

Old Growth/New Growth

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[0 : 00] I really have enjoyed preparing this sermon this morning. I'm still a bit doubtful about you, though. Sometimes your heart is bursting with good news, and you dial the number, and you get a busy signal.

Sometimes you stand up in a pulpit and read the text, and you get a busy signal. Well, I'm not going to hang up just yet. Three things by way of a commercial enterprise, without permission from anybody, I'd like to tell you about.

One is that, you know, as a member of this congregation, this is the first time I can do this, I'd like to tell you, ask you about your envelope giving.

You know, I spent 15 years being afraid to raise the subject. But I'm not afraid anymore. And, you know, I suspect if there's any problem in the financial support of this church, it may have to do with a condition of our individual hearts more than the stewardship that the church has.

So err strongly on the side of being overwhelmingly generous, will you? Because God seems to have blessed this congregation in a wonderful way, and it probably wouldn't do us any harm to be very generous indeed in supporting God's work in this parish.

[1 : 47] There, I've done it. I know. The second thing I'd like to tell you is that my week has been an encounter with a number of artists, just by coincidence, in this congregation.

And there are some wonderfully capable artists in this congregation. And I don't think that's any mistake. I think that's probably something God is doing.

And so I want to commend that you pay close attention to very gifted artists in the congregation and to the work that they're doing and the things they're trying to say.

That's number two. The third thing is that on Tuesday night, John Stott's going to be here to speak. And usually, good old St. John says, Who's John Stott?

Well, he's someone that you should hear. And the opportunity is a wonderful opportunity to hear him on Tuesday night.

[2 : 58] Everybody else in Vancouver will be here, so be a bit greedy and come early so you can get the seats. Those are the three things I wanted to mention.

Now we have to deal with this passage. Wonderfully familiar, full of wisdom sayings about things like judge not that you be not judge.

Look at the beam in your eye before you look at the speck in somebody else's eye. Consider the pigs and the dogs by which you are surrounded. And then that wonderful ASK, Ask, Seek, Knock verse.

All these matters are dealt with in the passage today, and it's a wonderfully rich passage. I was very much helped when Jim Packer stood up here and preached to you on the Sermon on the Mount, and at the conclusion of his sermon said, The text for this sermon I'm telling you about is, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

And that's the text for the whole sermon. I just found that a very helpful way of hearing all the different parts of the sermon under that main text.

[4 : 22] And the next thing that I want to tell you is that it's within the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus teaches us how to pray. And when you pray, say, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

Now all this that we're talking about today is talking about the kingdom coming, how the answer to this prayer might show itself in our lives.

And so that's helpful too. The text, Blessed are the poor in spirit, the prayer, Thy kingdom come. And that's filled out.

And then remember also that the Sermon on the Mount, as you will hear in a week or two, ends with a strong admonition to each of us saying, Quit building sandcastles that are there for a short time and then the next tide comes in and they're gone.

And we waste so much of our lives building sandcastles. And this sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, ends with a strong plea not to do it anymore. Okay, the eight things that it says in this passage, I just want to look at them briefly.

[5 : 47] It's sort of like, you know how your diary is sometimes in long vertical lines saying, this is what I'm going to do on Monday and this is what I'm going to do on Tuesday and this is what I'm going to do on Wednesday and so on.

And then you write across those lines when you put down what it is you're going to do. Well, your life is, you've got those lines for your life.

Now, what Jesus is doing is telling you how to put the wool into those lines, how to, how to, you know, weave in these things into your life and these are the eight things that he tells us to be careful to weave into our lives, into the vertical lines we come across with these eight things.

First, I would like to say that the passage is totally impractical. Judge not that you be not judged, quite impossible in our world and in our culture.

But I don't think the person who gave this sermon in the first place was unmindful of that. I think that he was talking about something far greater than our culture when he said judge not that you be not judged.

[7 : 13] judged. What he was saying is you are to be in your personal life and in your personal dealings with people, you are to be totally generous in your judgment in the light of the verse that Bill read at the beginning of the service, you know.

The measure you get will be the measure you give will be the measure you get. So what you want to get is what you want to give is totally generous because God wants to be very generous with you. So in the matter of judgment you are asked in terms of not in terms of the world because the world still has to have police courts and policemen and laws and all those kinds of things.

But in terms of your relationship to the world and your anticipation of the kingdom you are to be extremely generous when you meet people. And Jesus reminds you that there's a practical reason for that and that is that when you get judged somebody's going to have to be very generous with you.

So it's wise in that sense to be generous. The second thing he says is get out of the lumber business. Now to give you a very simple illustration I think the homosexual community has got really tired of being looked at by the heterosexual community the heterosexual community trying to deal with the speck in their eye in the eye of the homosexual community while not dealing with the beam in their own.

[9 : 10] And so now the homosexual community have their own beam. And so that it's two people with beams in their eyes trying to help each other and that's not going very far in our society.

It's like what what Jesus says in Luke it's like the blind leading the blind.

The heterosexual community is totally in chaos about their sexuality. The homosexual community is totally in chaos about their homosexuality and they're trying to help each other.

And Jesus says they both fall into the ditch and then we have to see what happens then. So that's I think why Jesus says get out of the lumber business.

And then he says don't abandon the gospel to the pigs and the dogs. And the pigs run through the streets and the dogs run through the streets and you can't go through the streets without running into the pigs and the dogs.

[10 : 17] And what the pigs do with what you may have to offer them is to trample it in the mud. mostly they get jobs writing for the local newspapers.

And the dogs are there to take whatever it is you suggest and tear it to shreds so that it's completely useless.

And that I mean we all experience that. We live in a world of pigs and dogs and we watch them tearing things apart every day and trampling pearls into the mud.

So Jesus just reminds you that if you try and do anything that's even slightly worthwhile in our world you've got to watch out for the pigs and the dogs. He was I mean he was he wasn't politically correct to refer to them as pigs and dogs.

But he was very much more accurate. And when he did it himself remember with a Syrophenician woman and she came and asked for her child and she said should I take the bread which belongs to the children and give it to the dogs?

[11:46] And she answered him. And that's just a good picture to have in mind when you've got to remember that even dealing with dogs you've got to be careful. So that's the third thing.

The fourth thing is that you are to cultivate a continuous conscious prevailing dependence upon God our Father.

And that continuing that continuous conscious prevailing dependence is described as ask seek and knock.

The condition of most people in a large urban area is there's nobody I could ask. There's nowhere I can find it.

And if I knock the doors are bolted against me. And that's the kind of despair that is characteristic of our world.

[12:50] That there is nobody to ask. And you can spend your life looking but you'll never find it. And you can spend your life knocking but the door will never open.

And that despair has taken hold of hundreds and hundreds of people in a city like ours. lost. And so there's the good news of the kingdom. There is someone who is waiting for you to ask.

There is someone who is available to your seeking. There is someone who will open the door. And that's our faith. And that's what the continuing conscious prevailing dependence upon God.

Instead of the continuing conscious prevailing anxiety fearfulness guilt doubt in which we tend to drown. So that's the fourth thing.

The fifth thing is you know about the bread and the stone. Don't think that watching a roast beef dinner on a TV show is all your children need for supper.

[14:00] you know it's it has no nourishment in it. You know I mean I don't know if you want to look at TV as the stone we offer people that are looking for bread.

And it's sort of like that though isn't it? I mean the stone we offer people is made of plastic but it's no more nourishing than if it was made of granite.

that we try and offer some kind of plastic substitute and people can't work that way very well.

I mean they can't live on that. When you come to the next picture that you know better than to put a snake in your child's lunch pail rather than a tuna sandwich.

I've decided this is a little prophetic word for you. I think that picture really covers the drug trade fairly well. You know that when we're making drugs available to people we are really serving them a serpent instead of a fish.

[15:17] Instead of something that's going to nourish them we're giving them something that ultimately will poison them. And that's a strong picture that Jesus used to describe that situation.

But then he goes on and says the seventh thing is that even though there seems to be a diminishing evidence of human goodness still the evidence that there is that you won't give a stone for bread to your own children at least.

You won't give a serpent for a fish to your own children at least. And so Jesus builds an argument on that and he says if you self-centered as we are if we know better than to do that surely you can imagine that your heavenly father wants to do something a million times better than the best thing you can think of.

And that's what Jesus is saying I think when he tells if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father who is in heaven give you whatever you wish.

The good things you ask for. In Luke it says he'll give you the Holy Spirit. And then the whole thing ends with what for present purposes we'll call the golden summary.

[17:07] The golden summary is given to you in I guess it's in verse 12. Whatever you wish that men should do to you do so to them for this is the law and the prophets.

Now generally that's interpreted to mean well if you take that and leave everything else out you're alright. But what it really means is that the whole thing comes to focus in that.

And if you take that away from the whole of the law and the prophets and the whole revelation of God in Christ then you don't have much. And so the golden summary is a summary of all that God has made known to us.

Now I want I want you I want just to give you an illustration which seems important to me and I hope I hope it's apt.

But I was reading one of Fran's magazines on family counseling this week you know. And it described how back in the 60s if your boy was caught stealing cigarettes from the drug store the community the police the father the family everybody got involved in telling him that there is order and there is authority in this land and you should obey it.

[18:31] But that was 30 years ago. Now in contrast with that kind of situation and I hope you will pardon this illustration but it seems so pointed that I thought it would be helpful to you in understanding this passage.

And this is a quotation from the counseling magazine. It's a sort of case history. A therapist gets a call from a dismayed mother because her 15 year old son wants to bring his girlfriend home to spend the night in his room and in his bed.

husband's mother. Something that would have been virtually unthinkable to any right minded middle class parents during even the laid back 60s.

The mother is adamantly opposed not for reasons of morality and reputation that might have concerned her 30 years ago. Her concern is what if he gets AIDS?

What if she gets pregnant and wants to keep the baby she asks. Meanwhile, the boy's father, who is hard to reach, he lives with his new wife and infant child three time zones away, vaguely approves of the idea.

[19:54] At least we know where he's sleeping and who he's sleeping with. The boy insists that everybody else he knows is doing it. And the school counselor says it all depends upon whether or not he's practicing safe sex.

Furthermore, the mother's own lover frequently sleeps over. So why can't the boy and his girlfriend do it too? Meanwhile, the same struggle is going on in the girl's home.

And he ends with, Welcome to the quicksand of family therapy in the 90s. Where do you start?

Now, the reason I give you that illustration is because it seems a poignant one and kind of heart-rending to us as a congregation perhaps, but not unfamiliar probably to many of us in personal terms.

But what I think, the reason I want to give it to you, the reason I want you to think about it is this.

Don't you think it would be an enormous advantage to all the people connected with that situation if they could figure out what it meant to judge not that you be not judged, to get the beam out of your own eye before you deal with the speck in somebody else's eye, to recognize that any effort you make to do some good in the situation will be attacked and defiled by other members of society as dogs tear it apart and as pigs trample any value in it into the mud, that will happen, that what you need to do in that situation is starting from zero, is to ask because you need an answer, to seek, to find a solution, to knock, to find some opportunity to break into this situation.

All those things would seem appropriate. To remember that you can't raise your child and a counselor can't counsel the child on how to eat stones instead of bread and you can't, trying to help the child, give the child something which will, like a serpent, damage it.

[22:39] All those things, it would seem to me, are singularly appropriate both for the counselor and for the family, not in terms of a heavy handed censuring coming down on the situation, but being generous and in judgment, being very aware of your own weakness.

and just recognizing that what these verses from Matthew 7 do for us is to provide us with a radically basic structure within which to deal with the deconstruction that has taken place in our world.

our world has been deconstructed because we have, I mean, the structure which most of us, I mean, you're all so young, but most of us who are into the 40s and 50s and so on like that, we recognize the structure that is made up of authority and sustaining relations and good models and moral structure and long-term investment and how to live in a dog eat dog world and how to compensate for pigs that trample pearls into the mud.

We've learned how to do all those kinds of things, things, but all the structures have been torn away from us and now the father of this child can't do anything, the mother of the child can't do anything, the school can't do anything, the peer group can't do anything, nobody is in a position to do anything.

Well, I don't know, I mean, my feeling is that it wouldn't be a bad idea to start by reading Matthew 7, verse 1 to 12, and see if you can't find a place to begin in the kinds of situations we live in all the time, if we can't find something there that will sustain us as we try and sustain others.

[25 : 08] my last point that I want to make is a quotation about the nature of the Sermon on the Mount, because if you think, I mean, I want you to hear this simply because I think the Sermon on the Mount is infinitely more radical than we think, and it's not something you can easily fit into your life.

I think the demands that are being made are demands that are completely life-changing, and this was written about the Sermon on the Mount.

A moment's intelligent reflection shows that the Sermon on the Mount is the most terrifying program for living ever set before the human mind.

It is an ultimate demand, moment. But the same gospel shows that there is a final succor available to the man and woman, broken in spirit by their failure to reach this standard.

And the final help is Jesus himself in his marvelous invitation. Come to me, all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy, and I will give you relief.

[26 : 34] Bend your necks to my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble hearted, and your soul will find rest, for my yoke is good to bear, and my load is light.

And so, this word from Matthew 7 invites us this morning to come to communion, aware of the terrifying program for living that is set before us in the Sermon on the Mount, but equally aware of the fact of the person who taught it, saying to us, because of your, because of our weakness, because of our need, because of our insufficiency, because of the complexity of our problems, he says to us, come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.

I hope that we labor heavily under the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, in order that we may depend heavily on the one who says, come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden.

Amen.