

## *Inward to Outward*

Matthew 7:1-6

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Good morning Columbia Presbyterian. For those of you who don't know me, my name is John Song. I'm the pastor of Youth ministries here. And I want to welcome you to our Sunday worship where we are going through a series on Living the Kingdom. We're exploring Jesus's teaching on the Sermon on the Mount and what it means to live out the kingdom of God in the here and the now.

Please turn, tap, or swipe your Bibles to Matthew 7:1-6.

"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. 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 is the 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. 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." [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Please pray with me.

Our Father who is in heaven, we proclaim how holy your name is, and we long for you and the work of your kingdom to grow in this church. We long for your word to feed us, to convict us, to change us into the image of Christ, to call us to our great need of you and to give you the glory for all the greatness that you are. May your word change us and instruct us to godliness and to wisdom. In the name of your one and only Son, Jesus our great savior, we pray these things. Amen.

We begin today's sermon at the risk of being very cliché with a movie quote. *The Princes Bride*, 1987, one of the villains, Vizzini, is trying to escape Westley, the hero, by ascending a large mountain. It's Vizzini and his two companions, Fezzik, this giant of a man who carries Vizzini on his back, and the craft Inigo Montoya. They reach the top of the mountain first with a rope they can use to ascend to the top, and Wesley is climbing on the rope not so far behind. And as they reach the top first, the three cut the rope that Wesley was using to catch up to them thinking that surely this would be the end of our dear hero. But of course, that's not what happens, otherwise, that would've made for a terrible movie.

Wesley somehow manages to hold onto the mountain and is now climbing up the rock face without a rope. He's free soloing his way to catch up. And at this point, he's exasperated. Vizzini is flustered and he yells, "He didn't fall? Inconceivable!" A word that he has constantly used to describe Wesley's ability to find them and to catch up to them. "Inconceivable." And it's at this point that Inigo turns to him and utters this famous phrase, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

Now, Vizzini was probably using the word "inconceivable" to describe something that he thought was inconceivable. But as our good friend Mr. Montoya rightfully calls out, that's not what the word means or how the word is supposed to be used. Context is everything when we use words or phrases or Bible verses. And it's important especially as we're looking at God's word to discern what Jesus is actually saying in this often-misquoted portion of scripture.

Matthew 7:1-6 is the cry of "inconceivable" on the lips of atheists and others who reject the Christian faith. They use this passage as sort of a "got ya" verse to show that Christians aren't acting like Christians. Most people have heard and misused the teachings of Christ like "Judge not lest ye be judged,"

“Remove the log out of your own eye,” and “Don’t give to dogs what is holy” to such a degree that we have to say, I don’t think it means what you think it means.

In order to do that, we have to answer four questions from the text here today. One, should I criticize others? Should I change others? Should I consider others? And where is the gospel in all this? So, let’s tackle these questions one at a time. Here we go.

First, should I criticize others? Verses 1-2. The phrase, “Judge not lest ye be judged.” The phrase is so common that we actually still use the King James version when we quote it. But if you actually look carefully, even in the KJB, that’s not the wording of the KJB. It’s actually, “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” which carries with it a different force. But no matter how you look at it, the words in isolation can carry a variety of different meanings that can muddy the waters for how we use this phrase.

But first, let’s make sure that we understand what Jesus is not saying and eliminate some of the extremes of the interpretation in this passage. Some would say that these words from Jesus mean that we shouldn’t make any judgements at all. Judge not lest you be judged. No judgements ever. Well, that can’t be the case here because it’s pure logic alone. If Jesus were actually saying that no one could ever judge, then He would be in violation of His own principle. And it would certainly make strange many of His proclamations of judgement on the Pharisees and His disciples later on in the book of Matthew. So, to say that Jesus is saying you should never judge would be a self-defeating argument. So, that can’t be in view here.

One other extreme is the idea popularized by the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, that Jesus was using this to describe judgements that are made in official law cases, essentially forbidding the human institution of any law courts. Now, the advantage of this viewpoint is that it removes some of the difficulty and the hardness of Jesus’s words by using the loophole of the courts. But context and just being intellectually honest with the passage tells us that this has nothing to do with the legal issue of judgement. Jesus at no point is talking about the courts. He’s not talking about the legal Jewish system. He’s talking about the heart issues of the individual and the context of how it plays itself out in human relationships. So, this doesn’t really work. As much as it is a convenient interpretation, it doesn’t really work.

The third extreme of this passage and perhaps the most commonly used extreme of this passage is the way that most Christians and non-Christians alike use this passage. And that’s to evade or avoid any type of criticism of sin in one’s own life. They sort of use this verse as the gavel at the end of a conversation to say that we shouldn’t call out sin in anyone’s life. We go to a person and we say, hey, don’t judge my sin. Don’t you know what Jesus said? “Judge not lest ye be judged,” not realizing that they’re misquoting scripture. They use that verse as a way of saying, don’t call out my sin. Don’t you remember what Jesus said?

Now, what do they mean here? What is the heart behind this misinterpretation? Obviously, they’re saying that Christians shouldn’t be in the business of judging others if they themselves aren’t perfect as Jesus was perfect. But making this the absolute is ignoring the context of what Jesus is trying to say and how He’s framing this exhortation. And it would be lazy exposition at best and potentially damaging to the character of God at worst if we did this.

So, let’s get into what is Jesus saying, then, in these two verses? Jesus is reframing the exhortations on how He related the inward motivation of the heart in chapter 6 and how it’s expressing outward and how we relate to other people in chapter 7. And that is when you judge someone (Jesus is saying when, not if), we need to make sure that we’re doing it out of a place where we are not trying to lift up our own self-righteousness. Being made in the image of God means that we do pronounce judgements and make moral statements about the world that we live in. However, this does not mean that we take the place of God in doing so, acting at the jury and the executioner over this person. That’s God’s job. He’s the perfect judge.

Jesus in verses 1-2 is criticizing the critics, in essence, by saying that their way of evaluating others is not done out of a sense of wellbeing for the other individual. It's not done for the other person's good. Rather, judgements are being made to prop up their own self-worth, their own righteousness, their own importance to the thing that they are judging. And because of that, Jesus says in verse 2 that the standards that you use will inevitably come back upon you.

In other words, Jesus is saying that our judgements when we make them must be made in a way that is for healing. It's for hope. It's for reconciliation. It's for restoration of those whom we are judging. It is to not take the place of our Lord, but to take the place of a friend and a physician for those whom we're judging.

Imagine this. Imagine you're going to a doctor with a broken ankle, and all the doctor is doing is chastising you for having an unhealthy ankle. Imagine him laughing and yelling and gossiping. Oh, look at your ankle. You can't walk. I can walk freely. Imagine the doctor just starts rubbing it in and dancing around you, jumping and running in circles to show you, oh, my ankle is fine. Look at your ankle. It's so broken. Would you ever feel compelled to go to that doctor ever again? Would you ever return to him?

We have to ask ourselves, why do we find such treatment appropriate towards broken sinners who are experiencing real pain from the effects of the fall? Where is the empathy that we would want from our own doctors who treat our pain? Where is the compassion? Where is the love that we long to experience?

Jesus's reframing of loving others gives us a new attitude. This is the attitude we need to demonstrate to those who are sick and broken, maybe not physically but spiritually in their sin. Remember how unclean you once were. Remember how you have been forgiven. Remember the story of David and Nathan in 2 Samuel, how easy it is to cast down the correct judgement onto others while you yourself are a murderer, an adulterer, a liar, and a thief. Remember that we are just like David. And it changes everything in the way that we frame our judgement. It makes us pause. It makes us think before we judge others.

Nowhere more do we need this as a society than in our use of social media. And let me first say this as a confession of someone in the past who has not done this well. I've committed every error of social media under the sun. I've posted fake news. I've stated things with confidence and assurance that I later realized was foolish. And lacking in grace and humility, I've been outspoken on so many things on which I should have remained silent, and I have been silent on many things about which I should have been vocal.

One resource that's helped me, and I commend this to you, is a book by Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (you can actually get it free online if you go to Crossway) in which he discusses the way in which slander is used in scripture and on the internet. In it, he affirms the definition of many biblical scholars of the word "slander." Slander is not necessarily a false report, but an against report. The intent is to belittle another, to pour out contempt, to mock, to hurt, to harm, to destroy, to rejoice in purported evil, to attack a person's motives and character so that the listener's respect and love for the person is undermined. That's the definition of slander.

What this means for us and what Jesus is saying is that we must take a hard and examined look as to why we say the things that we say in statements of criticism. We need to ask ourselves some basic questions. To quote one of my friends Phillip Holmes,

"Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it clear? Is it kind? Is it helpful? Am I slandering against this person even if the statement is true? Am I close enough to the situation to comment in such a way that I'm earnestly seeking the healing of another person? Or am I positioning myself in a way to act as though I am more holy than they are? Or I am more like God than this person. Or even, I am God over this person."

You see, with this perspective in mind, you will begin to understand that Jesus isn't simply saying, never judge others. But rather, our judgement must be rooted in an inward care and concern for them, seeking out their joy and healing knowing full well that we are not better than they are.

This helps ground us in the understanding of verses 3-5 where Jesus is answering the second question of, should we change others? A question that is rooted by using this analogy that Jesus uses of removing a speck from someone's eye while someone still has a giant log in their own eyes. This imagery that Jesus is using here is almost comical in nature. It's meant to bring about the sheer lunacy and contradiction in the observation of this ultimate hypocrite in this situation, one who's going around to change the little in someone's life while he or she is living in full unawareness of their own affliction.

And by the way, we love this. We love this level of criticism, don't we? It's all over our reality competition shows. *America's Got Talent*, *American Idol*, *America's Next Top Model*, *Americas Best Dance Crew*, all of them have one person on these judging panels who, if we're being generous, have no idea what they're talking about. And yet, they're judging the ability of these people, these amazingly talented competitors, by pointing out the specks in their performance even though they have no credibility themselves. And we love it. We eat this stuff up. Why? Why do we love this level of hypocrisy? What draws us to this level of scrutiny among others?

The great preacher Charles Spurgeon offers one thought that might be helpful to us here. It's a quote that I have often found convicting in my life again and again. He says this, "The easiest work in the world is to find fault." Do you see why we're so attracted to it? It's easy. It's simple. You can step into a room and call out everything that you don't like about it. And the hard part is truly understanding, what would be the remedy and the solution here? How can we empathize with other people that are in this room? How can we have vision and compassion to see that maybe my own perspective is not the real solution to the issue? Maybe there's a log that needs to be removed from my own eye first.

So, here's a little application for us. We shouldn't be shocked when sin covers and taints everything that we see. Everything. No matter what organization you're in, what community that you step into, or even the doors of the church of Christian community, it's easy to walk in here and find something that you don't like. It's comically easy. And it's comically easy to say how you can fix it as though the solution was so simply incredible to be able to pull off. You can come into this service and start firing away. Well, we don't like the preacher today. He wears too much hair gel. We don't like that. You're laughing a little too hard. We need to pray for you. Well, we don't like the fellowship; there's not enough crab dip. We don't like the music; it's too contemporary. We don't like the music; it's too liturgical. We don't like the music; it's too modern. We don't like the music; it's too theological. We don't like the music; it's too emotional. We don't like the building; it's so 1993. We don't like that you don't have the right program or the age-specific ministry. We don't like that you don't have the right theology, which by the way happens to be your interpretation of scripture.

You see how easy this is? And in all of this, we find speck after speck after speck, all the while ignoring our lack of entering into the mess that is the church and embracing it and loving it in the way that Christ did.

This is why Jesus uses the not-so-subtle word "hypocrites" to describe these kinds of people. And by the way, the only time this word is used in Matthew's gospel, this word is directed towards the disciples. It's not the Pharisees this time. It's not the ones outside the community. He's using it for His followers. The word "hypocrite" in the original language here is referring to the attitude of an actor. So, for those of you who are in the performing arts, this isn't about you. This is talking about a mindset. They're just acting. Jesus is saying, you, all of us. When we judge in the way the Jesus is saying in verses 3-5, we're just faking it. The outrage that we use to call out the specks in other people's eyes is only a deflection to ignore the very real logs in our own, that prevents you from actually being able to be useful to help anyone. This is why He says, "first take the log out of your own eye," because then you will be able

to be useful. Then you will be able to help others. Then you will be able to really see change in someone else's heart.

Because when we don't, this is why conflict comes when we confront others in our sin. You see, when we haven't really reflected on our own hearts, our own lives, our own sin, our own hypocrisy, it creates this mentality where we go in guns blazing on someone by fault-finding, slandering against them, we're being lazy in our criticism and our judgement without looking to approach it with humility and grace. And what that does is it creates this wasteland of this firestorm of hatred and feeding on itself.

A Yale psychological study published in 2017 probably has my favorite title of any sociological study. The title is called *Why Do We Hate Hypocrites?* In this, they were trying to determine why people don't disdain liars as much as they do hypocrites. And in the key portion of their study, they found hypocrites are detested more in culture not because they live immoral lives; liars do the same thing. But rather, they take the credit for tricking others into believing that they are living morally upright lives. To quote the study,

"Hypocrite's false signals may rouse further disapproval because they lead to negative outcomes such as unfairly boosting the hypocrite's reputation or shaming other people into changing their behavior while the hypocrite carries on, otherwise known as 'freeriding.' Hypocrites freeride. They do so not by refusing to condemn bad behavior, but by using condemnation to imply that they will behave morally without incurring the cost of actually doing so."

Isn't that fascinating?

But what was even more compelling about this study was that it focused on a particular category of hypocrites that were actually more well-liked. Despite the fact that they were still living the same lives as the hypocrites were, the study actually referred to them as "honest hypocrites." Think about that for a second. Honest hypocrites were defined as those who were doing the very thing that the hypocrites were doing, however, with one exception. They revealed that they participate in the very thing that they're condemning. If you remember the old music piracy days, these were the people going, I hate people who steal music, but I download a couple of songs here and there. Just the Christian ones; that makes ma holy, right?

To quote the study,

"Honest hypocrites circumvent the judgement from others by stating that they themselves participate in the immoral behavior yet are nevertheless hypocrites. But society views them as being more honest, so they are exonerated from the same moral judgement despite being in exactly the same camp."

This is fascinating, isn't it? We have a secular institution confirming what scripture is already saying. If we have the humility to recognize the log that's in our own eyes, to recognize our own hypocrisy, this gives us the platform to stand on to aid those who are struggling with their sins and their failings.

This drops the guard down for all of us and to getting into a false war of moral righteousness, a war that, by the way, none of us can win. And by the way, it should help us to see our need for grace in these conversations. Imagine if we all lived by this principle? How much easier would it be to hear the correction of others. How much better it would be to be able to see my brother's faults more clearly when I've worked on and realized my own faults. How quick would I be the one to apologize for my behavior before claiming outrage over another's? How much more patient would that make you? How much more gracious would that make you?

This is a hard saying for us because this isn't really a feel-good sermon that Jesus is preaching, is it? There's no worse church growth strategy that I can think of than for me to come up here and say to all of us, guess what? Y'all are hypocrites. We are hypocrites. I'm a hypocrite. But we're just reading scripture. And until we truly get a grasp of what we really are, until we can say we have a log in our own eyes, then perhaps we really do have the capacity to change what we see as wrong with others in our community around us. In other words, we need Jesus. And we need Jesus to enter into the place of our hearts that wishes to defend how righteous we are, that the specks are not the bigger issue at hand. Jesus needs to enter that place in our hearts and remind us of the grace that we did not deserve and receive under His hand when he went to the cross. And it's only from that place, then, that we can extend the same grace to others.

Now, at this point, we may be wondering, what are the limitations to what we read in the first five verses? Where are the breaking points in relationships? Because remember, this is a wisdom passage. Wisdom requires wisdom to be able to use correctly. So, this is where the counterbalance of the passage comes in in verse 6 where Jesus is balancing the teachings of verses 1-5 to avoid abuse and to avoid totalizing the first two questions by answering the question of, should we consider others? Verse 6, "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."

Again, at first glance, the passage seems to make Jesus out to be a pretty mean guy. Why doesn't Jesus like dogs? Why doesn't he love pigs? What's going on here? I mean, if a loving God is referring to opponents, shouldn't he be loving to them? I thought He was a generous God. Why would He show restraint in His giving?

Well, the extremes used with this verse either use this passage to justify horrible atrocities like racism or exclusion of the lost as though some think that the dogs and the pigs refers to Gentiles which cannot be the case here. The people that take the extremes on this passage point to Matthew 5 where Jesus is referring to the Syrophenician woman as a dog. But as we've already covered in the sermon and previously in the past, Jesus is using that word "dog" ironically to the Syrophenician woman to demonstrate how the Pharisees view her. So, that can't be in play here.

Another extreme on this verse is that the passage is to limit the compassion that Christians should have on those who are in need. But again, that's not what's in view because surely Matthew 25 would be the total counter against that. But the key to understanding this text is to discern what the pearl is that Jesus is referring to which commentators have linked to the pearl of great price in Jesus's parable, the parable where the merchant finds the pearl and sells all he has to receive it. The pearl is the gospel news.

So, when Jesus is referring to dogs and pigs, He's not doing it in a way that's justifying name calling or justifying the insulting of others. Hey, we can insult others because Jesus called people dogs and pigs. Rather, Jesus was referring to a specific kind of a dog and a specific kind of a pig. You see, back in the Jewish culture, dogs were wild and savage. They weren't cute domesticated and perfectly trimmed dogs that we have as pets today. These were dogs that would roam free in the cities and would actually bark harder at those who would try to feed them. To the ones that were trying to show compassion, these dogs were the ones barking even more against them even more so than the ones that would just ignore the dogs. His reference to pigs was referring to a sermon that was given to a predominantly Jewish audience that would understand that pigs were ceremoniously unclean, and they would often mistake jewelry on the floor or other high-priced items as food, something to be trampled under their feet.

Here's what Jesus is saying. There will be those when they hear the pearl of great price, the gospel news, the gospel message. And no matter what you do or how you frame it, they will do nothing but waste your time and dig in harder in their rebellion and their hatred of you. So, it isn't worth your time to keep on trying. Rather, you must spend that time on others that the Lord has called you to, those who respond to the urging of the Holy Spirit to receive the word, hear it and respond in faith.

You see the counterbalance that Jesus is presenting here. He's saying in the first five verses that when you go out into the world and try and share the Christian life and worldview, when you're proclaiming judgements and moral statements on others, don't do it from a high and mighty chair. But in verse 6, He's weighing that out with, also, recognize that no matter what you do and how you will say it, even if it's done in perfect obedience to how Jesus is commanding us in verses 1-5, you're still going to be rejected. So, don't waste your time with certain individuals. Don't feed the trolls, is what Jesus is saying. Don't give to people who will trample on you and the gospel every opportunity they get the change to do so. Instead, love them well. Be gracious and move on.

One of my seminary professors would often tell me the story of his in-laws who rejected Christ every time he presented it. And he realized that by sort of driving the nail further, but continually saying, every time they come, I've got to preach the gospel, it was further dividing the family into meaningless arguments and occupying his mind in ways that were not healthy. And that he wasn't paying attention to what Jesus is saying here in verse 6. In fact, all he was doing was making them greater opponents of the gospel by doing so.

So, him and his in-laws instead, after some mending and some healing and forgiveness and repentance, they worked out this principle. He told his in-laws one day, "We love you enough that we aren't going to talk about Jesus all the time. But we love you enough that we'll talk about Him with you once a year." And instantly, the tone changed in their relationship. The in-laws were like, all right, we can agree with this. And so, every year they have the gospel talk. They know when to expect it. It allows room to breathe. It allows room to avoid people continually trampling on the gospel and the good news.

This is the wisdom of Christ that we see here in these six verses. Now, who is able to do all this? Who can do what Jesus is saying here?

This leads us to our last question to ourselves, where is the gospel in all of us? The danger of finding the gospel in this passage is to get into a Christian fatalism. That is to say, where we see the gospel in this passage is that Jesus is the one who does all of these perfectly, so I don't have to. We can say, Jesus can do this because He is Jesus, but I can't because it's inconceivable. But we would only be half correct.

Yes, Jesus is the one who judges perfectly and judges us not on the basis of our merit, but our faith in the cross for our sins, taking our guilt and shame and the judgement that we rightfully deserve. Praise God for that. Yes, Jesus has no speck in His eye, no log in His eye. So, He can clearly remove the taint of sin from ours, washing us clean and making us a new creation. Yes, Jesus is the one who reaches out to us although we were once dogs and pigs and did not deserve the pearl of great price. Yes, He extends that grace and mercy to reach us where we are.

But to leave the gospel message there and to remove the imperatives that Jesus is giving to His people would do injustice to the gospel itself. Remember, the gospel we have has four chapters, not three. It doesn't stop at redemption, but it continues on in the new creation, the restoration of not only this world but of you and the way that you judge and you talk about other people. You are image bearers of the most high God. You are redeemed and being redeemed. You are united to Christ. And in that union, you have been given the power to obey and the power to listen to what Christ is saying here by the Holy Spirit's work.

You can, by God's grace, not judge others hypocritically. You can, by God's grace, learn to criticize in a way that demonstrates the power of healing and reconciliation and caring rather than a spirit of control. You can by God's grace rightfully discern how and when to share the gospel with others, and when to recognize that they are not ready yet or will never be ready. You are a sinner saved by grace. But you are also a saint who is being renewed by the inseparable love of God.

Don't you want to be a part of a community like this? Christian and non-Christian alike where we all long for this? What would it look like to love others like this, to love Jesus like this? These are the

things that we can demonstrate to each other today, to our families, to our wives, to our youth, our children. These are the things that we as a community of faith can show today to one another. This is what the love of Christ calls us to.

So, let's do that now. We're going to demonstrate this love in worship of our Lord. But first, let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your words reminding us that you call us to look at others in the same way your Son looked at us, with compassion, with grace, with mercy, taking the inward part of our hearts and pouring them outward as sinners who have been changed by grace. Lord, may we worship you now. May we show this love to others as we sing the praises to your name. In the name of your Son we pray. Amen.