

The Sermon on the Mount – Part 5

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 10th April 2011

Intro-

- This week we will look at the final part of our series on the Sermon on the Mount- a key teaching of Jesus.
- We have seen how the context of the sermon could be summarised by these words of Jesus 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will not go to Heaven'.
- We have seen the need for the gift of God's righteousness which every Christian has through Christ's victory on the cross.
- We have seen how the Pharisees fell short regarding their interpretation of God's laws, their good deeds to be seen by others, and also a wrong view of money and possessions.
- This week Jesus exposes their wrong attitudes- they thought they were the spiritual elite and looked down from a great height on others from different backgrounds.

Read Matthew 7:1-29

Jesus' guidelines about bringing teaching and correction- v1-5

- Is Jesus saying it is always wrong to judge? No, when looking at a tricky verse we need to look at the **context** and also how it **lines up against other scriptures**.

Context

- Jesus could not have been outlawing making judgements because in the context He does not forbid taking the speck out of our brother's eye, but says that first we should take the log out of our own, and then we will see clearly to remove the speck out of our brother's eye.
- The pharisees had added many laws to the scriptures as a 'hedge of protection' around the law to prevent breaking God's laws. They looked down on anyone who did not keep their additional laws. As the basis for the sermon on the mount was the need for a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (see Matt 5:20) Jesus could well have been saying 'do not judge' in the sense of judging others for not keeping these additional laws.

Other Scriptures

- Lining up against other scriptures Jesus said in John 7:24 'Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgement.' Therefore, we should judge according to the truth of a matter rather than appearances.
- In Matt 18:15-17 Jesus says that we should challenge one another when sinning, and He lays out the criteria for Church discipline.
- Paul says we have a duty to judge those in the Church:

'For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."' (1 Cor 5:12,13)

'Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? (1 Corinthians 6:2-5)

- So coming back to our original passage; what is Jesus meaning concerning judging? I believe, He is saying 2 things:

1. He is warning against having a judgmental attitude- a critical spirit. The point He is making is not to be as the Pharisees were; i.e. have a 'holier-than-thou' attitude where others are judged who do not fit into our holy club. The Pharisees exhibited a 'holier-than-thou attitude' on many occasions in the life of Jesus, criticising Jesus for the company He kept. They detested tax collectors, prostitutes and Samaritans. Jesus associated with each of these classes of people and was criticised for doing so, being called derisively 'a friend of sinners'-

"Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!" (Luke 7:34).

The Pharisees were often judging Jesus for not keeping their extra rules concerning especially the Sabbath (e.g. healing on the Sabbath which they considered 'work'). If we have our own 'rules' about holiness that are not in scripture, we can choose to live by them, but we cannot condemn others for not keeping the same standards. E.g. views on Sabbath observance, views on the cinema etc.

Also to not be a nit-picker, always putting others down, gossiping about other Christians in a negative way.

Correct judgement is all to do with our motivation. Our judgements then should be motivated by love and should reflect God's mercy- His desire is to restore people. However, within the Church a critical spirit will cause problems including division. That's why Paul says this after warning Christians not to argue over minor issues of doctrine:

"So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another." (Romans 14:1-13)

2. He is saying to first sort our own lives out before criticising others- i.e. don't judge hypocritically.

Judging others can often be a smokescreen to hide our faults. It can make us feel good when we put someone else down because we elevate ourselves above them- this is not good. Revival starts with us.

Projection- At the turn of the century, the world's most distinguished astronomer was certain there were canals on Mars. Sir Percival Lowell, esteemed for his study of the solar system, had a particular fascination with the Red Planet. When he heard, in 1877, that an Italian astronomer had seen straight lines crisscrossing the Martian surface, Lowell spent the rest of his years squinting into the eyepiece of his giant telescope in Arizona, mapping the channels and canals he saw. He was convinced the canals were proof of intelligent life on Mars, possibly an older but wiser race than humanity. Lowell's observations gained wide acceptance. So eminent was he, none dared contradict him. Now, of course, things are different. Space probes have orbited Mars and landed on its surface. The entire planet has been mapped, and no one has seen a canal. How could Lowell have "seen" so much that wasn't there? Two possibilities: (1) he so wanted to see canals that he did, over and over again, and (2) we know now that he suffered from a rare eye disease that made him see the blood vessels in his own eyes. The Martian "canals" he saw were nothing more than the bulging veins of his eyeballs. Today the malady is known as "Lowell's syndrome". When Jesus (Matt. 7:1-3) warns that "in the same way you judge others, you will be judged" and warns of seeing "the speck of sawdust" in another's eye while missing the plank in our own, could he not be referring to the spiritual equivalent of Lowell's syndrome? Over and over, we "see" faults in others because we don't want to believe anything better about them. And so often we think we have a first hand view of their shortcomings, when in fact our vision is distorted by our own disease.

Why we need to make correct judgements: we reap what we sow

- An arrogant, judgemental attitude will come back to bite the religious. 'With the measure you use it will be measured to you' was a common teaching amongst the Rabbis, so they would have understood this well. The rabbis would give illustrations

from the Old Testament as to how someone's deeds came back to them- such things they saw as significant were: Egyptians drowning the infants in the Nile bit them back when their soldiers were drowned in the Red Sea. Absalom, David's son being puffed up over having long beautiful hair, but it was his hair that led to his death.

- The worldly saying 'what goes around comes around' has an element of truth in it. What we sow we shall reap is a biblical principle (Gal 6:7-9). Karma is a distortion of this spiritual truth- we will not get another chance. If we are merciful it will come back to us- Matt 5:7.
- This is summed up in Matt 7:12 by 'whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets'.
- **Applic-** What judgements have we had to make recently? Have they been made from a right motive of love, or being honest, were there other agendas at play? How fair are we to those around us? Would we want others to speak about us the way we speak about them? Have we got a generous spirit, or a critical spirit?

There is a right time to withhold teaching and correction- v6 'do not give what is holy to the dogs'

- 'Pearls' are used as a metaphor for teaching- i.e. The saying 'pearls of wisdom'. It is parallel to 'what is holy'- i.e. Holy instruction, i.e. Godly correction.
- Not everyone gladly receives the teaching of Christ – v6. What Jesus is saying is 'be wise about ramming God's teaching down someone's throat who really doesn't want to hear it'. "He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." (Proverbs 9:7-9)
- ABBA construction- swine trample and dogs tear to pieces- later in v15 the false teachers (a good proportion of the Pharisees) are called 'ravenous wolves'- it may well be that Jesus has in mind particularly the pious, religious leaders who would not only reject the message, but persecute the Church. Here Jesus is cryptically warning His followers of persecution from those, particularly the religious who rejected the message and turned on Christ, and would also turn on His followers.
- Some are set in their ways and don't want to change. Parable of sower- different types of ground- don't blame yourself when someone rejects the message- disciples commanded to move on to next town. Jesus rejected by whole towns- 'woe to you korazin & Bethsaida'.
- There is a right time to move on, when someone is trampling the truth of God to the ground. In Acts 13:45-46 and Acts 18:6 Paul was telling some Jews about Jesus. They rejected the message and started blaspheming and contradicting and resisting Paul's teaching. They were treating a holy thing as unholy and so Paul moved on. Jesus said in Matt 10:14 to 'shake the dust off your feet' if people reject the message and to move on. In 2 John 10 where we are commanded not to receive a false teacher into our home nor to give him a greeting- again this is someone who is abusing the Truth.
- Illust Ambrose of Milan was a famous bishop in the fourth century. He never wanted to be a bishop, but the people of Milan forced him into it. Because of his position, Ambrose became close friends with Emperor Theodosius. Theodosius was a Christian but had a horrible temper. Ambrose never compromised with the emperor. He would tell him, "If a priest doesn't tell you the truth, who will?" Theodosius had appointed one of his friends as governor of Thessalonica. This governor made a fatal mistake. He threw a famous charioteer into jail for cheating. Chariot racing was the Super Bowl of the 4th century, so the city rioted and killed the governor. Emperor Theodosius became enraged. Ambrose begged him to cool down, but the Emperor refused. He ordered the whole city to be massacred. Later he tried to change the order, but it was too late. The population had been crammed into the amphitheater and soldiers spent three hours hacking up men, women and children. News of the massacre reached Milan. The next Sunday, when the Emperor came to church, Ambrose wouldn't let him in. Theodosius pleaded for forgiveness (after all, he had changed the order).

Ambrose told him to go away. Eight months later the emperor returned to the church. Again Ambrose wouldn't let him enter. In the end, the Emperor of Rome had to lie face down in the dirt before he was allowed to worship with the church again. Sin was taken that seriously.

- **Applic-** We are responsible for how we speak to others and for what we share with them, but we are not responsible for people's reactions. Are there some people we need to give more space to?

Those truly hungry for God's truth will find it

- God is more than able to help us to remove planks from our own eyes - v7 'Ask & it will be given you'. If we are struggling with a particular sin God is more than able to set us free from it.
- Jesus now contrasts the hungry with the 'dogs'- 'do not give..(to the dogs)..ask and it will be given to you'. Those who are truly hungry for God will indeed find Him in Christ.
- Jesus had started His sermon by commending those who were hungry and thirsty for righteousness, and in 6:7 He said, rather than seeking possessions etc. to 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness'. Here is Jesus' encouragement that all who truly seek God will find Him, and all who truly seek God's righteousness will find it. All who truly seek His wisdom will find it.
- The tense is present continuous 'keep on asking, seeking, knocking' until you see the fruit of it. The Syro-Phoenician woman in Matt 15:21-28 wanted Jesus to set her daughter free of a demon, but Jesus said 'It's not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs' because she was a Gentile and Jesus had been called first to the Jews. However, her hunger meant she persisted and Jesus granted her request despite her being a Gentile.
- There is a story concerning Thomas Beckett--a story connected with his parentage. His father was a Saxon gentleman, who went into the Crusades and was taken prisoner by the Saracens. While a prisoner among the Saracens, a Turkish lady loved him, and when he was set free and returned to England, she took an opportunity of escaping from her father's house--took ship and came to England. But she knew not where to find him she loved. And all that she knew about him was that his name was Gilbert. She determined to go through all the streets of England, crying out the name of Gilbert till she had found him. She came to London first, and passing every street persons were surprised to see an Eastern maiden, attired in the Eastern costume, crying, "Gilbert! Gilbert! Gilbert!" And so she passed from town to town, till one day as she pronounced the name the ear for which it was intended caught the sound, and they became happy and blessed. And so, sinner, today thou knowest the name of Jesus. Take up the cry, and today, as thou goest along the streets, say in thine heart, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" and when thou art in thy chamber, say it still, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" Continue the cry, and it shall reach the ear for which it is meant. --Spurgeon
- Jesus taught as one with authority- the rabbis quoted other rabbi's opinions for their authority- Jesus did not do this. The Holy Spirit will guide us too.

Truth must be lived out, not just listened to

- 2 ways, 2 trees, 2 professions, 2 builders. True faith is followed by obedience- v24 'hears these sayings of mine and does them'. Cheap grace message- nicey nicey.
- Not easy-road Christianity, but a counting the cost and a picking up our cross daily to follow Christ.
- Universalism is wrong- all paths do not lead to God.
- Cerebral Christianity can be deceptive- the Christian faith should stimulate our minds, but must do so much more than that.
- Pharisees broad way- many Jews were travelling that road, but it was based on legalism, Jesus' road was through relationship with Him.
- Repentance is a necessary part of salvation- we are not saved by works, but a change of heart, leading to change in our actions. Faith sets us free to obey.
- A businessman well known for his ruthlessness once announced to writer Mark Twain, "Before I die I mean to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I will climb Mount Sinai and read the 10 Commandments aloud at the top." "I have a better idea," replied Twain. "You could stay in Boston and keep them."

During the mid-twentieth century, one of the most recognizable brand icons was a dog sitting in front of an old-

time gramophone, head cocked, listening to the sound. That iconic image, owned by the RCA Victor record company, was taken from a painting by English artist Francis Barraud. The dog, Nipper, had been owned by Barraud's brother who had recorded his voice on early phonograph records. After the brother died, Barraud inherited Nipper and the gramophone and records. Whenever the records with Nipper's master's voice were played, the dog would sit in front of the gramophone listening to his master's voice.

That's a beautiful image of the relationship between Jesus Christ and us. He has gone away from earth, so we can no longer hear His physical voice. But we sit in front of His Word, and kneel before Him in prayer, and listen for our Master's voice. The Bible was given to be the voice of the Lord until He returns, and prayer is how we confirm what we believe He has spoken to our hearts. How easily can you pick out the Master's voice from all others? Listening for the Master's voice is a sign of loyalty and longing -- an indication that we are eager to hear and obey.

Summary

- We need to follow Jesus' guidelines for bringing teaching and correction
- There is a right time to withhold teaching and correction
- Those truly hungry for God's truth will find it
- Truth must be lived out not just listened to

Song: Your Voice is like thunder