make up my own mind. I'm not anybody's student." Look at the words from t Romans 6:16, "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

As a student, you are going to basically follow one of two lifestyle teachings: One is evil and came from the devil—it leads to death. The other is goodness and came from God—it leads to life eternal. Make no mistake about it; you will either be the slave (student) of sin, or of righteousness.

Bob Dylan once wrote and sang a song entitled, "Gotta Serve Somebody." The first verse goes:

You may be an ambassador to England or to France
You might like to gamble, or you might like to dance.
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world;
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls
But you're gonna have to serve somebody;
You're gonna have to serve somebody;
It may be the devil or it may the Lord;
But you gonna have to serve somebody."

That's what Jesus meant when He said, "No man can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other. You cannot serve God and the money." (Matthew 6:24) Actually the word is "mammon" which means "the things of this world." What teachings are you following, the teaching of this material world or the teaching of Jesus Christ? Jesus will never lead you into the ditch—He will lead you to eternal life.

THE PARABLE: A SPECK OR A PLANK IN THE EYE? (41-42)

The second humorous parable is a little easier to laugh about. Jesus describes someone who has a speck of sawdust in his eye. He then describes the ridiculous effort of someone with a log in his eye trying to help the one with the speck.

For a couple of summers in high school I worked at a sawmill in South Alabama. By the end of the day, I was usually completely covered with sawdust. Sawdust was constantly getting in my eyes (nobody wore safety glasses back then). Usually it was just irritating and if I blinked enough, my tear ducts would handle it. On several occasions however, a large speck would get under my eyelid and it would be so irritating I would have to take off my gloves and try to get it out with my finger. It was not too unusual for one of the workmen to ask me or someone else to look and see if we could help them remove a large speck. I'd get real close and pull up their eyelid and blow it out or use my finger. Believe me that was a lot closer than I wanted to get to most of those guys! Some of them *did* bathe regularly—once in the spring and one in the fall!

A few yards away from me I could see the huge logs that were being cut into lumber. The word Jesus used in verse 41 means a "supporting timber." It would have been the main support for a roof or wall. Obviously, I never got a log caught in my eye, that's what's so humorous about this parable. Could you imagine what it would have been like for me to help one of those guys with a speck if I had a 30-foot log in my eye? Just turning around would have wiped out the entire crew! Looking up would have brought the shed down! And it would have been physically impossible for me to get close enough to look under a guy's eyeball. That's the ridiculous picture, and of course, there is a deeper meaning, so let's peel off a couple of layers off this parable.

1. THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE: A hypocrite is one who points out trivial mistakes in others when he is guilty of major faults

Notice Jesus is addressing the behavior of the scribes and Pharisees when he says, "You hypocrite!" Jesus is going to use the word "hypocrite" over a dozen times, always addressing this group of religious professionals. Through the years, when I've invited people to come to church I've often heard this excuse, "The church is full of hypocrites." My standard answer is, "Well, there's always room for one more!" What is a hypocrite? It is a transliteration of the word "hupocrites." It is an old Greek word meaning "to play a part on a stage." The theatrical symbol of two masks, one smiling and one frowning reflect the meaning of the word. Today we could use it for someone who wears a moral mask. A hypocrite is someone who wears a different mask when they are at church or around Christians. A hypocrite is someone who acts differently around the pastor than they do when they are with another crowd. The opposite of hypocrisy is consistency.

Jesus says a hypocrite is someone who is hypercritical of others' tiny imperfections (speck), while the whole time they are ignoring the major faults (log) in their own lives. It's like our expression, "That's like the pot calling the kettle black."

In Matthew's account, Jesus uses this picture of the speck and the log immediately after He says, "Don't judge, or you too will be judged." (Matthew 7:1) When we studied that statement in Luke 6:37, I shared with you this principle doesn't forbid us from making wise evaluations of people. Next week, we will see Jesus actually told us we were to be "fruit inspectors" in regards to people. This word "judge" means to be hypercritical. That's never a good choice, especially when you have a log in your eye!

There was an old preacher in Alabama who used to tell a funny story about how easy it is to criticize others, and how hard it is to admit we make mistakes. It seems years ago, a visiting preacher was preaching in a little church. He was preaching against smoking tobacco. He called "tobaccee, the devil's weed." A sweet little lady on the third row was really approving of his message so she would shout "Amen!" When he said, "Smoking may not send you to hell, but it make you smell like you've just been there!" The lady shouted, "Amen, brother!" The more he preached against smoking, the louder she shouted, "Amen!" At the conclusion of the message, the visiting preacher was shocked to see this same little lady open her purse and pull out her snuff can. She put a pinch between her cheek and gum and walked right up the preacher. She said, "Amen, preacher, I believe that smoking is a terrible sin!" He said, "Ma'am how do you have the nerve to say that smoking tobacco is a sin, while you are dipping snuff?" She said, "It's this way preacher, smoking is a sin because it's a sin to burn anything that tastes this good!"

Be careful that you aren't looking at specks when you have a beam in your eye ... or in your mouth!

2. THE PERSONAL APPLICATION: God HAS called you to help others deal with their problems - but only after you have carefully recognized your own mistakes

Don't miss the point here. Jesus is not saying "ignore the speck" in your brother's eye. If there is something wrong in the life of someone for whom you care (a brother or sister), you are doing him or her a favor to point out the speck. Don't ever stay silent with the cop-out attitude, "Who am I to judge?"

If you know of a friend who is cheating on a mate or a business associate who is stealing from the company or a classmate who is cheating, you *should* help them remove the speck.

Look again at the Jesus' final sentence in verse 42, "First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

You can't help someone if you have a log in your eye. It's interesting when former President Clinton almost admitted a "moral mistake" several years ago, he asked a couple of high profile pastors to "counsel" him. One was Gordon McDonald, a pastor who experienced a personal moral failure several years ago. He confessed it, resigned, and after a lengthy period of repentance under the supervision of godly men was eventually was restored to the ministry, a truly humbled man. He was probably a good choice. But who was Clinton's other choice? Reverend Jesse Jackson. We have now learned that during the very time he was "helping" Clinton, he himself was carrying on in an adulterous relationship. One of those counselors had dealt with the beam in his eye—and one had not. According to Jesus, one of them was a hypocrite.

So, does it mean you have to be perfect before you can help someone? Absolutely not. It means that you have asked God to reveal to you any unconfessed sin in your life. As I have said before, you are never perfect, but you can be clean before the Lord. In fact, it is our duty as Christians to help others deal with specks in their eyes, especially when they ask us. If I went to you and said, "I think I have something in my eye, would you help me remove it?" I hope you wouldn't say,

"Oh no! Who am I to look in your eye? I had a bigger speck in my eye one time!" Ridiculous. You are going to help me if you can.

Paul writes in Galatians 6:1-2, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently [the eye is sensitive, so be careful]. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (To love your neighbor).

The whole point is that we must be available and willing to help our brothers and sisters who have specks in their eyes, but we must do it gently and carefully. And we must do it only after we have dealt with the log in our own eye. How do you do that?

A good example of this comes from King David's life. Even though David was man after God's own heart, he became spiritually lazy. He succumbed to temptation and committed adultery with Bathsheba. When it was discovered she was pregnant, David hatched a plot resulting in her husband Uriah's death. David thought he had gotten away with it. So there he was—a king sitting on the throne of Israel with a huge beam in his eye.

God sent the prophet Nathan to David. Nathan said, "Oh, King, I need you to judge on a matter for me." Nathan presents a case in which a poor family owned a single lamb. This lamb was more like a house pet. It ate from their table, drank from their cups and even slept in the arms of its owner. In the same town lived a wealthy man with hundreds of sheep and cattle. One evening, instead of killing one of his own sheep, he stole the pet lamb, killed it and ate it. Nathan says, "David, what should the punishment be for a man who would do that?"

David literally roared with moral outrage! The Bible says, "He burned with anger against the man." A log in your eye makes good fuel for the fire of moral condemnation. David swore by an oath, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die. He must pay for that lamb four times over!"

David never realized for a second he was pronouncing judgement on himself—why? He had a log in his eye. Then the fearless prophet Nathan pointed his bony finger at the king and said with chilling words that caused David's angry blood to freeze in his veins, "You are the man!"

Suddenly David realized his "secret sin" wasn't so secret. How can you hide anything from God? David wished he could have died, but he lived. But go back and read his judgement in 2 Samuel 12. He said, "The rich man shall pay back four times." Trace the final chapters of David's life and you will find four of David's children die. It's dangerous to get upset over specks when you have a log in your eye! Remember, David was a great sinner, but he was a great repenter also. He did get right with God, and God forgave him, but he had to suffer the consequences of his poor choices.

How do you clean out your own eye, so you can help others? First, you must pray the prayer David prayed in 139:23, "Search me, Oh God and know my heart ... see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Then you must pray the prayer David prayed in Psalm 51. This was his prayer after he had been convicted of his "secret sins" of adultery and

murder. "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. I know my transgressions, and my sin always before me. Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, (vs. 2-4) ... Create in me a clean heart oh God and new a steadfast spirit within me. (vs. 10) ... Restore to me the joy of your salvation [you can't lose your salvation, but sin makes you lose the *joy* of your salvation) ... then will I teach transgressors your ways, [remove specks] and sinners will turn back to you."

CONCLUSION

You may be thinking for a sermon on the humor of Jesus, this is pretty serious stuff! It's because Jesus used simple, amusing parables to teach profound truth in a non-threatening way. The correct picture of these two parables aren't humorous, they are lovely. How beautiful it is to picture Jesus, our teacher guiding us down the road of life. You can trust Him; you won't end up in the ditch. And the longer you follow Him, the more like Him you become!

There's nothing funny about sin. It's sad to see people who ignore their beams and look only at the faults of others. That's why we must constantly ask the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, so we can confess our sin—but it is a beautiful sight to see someone with a clear eye gently and lovingly helping someone remove a speck from his or her eye.

OUTLINE

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They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. *Ephesians 4:18*

2. THE PERSONAL APPLICATION: You will become exactly like your primary teacher.

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? *Romans 6:16*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes