

Jesus said, “Judge not...” which sounds simple enough. Don’t judge. But the more that you try to apply this teaching to your daily life, the more you will find that it is not that simple. For example:

If someone comes to your place of employment seeking a job, prudence dictates that you make a judgment - *is this the type of person that we are looking for?* If your teenage daughter comes to you and says, “Mom, Dad, I’ve just met the most interesting guy on the internet.” You need to make a judgment! Every time you get your car fixed you make a judgment concerning which mechanic you trust. Every time you get your hair cut you make a judgment - *did the barber or beautician do a good job?* Sometimes we make judgments in church. *Did the choir sing well, did the Sunday School teacher make the lesson meaningful, and what did you think about the sermon?* If you think about it, we judge all the time. But Jesus said, “Judge not.” How do you not judge? Let’s take a closer look at this text.

This morning we have come to the final sermon in our series of sermons on our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. Next week I am going to go get some education and Stephanie Hand will preach. I know that you will want to be here for that. So this morning I want to wrap up the Sermon on the Mount by giving you the religious context.

There were four religious groups in Israel at the time when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. The first group was called Zealots. Zealots were zealous for the nation of Israel. They were looking for a militant Messiah who would bring an army of angels and run the hated Romans out of their country. The Zealots wanted a holy war! But Jesus said, “Blessed are the peace makers - they will be called children of God.” Jesus was quite explicit saying, “turn the other cheek... love your enemies... pray for those who pursue you.” If I had been a Zealot I would have squirmed during this sermon.

The second group was called Esseens. The Esseens were most likely the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls. What were they doing down at the Dead Sea? The Esseens wanted to get away from the corruption of the world. They wanted to practice pure religious rituals so that they would be ready when the Messiah comes. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” As to separating ourselves from the world, Jesus said; “You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others.” We tend to think of the Sermon on the Mount as being warm and fuzzy, but I think Jesus was stepping on people’s toes.

The third group was the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the upper crust of society. Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. If you do not believe in going to heaven, then if God is going to bless you it has to be in this life. But Jesus said, “...lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, for where your treasure is there your heart will be also.” Can you see how Jesus was teaching us about the kingdom of heaven in contrast to the religious beliefs of his day? I said that there were four religious groups. Which group am I leaving out?

The Pharisees. The Pharisees were the keepers of the Old Testament law. If the 10 Commandments tell us to honor the Sabbath, the Pharisees felt that it was their job to make sure that no one worked on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were the good religious people of that day, but to borrow a quote from Mark Twain, they were often “good in the worst way.” The Pharisees would walk around pointing fingers saying, “She is a sinner, he is a sinner, they are sinners!” But Jesus said, “Judge not.”

Friends, anyone who was listening to our Lord preach the Sermon on the Mount would have understood exactly what Jesus saying. Do not self-righteously point the finger, criticizing and condemning, as the Pharisees do. In verse 2 Jesus said *when you judge* – Yes we judge. We make judgments all the time! I will make at least a dozen judgments before I leave church this morning. Jesus said; when you judge, know that the way in which we judge others will be the way in which we are judged ourselves.

Years ago I ran across a story that I can not get out of my mind. Once upon a time there was a dishonest judge in Persia who accepted bribes. When the King found out about it, the King was infuriated. This man was judging others when he was guilty himself. So the king had the dishonest judge flayed. That means they removed his skin and they made a chair out of it. They put the chair in the courtroom. From that day on any judge who presided over the court of Persia would sit on the chair made from the skin of the dishonest judge. Whew! I don’t know about you, but that would be a pretty good reminder to me that I’m going to be judged by the way in which I judge others. Matthew chapter 7 verse 2, “For in the same way that you judge others, you will be judged,” can be the most terrifying verse in the bible. But it can also be the most comforting. Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

Then Jesus told a joke. Yes, there is a joke in the Sermon on the Mount. It goes like this. Did you hear the one about the fellow who had a splinter in his eye? The Greek word can mean a speck or something very tiny. So the guy was rubbing his eye when someone walked up and said, “Hey you! Yea you! You’ve got a speck in your eye.” The fellow looked up and saw that this guy had a log – the word can also mean board or beam – this guy had a 2x4 sticking out of his own eye. It is humorous. It was ludicrous. But it happens. Jesus said, “First take the log out of your own eye, then you can see clearly to help the brother with a speck in his eye.”

When I was a college student I spent a summer volunteering with street people in downtown Charlotte. Some of the people we worked with were transients, some homeless, and every now and then we would encounter people who were wrestling with drugs. I worked with a volunteer named Carl. Carl is not his real name, but this was 30 years ago and I was unable to get permission to use his real name so I will call him Carl. Carl could spot a drug addict the minute they walked in the door. Carl knew exactly what they were going through. He knew what they needed and how to help. One day I said to him, “Carl, I love your heart. You have a God given heart for people on drugs.” He replied, “Well, there was a time when I smoked two packs of cigarettes a day. When I quit it almost killed me. If these people are wrestling with anything like what I went

through then God bless them.” That is removing the log in your own eye so that you can help others with the speck in their eye.

Years ago, Dr. Gerald Mann, my favorite Baptist preacher from Austin, Texas, had a television show. Dr. Mann would sit on the edge of his desk with a telephone and people would call in with religious questions. One day a caller said, “Dr. Mann, I would like to know your position on... people who do this and people who do that... he had a list. Dr. Mann said, “You know, I’ve got so many issues that I am struggling with in my own life that I would have to know what another person is going through before I pronounce sweeping judgments.” I think that is a great answer.

You’ve heard the saying; “Don’t judge someone until you have walked a mile in their shoes.” We never know what someone may be going through. Sometimes people are jerks, but if the truth be told, if I’m having a bad day, I can be a jerk. If we are going to be really honest, I will tell you that there are times when I can be insensitive, thoughtless, and inconsiderate. There is a long list of things that I can be. I need for God to forgive me. I need for the people in my life to be compassionate and merciful to me. If this is what I need, then isn’t that the way I should judge others?

Jesus said, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” That is how we should judge. The golden rule is easy to understand but hard to do. Oh, you will do it for a while. But you will slip back to the old ways. After wrestling with the Sermon on the Mount I have come to the conclusion that the only way to actually live the life that Christ has taught us is to be made new in Christ.

One morning I was in the shower and I looked at the shampoo and saw the words, *New and Improved!* So I thought; *if shampoo can be new and improved then so can I.* I announced to my wife that I was a new and improved husband. She said, “Yea right.” I said, “You are thinking about the old guy. He is gone. I’m the new and improved guy.” And I was - for a while. I can not tell you how many times in my marriage that I have had to become new and improved. I can’t do it. But with God all things are possible.

Jesus said, “Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened to you.” If we are seeking the ways of the kingdom on heaven, God wants to give us a new heart and a new life. If you are a father and your daughter asks for bread, are you going to give her a stone. If you are a mother and your son says, “Can we have fish for supper tonight?” are you going to give him a snake? If we know how to give good things to our children, don’t you think that God knows how to give good things to us? If we ask for a heart that is in tune with God’s kingdom don’t you think that God will give us a new heart?

So here is my final question; *how did Jesus judge others?* Actually, Jesus was quite judgmental toward people who judgmental. Jesus was tough on the Pharisees. Read Matthew 23. Why was he tough on the Pharisees? The way that you judge others will be the way that you are judged yourself. But I think that the best example of Jesus’ judgment is found in the 8th chapter of the Gospel of John. A woman had committed

adultery. The Pharisees were going to stone her. They asked Jesus; “What do you say? What is your judgment?” Jesus said, “Let those who are without sin cast the first stone.” And one by one the stones fell from their fingers. Jesus turned to the woman and said, “Who is left to condemn you?” She said, “no one.” Jesus said, “Then neither will I. Go and sin no more.”

When we experience that - when we receive His forgiveness and His mercy - His love, His compassion, His grace – then we will be thankful. Then we will understand what others are going through. Then we will rejoice when Jesus says, “Judge not...”