

INTRODUCTION

As we walk through the Gospel According to Matthew, we're pausing to consider all the Parables and Miracles of Jesus. Jesus employed some very creative word pictures. For instance, next week the message is entitled "Poodles, Pigs, and Pearls," because Jesus talked about dogs, hogs, and pearls in one single verse!

This message is about judging others, and is entitled, "Who Appointed YOU Judge Judy?!" Judge Judy has become an American icon. Her full name is Judith Sheindlin. After she retired as a family court judge in Manhattan in 1996, she started her second career as television's abrasive, no-nonsense Judge Judy. On the show, the state of New York's flag is behind her bench, but the show is filmed in Hollywood. Her courtroom isn't really a court of law, it's a binding arbitration process in which both parties have signed an agreement that they will abide by her decision. The gallery is made up of actors who are told to discuss the case among themselves. The plaintiffs are real people who have submitted their claims to the show's producers. If you have a disagreement submit your claim and if you're chosen, your airfare and lodging will be covered by the show and you'll receive \$100 a day. Judge Judy, on the other hand, is paid \$25 million a year for the show. She lives in Connecticut and commutes each week to Hollywood in her private jet. There's a lot of money is judging others! Judge Judy's tagline is "justice with an attitude." She's known for her "judyisms" such as "beauty fades, but dumb is forever." There's only one Judge Judy, but many of us play the role of Judge Judy by unfairly judging and criticizing others. That's why people often respond to our criticism by asking, "Who appointed you a judge?" Or "Who are you to judge me?" And if there is ONE statement from the mouth of Jesus that is most often quoted (and misquoted) by non-Christians it's, "Judge not!" Well, Jesus DID say something important about judging others, so let's read His words found in Matthew 7:1-6:

"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."

And let's glance at the text for "Poodles, Pigs, and Pearls" for next week: "Do not give to dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces."

Did you catch the humor in the words of Jesus? A father who read the Bible to his four-year-old son every evening before bed was reading Matthew 7 when his son started to giggle. His dad asked, "What's so funny?" His son said, "Daddy, there's no way a person could have a log in their eye! It's too big!" His son had seen the humor that the father hadn't.

Most of us don't have a 1st century Jewish sense of humor. But Jesus often employed humorous hyperbole to make a point. Hyperbole is making a ridiculous statement that isn't meant to be taken literally. Jesus was a great Hebrew comedian. I can imagine as people talked about His

teaching they asked each other, "Did you hear the one about the guy straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel? Oy vey!" "Did you hear the one about the guy with a log in his eye trying to get the speck of sawdust out of his brother's eye? Oy vey!" I think Jesus talked about a beam and a speck of sawdust because He was a carpenter. The meaning is clear: Who are we to judge others when we have the same problem, or a worse problem? This same idea about avoiding a non-judgmental attitude is found in many cultures around the world, it's just stated differently. For instance, perhaps you've heard the statement that comes from England: "It's like the pot calling the kettle black." The Norwegians say, "Don't throw stones if you live in a glass house," but the basic meaning is the same. The Arab people say, "The camel cannot see the crookedness of its own neck." The Germans say, "One donkey chides another for being long-eared." The Uzbek people say, "The man with no pants laughs at the man with a hole in his pants." The Hungarians say: "The owl tells the sparrow it has a fat head." But my favorite comes from the Japanese: "The sleep in one's eyes shouldn't laugh at the snot in another's nose." Leave it to the Japanese to give us sushi and a statement like that! What did Jesus really mean when He spoke these words about judging? I want to make four observations about judging others:

1. THE MISUNDERSTANDING: Who appointed you a judge? Jesus did

The ones who quote this verse the most misunderstand it the most. When Jesus said, "Do not judge or you will be judged," He wasn't prohibiting us from fairly judging or evaluating others. He was saying that the same standard we use for others will be applied to us as well. But people, especially non-believers, love to quote "Judge not!" For instance, several years ago a woman in Oklahoma was removed from membership of her church because she was committing adultery and refused to repent. She then filed a lawsuit against the church and the case received national media attention. She appeared on the Phil Donahue show and described the members of the church as being judgmental. One of Donahue's statements was, "Didn't Jesus say, 'Judge not and you will not be judged?'" Phil expressed the attitude of a lot of people who think this verse means, "You live your life the way you want to and I'll live my life the way I want to. But don't you dare judge me by imposing your moral standards on me by telling me what is right and wrong." To understand what Jesus meant, let's define the word "judge" (*krino* in Greek). To judge doesn't mean to condemn it means to evaluate. We judge things and people all the time. Before you proceed through an intersection, you're going to judge whether or not it is safe to go. Employers must judge or evaluate employees to see who deserves a promotion or raise, or who needs to be fired. It's acceptable for schools to judge the performance of students to assign a grade to them.

Jesus *did* appoint us as judges. He wants us to evaluate the conduct of others, but we aren't to *condemn* them. In our next message Jesus warned us about people who act like dogs and hogs. How are we going to recognize them without evaluating them? Later in this same chapter Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them... Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit ... thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." (Matthew 7:16, 17, 20) When you walk up to a tree and see apples hanging there, you're going to say, "That's an apple tree." That's a judgement call. And Jesus said you can watch people's lifestyle (their fruit), and you can judge what kind of person they are. Judging others means we discern wisely. There's an ancient Aesop's fable that illustrates discernment. Once there was an old Lion, the king of the forest, who was no longer fast enough to capture his food, so he retired to a cave and there

pretended to be sick. Being a shrewd lion, he made sure the other animals in forest knew he was sick. The beasts came one-by-one to visit the lion to express their sorrow over his sickness. As they approached the lion in his cave, he jumped them and devoured them (some of Aesop's fables were rather gruesome). However, a fox came to visit the lion. Standing outside the cave, the fox asked the lion how he was doing. The lion said, "I am very sick, but why do you stand outside? Please enter within my cave and talk with me." The wily fox said, "No thank you. For I see that there are many animal tracks entering the cave, but there is no trace of any animal leaving your cave." That was a smart fox because he was discerning. That's what Jesus is telling us do—be discerning about people.

2. THE PRINCIPLE: It's easier to be critical of others' faults than to see our own

The humorous point of the parable is that we can't help someone with a speck in their eye as long as there's a two-by-four in our eye. *The Message* paraphrase is, "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." (Matthew 7:1 *The Message*) I love "The Music Man" and there's this song in it where the women get together and sing, "Pick a little, talk a little, pick a little, talk a little, cheep, cheep, talk a lot, pick a little more." When I first heard that I thought it sounded like a Baptist Church! Christians can be some of the most picky, critical people on the planet. We've all known people who could be called "Church Vultures." Like vultures who feed on dead and rotting meat, these church vultures circle around the scent of any sin or scandal and feed off the pain and misery of those who have stumbled. And while these speck inspectors are doing their thing, there are enough planks in their eyes to fill a lumber yard! I heard a funny story about a preacher who was railing against the evils of smoking, and there was a little old lady on the front row amening his every word. He said, "Smoking won't send you to hell, but it will make you smell like you've already been there." The little lady shouted, "Amen! Brother, preach it!" After the service she got up, opened her purse and put a dip of snuff in her mouth. She walked to the back to speak to the preacher with that obvious dip of snuff in her mouth. She said, "Amen, preacher! I'm glad you talked about the sin of smoking!" The preacher said, "Ma'am how can you talk about the sin of smoking while you have a dip of snuff in your mouth?" The lady said, "Well I figure that it's a SIN to burn anything that tastes this good!" That's the pot calling the kettle black!

In his book, *In the Grip of Grace*, Max Lucado devoted an entire chapter to "Godless Judging." He wrote: "It's one thing to have an opinion. It's quite another to pass a verdict. But is there any act more delightful than judging others? There is something smug and self-satisfying about donning the robe, stepping behind the bench, and slamming down the gavel. 'Guilty!' ... Standing next to all the Mussolinis, Hitlers, and Jeffrey Dahmers of the world, we boast, 'Look, God, compared to them I'm not too bad.' But that's the problem. God doesn't compare us to them. They aren't the standard. God is. And compared to Him, 'there is no one who does anything good.' (Romans 3:12)" (*In the Grip of Grace*, p. 38)

Judging as evaluating is acceptable, but condemning others and being critical is wrong. The Bible says, "Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it." (James 4:11)

Have you noticed some people are more critical than others? Sometimes the people who are the most critical are the ones who have unconfessed sin in their own lives. In 2 Samuel 12 we read about an encounter between King David and the prophet Nathan. Nathan came to him to seek his advice about a crime. Nathan said, "A poor family had a lamb, and it was their pet. Across the road lived a wealthy man with many sheep. Some company came to visit the wealthy man and he decided to serve them lamb chops. But instead of using one of his many lambs, the rich man crossed the street and stole the pet lamb and killed it instead. What should be done to that man, oh King David?" At the time, David's eyes were filled with the dual planks of adultery and murder, which made him even more critical. He exploded with anger and said, "That dirty, rotten, scoundrel! He should be shot, but he will pay back four times for what he has taken!" Nathan said, "David, you're the man. God gave you everything you desired, and yet you went and stole Uriah's wife, Bathsheba." Oops. Be careful that you aren't condemning others when there's a log in your own eye. It is so much easier to see the faults of others than to see our own.

3. THE DANGER: I'm not a perfect judge because I can't see another person's heart

When we judge others while ignoring our own faults, Jesus says we're a hypocrite. That means that we playing a part—we're acting—rather than being real. We can evaluate other people, but we must realize our evaluation will always be limited to the fact that we can't see inside a person's heart. The Bible says in 1 Samuel 16:7, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." To put it another way, I can judge what you do, but I cannot judge *why* you do it. I can judge what you say, but I cannot judge *why* you say it: Only God can. Did you notice Jesus actually asked a question? He said, "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?" WHY do we do it? I'll tell you WHY we do it ... are you ready to write down the answer to WHY we judge others unfairly? I don't know. I don't know why I do it, and if you're honest you'll admit that you don't know why you do it either.

Do you remember when you were a kid and you did something wrong and your mom or dad said, "Why did you leave the ice cream out to melt?" And your only answer was "I dunno." And then you grew up and you demanded the same thing from your kid. "Why did you leave the ice cream out to melt?" And you get so mad when they just say, "I dunno." Actually, that's not a cop-out; it's a profound theological truth. We're so wicked by nature that we don't even know WHY we do the things we do! I don't even know my OWN heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says of my heart, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure, who can understand it?" Only God can. So if I can't know my own heart, what makes me think I can know the heart of another?

Our judgement is faulty at best. That's why the Bible warns us, "Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God." (1 Corinthians 4:5) We're all prone to making poor judgements about others.

In 1884 a young man died. After the funeral his parents requested an appointment with the president of Harvard University, Charles Eliot. They expressed their desire to do something in

memory of their son. Eliot looked at the modestly dressed couple and decided they didn't have much money but he would indulge them. He said, "Perhaps you could fund a partial scholarship." His father said, "We were thinking of something more substantial, like a building." In a patronizing tone, Eliot laughed and replied that it was out of the question because buildings were extremely expensive.

The couple left and Eliot later realized he had misjudged the couple. They gave their money to a little college in California. In fact, they gave \$26 million to this school and out of gratitude the school was renamed in memory of their son, Leland Stanford Jr. And today that school is simply known as Stanford University. Every time you hear anything about Stanford it should remind you of the folly of our human judgements.

4. THE DIRECTIVE: Keep your eyes clear so you CAN see how to help brothers or sisters deal with their struggles

The main thing Jesus was teaching was NOT that we shouldn't judge. His primary directive is found in verse 5: "first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." It's important to point out again that the Sermon on the Mount was not spoken to the general population; it is a code of conduct for Jesus-followers only. It's not our job to go around pointing out the faults of just everyone. But if there is a brother or sister in Christ who has a speck in their eye, Jesus directed us to help them.

When my girls were little I can recall them running to me crying, "Daddy, my finger hurts!" If I looked and saw there was a splinter in their finger, I never said, "Sorry, kid, I can't help you because I've had my own splinters to deal with." No it is for the very reason that I've had painful splinters that I want to help them. But before I helped them, I made sure I could see clearly. I'd use a bright light and use glasses or a magnifying glass but my goal was to relieve them of the pain. That's our job—to help our brothers and sisters deal with their struggles.

At the end of the 19th century, one of the most renowned astronomers was Sir Percival Lowell. He had read the observation of an Italian astronomer suggesting there were canals on the surface of Mars. Lowell moved to the U.S. and sought out the best place for a telescope. He chose Flagstaff, Arizona where he built what is still known today as the Lowell Observatory. But Lowell was so fascinated by the canals on Mars that he spent the rest of his life squinting through that telescope mapping these canals. He was convinced the canals he saw crisscrossing Mars were a sign of intelligent life on the Red Planet. His theories gained wide acceptance and gave rise to the popular idea that Martians existed. But now that modern space probes have orbited and landed on Mars, they have found there is not a single canal on the planet's surface. Why did Lowell see canals? We now know that he suffered from a rare eye disease that made him see the blood vessels in his own eyes reflected in the telescope. The Martian canals he saw were nothing more than the bulging veins in his own eyeballs. That eye condition is known today as "Lowell's syndrome." We face the same danger of misreading others when our eyes are not clear.

The Bible says, "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. Carry each other's burdens, and in this

way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1-2) What is the law of Christ? It's simple: Love God and love your neighbor. One of my favorite television shows is "Friday Night Lights," which is about Texas High School football. The motto of the championship Dillon Panthers is, "Clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose." Our hearts should be full of love for our brothers and sisters, and if they have a speck in their eye, we SHOULD help them deal with it. But before you help your brother or sister with their speck, make sure you get rid of that two-by-four of self-righteousness in your eye first. God wants to keep your eyes clean and clear so you CAN help your brothers and sisters deal with their faults. He has blessed you so you can be a blessing to others. He has helped you through the tough times in your life so that you can help others deal with their tough times. There's an old gospel song written by Ira Staphill that says, "He washed my eyes with tears that I might see; The broken heart I had was good for me; He found it full of fear and foolish pride; He swept away the things that made me blind; And then I saw the clouds were silver lined; And now I understand 'twas best for me; He washed my eyes with tears that I might see."

CONCLUSION

The reason I cannot be a condemning judge is because there is only one ultimate judge, and that is God Himself. And because He showed me grace and mercy when I stood before Him as guilty as sin, I should show the same kind of mercy and grace toward others.

In another state, there was a young woman who visited a small church, where she felt the tug of God at her heart. That night she accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. This young woman had a very rough past that included drugs, alcohol, and prostitution. But God claimed her and cleaned her up and made her one of His daughters. She left her old lifestyle, and as time went on, she became a faithful member of that little church. She became involved in the ministry of teaching children. The pastor's son, who was single, also taught children and she soon caught his eye. The relationship grew and they fell in love and started to make wedding plans. That's when the trouble began. Some of the church vultures started to circle and spread gossip about her past and offered their opinion that she was not a suitable candidate to marry the pastor's son. The little church was soon rocked by division and argument over this matter. They decided to have a meeting to discuss the issue. As the meeting progressed, people began to talk about the young woman's sordid past and soon the meeting got out of hand. The young woman became very upset and began to cry. Finally, the pastor's son stood to speak and everyone got quiet. He said, "My fiancée's past isn't on trial here tonight. What you are actually questioning is the ability of the blood of Jesus to wash away sins. You have put the blood of Christ on trial. Does it wash away all sin or not?" When the church members heard this, they began to weep and repent as they realized they had been slandering the blood of Christ. As Christians, how can we be critical of other brothers and sisters who have a past worst than ours? If the blood of Jesus Christ can't cleanse them completely then it can't cleanse me. But the blood of Jesus Christ DOES cleanse us from all unrighteousness. What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Christ!

So, who appointed you a judge? Jesus did—but not to criticize or condemn. He appointed you to be discerning and to help your brothers and sisters who may have a speck in their eye—but allow God to remove that plank from your eye first!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes