

Judging

📖 Matthew 7:1-5

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We're studying the Gospel of Matthew. Why did Matthew write his gospel? To demonstrate that Jesus is the King. In what chapters does He demonstrate that? Matthew 1-11. How does He demonstrate it? By His genealogy. By His fulfillment of prophecy. By His teaching. By His miracles. Those four things prove that Jesus is the King. But all that is accomplished in Matthew 1-11 so what's the rest of the book about? What happens in Matthew 12? Jesus is rejected by the leadership. What were the implications of that? Kingdom postponement. So why did Matthew write Matthew 13-28? To explain what happened to God's kingdom program in the light of Israel's rejection of her King. What is happening in light of the rejection? We have a new entity being formed called the Church. So in lieu of the Kingdom we have a new entity called the Church.

When was Matthew written? What year? AD51. What's the significance of that? It was written during the Church age. So how would this gospel that proves that Jesus is the King and explains the Kingdom program be helpful to a believer during the Church age? It would help Jewish believers in particular answer the chief objection of a Jew who did not believe Jesus was the King. How would he argue that Jesus was not the King? If Jesus was the King where is the kingdom? Messianic thought taught that when the King comes He will come in His kingdom. There was no kingdom so Jesus was not the King. So how does Matthew's gospel answer this objection? It explains that Jesus had all the credentials of the King but He was not accepted as the King by the national leadership and therefore the King went away and the kingdom did not come. A King had to be received by the people. All the OT kings were preceded by a prophet who anointed the King, pointed out the King and then through period of time would be authenticated by God as the King so the people would recognize, coronate and enthrone the King. The same pattern happened in Jesus' life and ministry but He was rejected. When will the King return to establish His kingdom? When the leadership of Israel receives Him. Do you see how Matthew's gospel would answer the chief objection that Jewish believers were getting from Jewish unbelievers during the Church age? They needed an answer for this seeming discrepancy.

This gospel is the critical one for understanding the Kingdom and the Church. You see that the Kingdom was offered but rejected and in lieu of the Kingdom there is something new formed called the Church. The Church is not the Kingdom. The Church is the body of Christ; that is, Jew and Gentile in one new man and primarily it is Gentile. Once it has been built then the Kingdom program for Israel will resume. So the important thing is not to confuse the Church with the Kingdom. How does that affect your reading of the Sermon on the Mount? It means it's for Israel and not the Church. The Kingdom offer is still on the table. Is the Church even known? No concept of the Church exists at this time. So this is for Israel and relates to the Kingdom but, of course, there are principles here, there are always principles that can be applied in a secondary sense, so just because it's to Israel does not mean that it is not for the Church. Of course it is for the Church but it must be read and understood in a Kingdom offer context.

The Sermon on the Mount is Matthew 5-7. What do we see in Matthew 5:1-2? Jesus taking His seat and opening His mouth like a rabbi. Why did He do this? To signal that He was ready to teach. What do we see in Matthew 5:3-12? The Beatitudes or Blessings. What do these essentially teach? That blessing in the earthly Kingdom will be upon those believing Jews who had a character that conformed to the true intent of the Mosaic Law. What do we see in Matthew 5:13-16? Jesus commissioning His disciples as salt and light. The Pharisaic leadership was defunct. A new leadership was needed. What is Jesus doing in Matthew 5:17-20? Prefacing His teaching in 5:21-48 with some explanatory remarks about what He is and is not doing. He wants to allay any confusion that might result from his remarks about the Mosaic Law. Is He setting aside the Mosaic Law? No. Is He changing the Mosaic Law? No. What is He doing? Giving the true intent of the Law over and against the scribal and Pharisaic interpretation of the Law. It was an issue of interpretation. What is Matthew 5:20? It's the key to the whole lesson. "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." What does that mean? There's a lot of argument over what that means. Some say it means the scribes and Pharisees didn't have imputed righteousness and therefore His audience needed to have faith so they could have righteousness imputed to them. Why is that a weak argument? We grant that an individual had to have faith to enter the kingdom. That's not what we're denying. What we're denying is that is the argument here. Why are we denying that argument here? Because Jesus' disciples already had faith. He's not addressing the crowds, He's addressing His disciples (cf 5:1-2). What then is the issue? What then is the entrance? It's a national entrance. One generation of Israel is destined to enter the kingdom. At this time the kingdom was 'at hand,' meaning it was on the verge of breaking into history. But what has to happen, what is the condition that Israel must meet in order for the kingdom to come? Receive their King. Well, are they going to be able to recognize their King if they are not living in obedience to God's Law given through Moses? That was their rule of life. No. Were they living in conformity to the Law of Moses? No. So how would we classify their lives? As sinful. What does sin do to your way of viewing things? It distorts and blinds. So would they be able to recognize Jesus as

their King if they were not living in obedience to the Law of Moses. No. And that is the issue. If that generation is going to be the one that enters the Kingdom then they've got to repent! Repent of the teachings and practices of the scribes and Pharisees and follow the teachings and practices of Jesus and His disciples. That is the only way their vision will be restored to be able to recognize that Jesus is their King, receive Him, coronate Him and enthrone Him. So I don't think 5:20 is setting forth the individual requirement for entrance into the kingdom; that was always faith, a faith like Abraham. But what is being set forth is the generational requirement for entrance into the kingdom. What does Jesus show in Matthew 5:21-48? That the teaching of the current leadership, the scribes and the Pharisees, was a distortion of the Mosaic Law and therefore if the nation followed them they would remain in a state of blindness. Remember, the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said later, were the blind leading the blind. It was the sin of following their misinterpretations that blinded them. So if that generation continued to follow the teaching of the blind then they would not enter the kingdom because they wouldn't recognize their King. What do we find in 6:1-34? The practices of the scribes and Pharisees. These were also distortions of the true intent of the Mosaic Law and therefore if they continued to follow these practices they would continue to walk in blindness. A great Light had dawned on them but they were walking in what? Darkness. If that generation continued to follow their practices then they would continue walking in darkness and not perceive the Light and as a consequence not enter the kingdom. There was a radical shift that needed to take place in Israel and that shift is what we call repentance, a change of mind about the word of God, about what they were seeking. They sought importance in the eyes of men, they sought riches, they sought security but what did they not seek? His kingdom first and His righteousness. And I think the Church has not put first things first and therefore there is a great blindness that overshadows the Church. They seek a great many things but do they seek the things above (Col 3:1ff)? Do they set their minds on things above? Or do they set their minds and their aspirations on the things on earth? The consequences for seeking the things below on earth are sin and consequent deception and blindness. That's one reason this sermon is so important. It shows us that when we don't put first things first the consequence is sin and blindness.

Before we look at 7:1 we want to comment briefly on 6:34 since it's the concluding note of the chapter and it got left out last week. Jesus has just climaxed His teaching in 6:33 with the command to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness," and if that is their central focus in life then all the daily needs such as food and clothing would be provided for them. Logically then, **do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.** What is Jesus' simple point? Each day has enough troubles for one human to bear. If we start worrying about tomorrow then we will be distracted from putting first things first. What are the first things? Seeking His kingdom and His righteousness. What anxiety does is detract our attention from what is really important. It distracts us away from a proper perspective on life, why we are here, what our purpose is. First things must be kept

first and anxiety gets in the way of that. In the Jewish context the first things at the time were His kingdom and His righteousness. They were distracted away from that because they were worried about what they were going to wear the next day, what they were going to eat, what they were going to drink. That's the way pagans lived their lives. If they had paid attention to the lessons in nature about how God feeds the birds and God clothes the flowers, more remarkably so than even Solomon, then they would realize that God knows they need these things and God will provide these things. Then they would be free to focus on the first things; seeking the Kingdom, seeking His righteousness. By doing so they would be storing up treasure in heaven for enjoyment in the coming kingdom.

Tonight in Matt 7 Jesus is still teaching His disciples on the hillside and the crowds are beginning to gather around. By the end of the chapter they will have gathered and so more than likely the teaching they will hear and be so impressed with is just the teaching in this last chapter. So keep in mind that the audience is expanding at this time. What's Jesus' theme? He continues with the same theme He has been proclaiming, namely, a righteousness which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees that was necessary for that generation to enter the kingdom. Glasscock says, "The theme connecting all of Jesus' teaching since He sat down on the mountain had been the righteous standards of the kingdom, which greatly surpass those of the Pharisees. These final proverbs fit well into that theme."¹

What's the particular teaching in 7:1-6? Judging. What was to be their approach to judging others? This is another point that has as its background the scribes and Pharisees and their distortion of judging others. Pentecost says, "Our Lord now referred to the Pharisees' practice of setting themselves up as judges of all men and measuring all others by themselves."² In other words, what did the Pharisees do? They made themselves out to be God. How did they do that? By re-interpreting the Mosaic Law. Who had given the Law? God had given the Law. It was God's Law and God's standards. God was the authority. What happens if those standards are manipulated by misinterpreting them? The mis-interpreter becomes the authority. He makes himself out to be God. That's what Eve did in the Garden isn't it? She made herself out to be the authority. She would decide what was true and false. But to decide what was true and false she had to seat herself in the chair of judgment. She had to stand in judgment over God. She had to make herself out to be the final arbiter. That is what the Pharisees had done. They had made themselves out to be God.

Almost without exception this verse is taken to mean that we should not judge others. Taken out of context it might be thought to mean that but taken in context it could never mean that. If Jesus was teaching that we should not judge others then Jesus is the worst of all. This is evident from the fact that Jesus has been judging the entire sermon. He judged the scribes and Pharisees as being murderous, adulterous, unloving, hypocritical, worry warts who sought riches. Jesus was obviously not teaching

against judging. Jesus was teaching against the scribal and Pharisaic practice of judging on the basis of their re-interpretations of the Mosaic Law rather than the true intent of the Law.

Jesus' command is verse 1, **Do not judge so that you will not be judged.** This is a present imperative just like verse 25. What's the command in verse 25? "Do not be worried." But what does it mean? "Stop worrying." What's the command in verse 19? "Do not store up treasures." But what does it mean? "Stop storing up treasures." In each case what was the meaning? "Stop," implying that what they were practicing they needed to stop immediately. Here they need to immediately "stop judging."

Now what does this mean? Ironically this verse may be the most misjudged verse in the entire Bible. How do people usually take this? Never judge others. Really they just want you to leave them alone. They don't want to address something in their life so they quote this verse. What's the problem with that interpretation? Just on the face of it. It's a judgment. It's casting judgment on others for judging. It's a judgment about judging. So that interpretation is self-refuting. In other words, you cannot say never judge others without judging others. So what does Jesus mean? He is obviously not saying do not make sound moral judgments or do not evaluate ethical situations. The standard at the time for Israel was the Mosaic Law. It was their national constitution! Obviously they had to judge moral and ethical issues on the basis of their national constitution. That would be the only way to ensure obedience to God!

But there's something more here about the way that they judged. Here the argument is "stop judging **so that you will not be judged** and then in verse 2 He makes light of the way in which they were judging. **For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.** It's really fascinating in the Greek. The Greek literally says, "For in the judgment which you judge you will be judged; and in the measure which you measure it will be measured to you." Do you see the two repetitive words? It's a triple use of words for "judge" and "measure." Because of this some consider Jesus to be quoting what had become a popular proverb. Or maybe He was authoring a new proverb. In any case it's a very memorable saying in the Greek. What does the proverb point up? That there is a wrong way to judge that has consequences. What was the wrong way of judging? We'd say it was being overly-critical, being a fault-finder, standing in judgment over others. The scribes and Pharisees loved to stand in judgment over everyone and peer into every nook and cranny just to find their faults and criticize them. Some people love to do that, they excel at doing that, they will speculate to no end on the bad motives of others that underlie their behavior. The problem is common to man because it is inherent to the sinful nature. We enjoy finding faults in others and criticizing them. Why? Because it makes us feel better about ourselves. That's what it's all about. It's not about the other person. The other person is just being used and abused by us to make ourselves feel better. A word of clarification just so we're clear. The passage does not mean don't make judgments. We have to make

judgments. Just make sure when we make the judgments we're making them on the basis of a proper interpretation of Scripture and tempered by mercy.

Now the scribes and Pharisees loved to find faults, they were nitpicky; they did it to make themselves feel more important and more spiritual than others. Jesus' disciples should not do that. They apparently did do this to some degree but as his newly commissioned disciples they should not do what the scribes and Pharisees did.

The reason they should stop judging in this manner is **so that you will not be judged**. Verse 2 explains, **For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you**. If they continued to pick out others faults and criticize them then they should expect this type of judgment in return. Christians erroneously think that their judgment at the judgment seat of Christ will inevitably be one that is tempered by His mercy. The Bible does not teach this. The Bible teaches that in the manner in which **you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you**. In other words, if you are overly harsh and critical of others then when you are standing at the judgment seat Christ He is not going to show mercy. Keep in mind this is a family judgment but the tone of that judgment is not identical for every Christian. What does James say in his epistle? In James 2:13 the Spirit says, "Judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." So the principle here is just as true for us in the Church as it is for Israel. If we do not temper our judgments of others with mercy then on the day of our judgment Christ will not temper His judgment with mercy. This sobering thought should teach us to stop being overly critical immediately and to give others the benefit of the doubt so that at our judgment before Christ will be one tempered by His mercy. Glasscock says, "If one shows mercy to others, he will be shown mercy, but if one is harsh and unforgiving, his judgment will likewise be harsh and unforgiving." I'm not too favorable of that last statement but I do think that what it means is that every little issue will be dealt with in a proportional way vs what is possible if we show mercy to others and that is that many little issues will be overlooked. That is what it means for judgment to be tempered by mercy, not every issue is brought up and dealt with but things are overlooked because we did the same for others. That's what's going on here and again, I warn you that it is very natural to the sinful nature to be overly critical and harsh and to speculate on motives. We really need to be cognizant of this tendency and to nip it in the bud. Who are you anyway? Who do you think you are? Apparently the Corinthians had this problem, go figure - they were the most carnal Church in the NT. And Paul in 1 Cor 4 addresses this exact issue saying, "...do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts..." In other words, leave judging motives up to Christ. The only exception to this is when someone reveals their motives. Once they have revealed them verbally then they are subject to our judgment, and Paul shows this elsewhere, but otherwise, leave it! Leave it to Christ. He can handle it. Don't try to play God.

Now, one should also remember that when he is overly harsh and unforgiving of others it is ultimately because he or she is very short-sighted with respect to his own sins. This was the teaching earlier in 6:15. What did Jesus say there? "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." We had to sort through this one and what did we conclude? Hey, look, if you don't forgive others their faults then what have you unquestionably done to your own? You've minimized them. In fact you don't even see them because you're too busy pointing out theirs. So why doesn't your Father forgive your transgressions? Because you don't see any need to confess them. It's everybody else that has a problem. You, you're perfect. You have a poor analysis of yourself. You're blinded to your own faults. And if you find yourself running people over the coals and scathing them for their faults it's a sign that something is very, very wrong with the way you are viewing yourself. You aren't seeing yourself correctly.

Verse 3 hits this point precisely. **Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?** Something is wrong here. The word **speck** is *καρφος* and refers to "a small piece of wood, a chip, a grain of sawdust." The word **log** is *δοκος* and refers to "a heavy piece of lumber, a beam of wood." The point is that sawdust and a beam of wood "are identical in nature; they differ only in size."³ Sawdust is just a tiny version of a beam. What is Christ saying? The fact that a speck of sawdust and a beam are of the same nature shows that the problem is the same for both people. Pentecost says, "Christ was saying that what one is quick to judge in another is often a major concern in his own life. Instead of dealing with the personal problem, the one who judges seeks to divert attention away from self to the problem as it exists in another."⁴ People love to pick out a tiny problem in someone else's life as a point of attack, but this betrays that the attacker actually struggles with the same problem. Sin is a world of deception, deceit and blindness. When we have a fault and we see the same fault in another we automatically tend to magnify that fault in the other and simultaneously minimize it in ourselves. That is the sinful nature! Glasscock says, "Jesus was rebuking the natural tendency to look at others and instinctively observe their faults but refuse to consider one's own problems. To try to avoid seeing guilt in oneself by noting the faults in others is instinctive to the fallen human nature." We should recognize this, stop it immediately and temper ourselves by showing mercy!

Observe that two different words are used in verse 3 for looking and noticing. The first one is **you look at the speck in your brother's eye**. That Greek word **look** is from *βλεπω* and simply means "to see," just to notice the problem in passing. But the second one in the verse **you do not notice the log that is in your own eye**. That Greek word **notice** is from *κατανοεω* and means "to look at carefully, to contemplate, to think about in a reflective manner." The point is that we can notice someone else's problem just in passing and make a huge issue out of it but we have the same problem and we don't think about it in a reflective manner in ourselves, we don't contemplate it. But we're so quick to judge

even the slightest glimpse of the problem in someone else. We are wicked, wicked people in our sinful nature. And Jesus just points it out. The one who glimpses a tiny speck of sawdust in his eye makes so much of it all the while ignoring the large beam that is in his own eye. What a monstrosity.

Verse 4, **Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?** Now this just points up the absurdity of the notion. It's very colorful what is said here and therefore very memorable. This is why we use figures of speech. Figures of speech add color and color makes memorable. Some things just can't be said in an ordinary literal fashion with the same kind of force that they can be said by an ordinary figurative way of saying it. These pictures stay with you forever. Here a man sees a speck of sawdust in another person's eye and the sense of the original Greek is, "How exactly will you express your opinion that you should take it out when you are approaching him with a beam of wood in your own eye."

Now it's just plain ludicrous that anyone would even suggest helping you solve a minute problem in your life when they've got the problem on a grand scale. That's sort of what is being taught in Gal 6:1 where Paul says, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted." Not an identical situation but very similar. Here a brother has literally been tripped up and caught inadvertently in a sin problem and the question is "who is qualified to help restore this brother?" The answer is a spiritual brother, one who is mature. It can't be someone who has the same problem. Yeah, maybe someone who has come out of that same problem and is way past it now, but if there's any danger he might fall back into it then he shouldn't be the one to restore. It should be common sense.

Our passage is more along the lines of the gall it would take for someone to try to solve your little problem when they have the problem to the nth degree! It points once again to the practice of the scribes and Pharisees who put themselves in the place of judgment and were overly critical and harsh toward others and their sin problems, all the while ignoring their own. "The speck/beam comparison serves as a warning for His followers not to be as the Pharisees, who extolled their own virtues while judging others."⁵ They were acting as if they didn't have problems while playing up everyone else's. That made them hypocrites, the very charge Jesus levels in verse 5.

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. One cannot see clearly to accomplish such a delicate procedure with a beam in his own eye. Therefore, rather than trying to approach a brother to remove a speck from his eye with a beam in his own Jesus says they should **first take the beam out of their own eye**. The teaching is clear, until we sit in judgment upon ourselves we can't **see clearly** to judge others. Our vision will be clouded by the self-imposed blindness of our own sin. **Hypocrites** put on a mask as if they are something they are not. Glasscock says, "A critical point is that...the "beam" often not

acknowledged by the judgmental person is self-righteousness. One may not be an adulterer, a drunkard, or a thief, but the sin of self-righteousness is just as offensive to God."⁶ Failure to deal with it blinds one to proper judgment of others. Hendriksen says, "However grievous the other man's error may have seemed to the eye of the would-be corrector, was it not a mere "speck" compared with his own self-righteousness, a defect so glaring that in the sight of God it amounts to a beam in the critic's eye?" The bottom line is that we should first judge ourselves rightly. We should be critical of ourselves not of others. Toussaint says, "The disciples of the King are to be critical of self but not of their brethren. The group is to be noted for their bond of unity, which is indicated by a lack of criticism."⁷ This would demonstrate to their fellow Jews that they were the true sons of the kingdom in opposition to the scribes and Pharisees who were sons of darkness. Jesus' disciples needed to be set apart in their practices in order to demonstrate true leadership. A true leader must first lead by example. Only then will others desire to follow. If we are able to criticize ourselves first then we will be in a position to exercise correction of others in a gentle and loving way. This is the mark of a true disciple and leader. Leadership starts not with noticing the faults of others but with noticing them in ourselves and making the necessary corrections. Then we are qualified to correct others in a gentle and loving fashion which can be well-received.

In conclusion, in verse 1 Jesus is not condemning all judgment; obviously He Himself had been judging the scribes and Pharisees throughout the discourse. What He is condemning is judging like the scribes and Pharisees who put themselves in the place of God and stood in judgment over others. Rather than tempering their judgments with mercy they mercilessly criticized and magnified others faults. Jesus' disciples needed to "stop judging" in this way. In verse 2 Jesus gave this proverb to warn of the dangers of judging mercilessly. In the way that they judged they would be judged. If they didn't show mercy then God wouldn't show mercy to them. This means He would not leave any crevice of their lives untouched at the judgment. In verse 3 Jesus points out that those who judge others for some fault usually have the same fault. They do this to make themselves feel better about themselves and to divert attention away from themselves and at others. That is like taking notice of a speck of sawdust in someone else's eye while not contemplating the beam that is in your own eye. In verse 4 he continues with the same image and wonders how someone might approach a brother to remove a speck of sawdust from his eye when he is standing there with a log in his own eye. Such a scenario betrays the hypocrisy of the hypocrite. In verse 5 the first step is to recognize the log in your own eye and remove it before trying to complete the successful surgery of removing the speck of sawdust from another's eye. Jesus' disciples needed to do this immediately. We should follow in principle. When we are raking someone over the coals something is not right. We are usually very short-sighted regarding our own shortcomings. With that attitude we will be no better than the scribes and Pharisees and we will be setting ourselves up for a judgment at the judgment seat of Christ where He will peer into every nook

and cranny of our wasted lives. To avoid that we should carefully investigate our own shortcomings first and correct them. Am I saying you can do this on your own? No. The OT believers had certain spiritual assets, they had to trust and depend upon God and we have more spiritual assets available to us, we have to trust and depend upon the Spirit of God. Only then are we in a position to be leaders that are able to correct others in such a way that is tempered by the mercy of God. Only then can we expect Christ to be merciful to us in our day of judgment.

¹ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 161.

² Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 185.

³ Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 185.

⁴ Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 185-6.

⁵ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 164.

⁶ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 164.

⁷ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 113.