

Matthew 7:1–12

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[0 : 0 0] Once again, that's Matthew chapter 7, verses 1 through 12. I'd invite you to please stand for the reading of God's word.

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?

For 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. Ask, and it will be given to you.

Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. For which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

[1 : 1 3] Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father, who is in heaven, give good things to those who ask him?

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Well, good morning, and welcome to Christ Church on this Thanksgiving weekend, where we are all settled in from the food we've eaten, and our minds are not yet ready to lurch forward into Christmas.

So my guess is that those of us who are in the room here today, 15 of us, those of you who are at home, are in the midst of a weekend where you're just settling your life in preparation for work and the work of the coming months.

And so it's perhaps a difficult week to give 30 minutes of your mental energy to the reading and the hearing of the word.

[2 : 4 6] But my prayer is that this text will be of help to you and to all of us as we walk together. What am I going to be speaking about today?

Simply then, what our words about one another reveal about our walk with one another?

What do our words reveal about the progress we are making in our Christian walk?

I mentioned last week that our journey as Christ Church Chicago to heaven is more like taking the stairs than it is an elevator ride.

And that the Sermon on the Mount, which we are now in the midst of eight weeks looking at, provides almost a stairway for us to ascend together unto heaven.

[3 : 5 4] And that foundational step of our vision really requires a good look at the Beatitudes and a consideration of those to whom the kingdom belongs.

There's no sense in journeying to heaven if you're not actually among those who will be blessed by God and find his approval at the end. But the Beatitudes gave way to that little text on salt and light or movement from those to whom the kingdom belongs to the work we are to do.

Which gave way immediately to Jesus and his word, which we are to follow. And we'll give ourselves to that together. After that, we saw the almsgiving and the prayers and the fasting.

And we saw clearly the worship we are to bring and the worship that we're to be known by. But then when we hit last week, we hit what I would call kind of a landing, a breadth of space between chapter 6, verse 19, all the way through chapter 7 and verse 12.

And this we really looked at in this week and last week as a landing that talks about what our walk will require.

[5 : 15] It's been, according to commentators, a difficult section of scripture. And so I almost just want to say a word about this portion of scripture before preaching the truths that were read to us aloud.

Let me just say a word about this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. A commentator by the name of Stanton wrote the following. Matthew 6, 19 to 7, 12 has long puzzled interpreters.

This part of the sermon seems to be a ragtag of sayings, only some of which are loosely related to others. In other words, he finds himself in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount and not quite sure where he is.

Another commentator, Gulich, put it this way. Chapter 6, verse 19 to 7, verse 12 consists of six apparently disjointed units, neither directly related to the doing of righteousness, nor do they exhibit any visible relationship with each other.

And so if you've been following along, you've come to understand that from my perspective, the whole unit can be spoken of in terms of the walk that is required by us.

[6 : 38] And it really is divided into two simple parts. So let me see if I can clarify what has long puzzled many. Look at verse 19 of chapter 6.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. That whole banner related to our wants, our desires to things that we are seeking.

But the reading we have today starts this way. Judge not that you may not be judged. Judge not that you may not be judged. It's a two-part landing on your wants on one end to be replaced by seeking the kingdom of heaven and your words on the second half.

What you are saying and what you are seeking. What you are really serving and what you are speaking.

What do you really want out of our life together and what do your words reveal about them. You know that as I was looking at the text last week, it broke open with such clarity.

[7 : 50] I just want you to see it before we get any further. On both halves, there is an instruction. Do not lay up. Do not judge. Each half is followed by an illustration.

The instruction gives way to an illustration on an eye. Verse 22 of chapter 6, the eye is the lamp of the body. Or in verse 3 of our own text, why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye?

And the illustration on the eye gives way to an interpretation put forward in a proverbial saying. Almost as if this is what you are able to remember.

Last week, it was you cannot serve God in money. This week, do not give to dogs what is holy or throw your pearls before pitting. These proverbial like statements of wisdom that throw all the weight of the instruction and the illustration before the reader.

And then the application follows. Therefore, verse 25, and you begin to see how anxiety is put in its place by a reordering of what we seek.

[8 : 57] And in our own text, the asking of verse 7 puts in place the judgmental spirit we have by the redirecting of our speech. When you look at this text, 619 to 712, it opens beautifully like a flower, mirroring halves of one another.

And the truth or the full force of what we're going to deal with today is simply this. What our words about one another reveal concerning our walk with one another.

The instruction, verses 1 and 2. Judge not that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged. And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

That's the instruction Jesus would have concerning our way with one another. In particular, the words we use. Now, this phrase, do not judge lest you be judged, has been used as a cover or a shield.

I've actually had that thrown at me over 30-some years of pastoral ministry when trying to seek the welfare of a brother or sister in Christ in regard to their life.

[10 : 23] And in regard to patterns of life that we would like to see the Lord bring them into greater conformity. And a resistant heart would say to me, hey, judge not lest you be judged, which is a shield that would allow them to just live as they ever would want to live.

But that's not really there. It doesn't mean that we can never make a judgment about what's going on in one another's lives. In fact, later in the text, it's actually going to tell you, don't be throwing pearls before swine.

That would require you to make a judgment on the person you were speaking with. And by verse 15, next week, beware of false prophets. You're actually supposed to make determinations on people who are walking with Christ and those who aren't.

It doesn't mean that a Christian and a Christian in Christ's church can never make a judgment on the life of another in the body. What it means is that a judgmental spirit, a highly critical use of speech toward one another is completely out of play.

In fact, it's a special danger within the family of God that this could unwind our vision over the next 20 years, how we speak of one another.

[11 : 47] Do you know that when we started our church some 22 years ago now, about two or three years in, I had an individual say to me that one of the things that most attracted them to the church was they never found themselves in the company of those within the church where people were speaking negatively of one another.

Wow. What a statement that would make concerning the life of our family and the progress of our soul. We know this is an internal matter or a Christian matter or a local church matter.

Verse 3, we see the word brother twice or once in verse 3, once in verse 4, once in verse 5. How we speak about one another reveals how we're walking with one another in Christ.

So we just need a little self-examination today. Are we fault-finding folk when we speak about others in the church?

Are we highly critical? Do you have a tendency to frame the narrative in ways that would protect yourself and undo your brother or sister?

[13 : 13] I was thinking of this this morning and my normal morning devotional today came from Charles Spurgeon. And he said that when we do this thing, it fit perfectly with the text.

He said this kind of speaking about one another in negative terms is a three-fold poison. It injures the person. It injures the teller, the hearer, and the person about whom that speech is being told.

He says the reputation of the Lord's people should be very precious in our sight. Listen to this.

He says some tongues need a bridle rather than a spur. Many glory in pulling down their brethren as if thereby they raised themselves.

Then he says this. We may ourselves, one of these dark days, need forbearance and silence from our brethren.

[14 : 24] Let us render it cheerfully to those who require it now. Be this our family rule and our personal bond.

Speak evil of no man. Wow, what a family rule. What a personal bond.

What an indication of the progress that we are making with one another on our journey to heaven. Our words spoken about one another reveal the progress of our heart concerning our walk with one another.

Just do an experiment in your own mind. You will learn about the condition of your own heart as you hear yourself speak words.

For those who are married, listen to what a husband says about his wife. Listen to the words that come forth from a wife about her husband.

[15 : 30] Listen to the words that you hear in conversation concerning a third person who's not present and yet a member of the church.

Listen to the words that come forth from a throne. Listen to the words that come forth from a throne. Listen to the words that come forth from a throne. I've often thought that my own conversations would be shorter and more profitable if I heeded Spurgeon's dictum, let us speak no evil of any man.

So think about it. Think of the last 10 or 12 conversations you've had with someone in Christ's church. Think about those occasions when another person has come up.

What was said. If the bulk of it is critical, it's often at times even covered by some tagline at the very close, like, well, you know I love that person.

They're really awesome. As if that blanket covers you or justifies all the things said about them. When we put others in a poor light, it reveals the progress we yet need to make in our walk with Christ.

[16 : 56] What's the issue? The issue for those of us in Christ's church Chicago then is simply this. Remember that the self-righteous are not so good at self-assessment.

Or remember that those who are highly critical in their speech of others suffer themselves from heart calluses that are unknown even to themselves.

And so the illustration is really perfect. The illustration of the eye is meant to arrest the large blind spots we have.

Why do you see the speck that's in your brother's eye but don't notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when there is a 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. You see, you are able to help others grow in Christ.

[18 : 06] But even here, the force of the text is not so much on how to correct someone else rightly as it is on the need for us to self-correct by assessing the logs in our own eyes.

The proverbial wisdom follows. Verse 6. Do not give dogs what is holy. Do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot. And turn to attack you.

It's almost as though he's looking for a proverb to anchor the force of his full discussion. And so he reaches for a proverb that shows the futility of correcting others, even when the things you have to say are right and precious.

I'm reminded of Proverbs 26, 17. Like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears is someone who rushes into quarrels that are not their own.

And if the truth is there, if he's really saying within the church, take such care with your words, that even if you are going to correct someone, it would be after self-assessment.

[19 : 27] It would be in light of a loving relationship. It would not be in any way would you ever be able to be described by another person in the church as a critical individual, as a fault-finding person, as one who's continually speaking negatively about others under the guise of your great care for godliness.

But rather, you would understand that if it's that difficult in the church, you would certainly understand if dogs and pigs are degenerate, unregenerate emblems within the scripture, you would know that this is a difficult thing within the family, let alone try to get it done outside the family.

You try to correct people, well, they'll just turn and attack you. So take care.

Even when you're right, your words are fraught with problems in bringing about the unity of the family.

I think the part of the text that most interests me and intrigues me is what happens at the turn at verse 7, the instruction, verse 1 and 2, followed by the illustration of 3 to 5, the interpretation of that proverbial saying, verse 6, now moves toward an intriguing application.

[21 : 02] How is this the rightful next step that would apply the instruction of his text?

Where do you begin? Where do I begin? Where do we begin to make improved progress with our words?

What's the antidote to a critical spirit? What help can we bring to one another in our fault-finding nature?

Interestingly, he moves us to the direction of prayer. Instead of us talking poorly about one another, he would have us talk with God about ourselves.

And really, our own needs. I'm reminded of David's request in Psalm 139.

[22 : 22] Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in me.

And lead me in the way everlasting. The antidote to the Christian in Christ's church who wants to make progress in their own soul, in their words about one another, will come to a return to private prayer where you begin to speak to God about your own life, your own desires, your own needs.

And why is that such an antidote? Because, verse 9, Suddenly, we're confronted with the reality that our Father is good.

And that our own frailties are many. And our weaknesses and our faults and the words of our mouths, which have uttered far too many judgments on the lives of others, finally fall to the ground in silence.

As we understand that our Father is actually still providing for us in the midst of all of our judgmentalism. This is really quite something.

[24 : 02] It's because God is good, and that he will be gracious to you, that you will learn to speak no evil of others, and begin then, verse 12, to actually implement the great antidote for the critical spirit.

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also for them. In other words, our love for our neighbor, our brother, our sister, your husband, your wife, your friend, your family, your community group leader, that it all takes on a new banner.

Love is extended. Words are constrained. The law is kept. And unity pervades.

This is really just a wonderful thing for us to consider today. We're shut up into our own homes for the most part.

What a season of life. To continue the hard, soul-searching work of being the Christ church that we would want to be by the time we gather publicly again.

[25 : 35] And as each of us commits to making progress in our own life, we will benefit ourselves, those we speak with, and those who we speak about.

The Sermon on the Mount. What a body of material that provide first lessons for future followers.

Be among those to whom the kingdom belongs. Do the work we've been given to do. Follow the word of Christ in all of its fullness.

Perform the worship that will actually be rewarded. Begin re-ordering your wants by seeking the kingdom.

And redirect your words, which far too often bring others down, by speaking to him who is everlastingly good.

[27 : 00] Our Heavenly Father, as we stand now in the middle of this fall series with only two Sunday texts to go, we pray that this sermon by our Lord Jesus Christ as assembled by Matthew would be fashioning us in the hidden parts of our own heart.

It would be not only informing us, but it would be implemented by us. And Lord, as we continue to see you in all of your goodness and all of your kindnesses to us, may that lead us into a love of our brethren for the glory of your name.

Amen.