

One Way

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's very good to be with you this morning, and for those of you who have not been here and are visiting, we are at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, this famous sermon that Jesus gave, and we're actually at the end of the first part of a series on Matthew.

Next seven weeks or so, we're going to be hearing about issues with Christianity that people have, difficulties they have, and what the Bible says about it, and how we can respond well to people in our life who have questions about our faith and what it all means.

So that will be a great time for us to be equipped to share our faith the next seven weeks, different subjects, and then we're going to continue with Matthew in the fall, too, in September.

So we're ending here this section, the Sermon on the Mount, and for whatever reason, which we'll find out now, Jesus closes this sermon by talking a lot about God as our judge.

God as our judge. And we might think, isn't that kind of a negative way to end this incredible sermon? And the answer is, well, it seems like it at first.

[1 : 1 9] First, I'm well qualified to speak on the subject of God as our judge because my name is Daniel, which means God is my judge.

And, you know, when I was growing up and we'd share about what names meant, you'd hear things like, oh, my name means beautiful or strong helper or one who helps mankind, beautiful flower.

And then I'd say, well, what's yours? They'll say, what is yours? And I'll say, God is my judge. And I'll say, oh. But, you know, this is a good name.

But it is a subject, God as our judge, which actually, for God's people over the centuries, right into the Old Testament, has been a cause for great joy, a cause for thankfulness to God.

Psalms 98, which is what Joy to the World is based on, that great carol, is all about God's judgment. But it's all about joy and praise as well because he is judge.

[2 : 3 3] And so at the end of that psalm, we hear, let the rivers clap their hands. Let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity. You see, there's this incredible sense of rejoicing in God's judgment because it means that all things will be made right.

All that we truly need will be given to us. Things that are wrong are corrected. But it also means that we have a reverence for God because he alone can save us from judgment.

He alone can save us from all that is not right. And so we have this love for God because he makes things right. And we have a reverence because all is not right.

And so this transforms our hearts to live a different life because it's only God who can bring his goodness into this world as he is judge.

[3 : 45] Sometimes when we think of God's judgment, we think that this is something that will cause us to be pressed down with fear.

But what it actually means, if we actually understand God as our judge, is that we will live a different life, a life with the very qualities of God, a life that Jesus says will shine into the world, that it will bless the world.

We will have the quality of the kingdom of God if we know that God is our judge, the quality of Jesus himself. And he gives us two great gifts that I want to talk about this morning.

Gifts for a Jesus-shaped life that forms us. He gives us his humility to love rightly. And secondly, he gives us his wisdom to live rightly.

And I want to talk about those two points today. Okay. The first, his humility to love rightly. The first mark of a kingdom citizen is that they love.

[4 : 53] Jesus said, they will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. And knowing God as our judge gives us the strong humility to truly love in all of our relationships, and especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Secondly, it gives us grace to love our Father who is in heaven as well. So if you look at verses 1 through 7, Jesus shows us how to care for brothers and sisters with a repentant heart.

So look at verse 7. This is probably the best known verse in the Bible for non-Christians. People who don't go to church memorize this verse more than any other verse in the Bible.

Why is that? It says, judge not that you will not be judged. And so there's a reason for that. It's because they do not want Christians to be restrictive.

They want us to be morally permissive. That one's choice is always right. And no one should say anything differently. Well, Jesus is not saying that. He's not saying don't make judgments.

[6 : 05] Don't have discernment. In fact, Jesus says that we are to judge. In fact, if you look at verse 6, there's rather strong language. It says, don't give dogs what is holy and don't throw your pearls before pigs.

Why would he say that? Well, he's saying don't keep hammering away with the gospel to people who clearly reject Jesus and despise or ridicule his name.

Don't waste all kinds of time on that. You have the treasure of the gospel. So Jesus wants us to be discerning. And not only that, but when we see our Christian brother and sister living a life that dishonors Jesus or making decisions that disobey him where they are wrong before God, we are to help them.

We are to help our brothers and sisters to come back to Jesus, to the place of repentance. But Jesus so clearly and vividly says, look at yourself first.

So Jesus says, you hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then, only then, you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother or your sister's eye.

[7 : 22] Now, Jesus knows our hearts. He knows that we are very, very good at seeing the failings in other people around us. But we can be completely blind to our own failings.

In fact, the weaknesses that we point out in people are often the very failings we have in ourselves. It's just the way that we work. And so Jesus is saying to you and me, you need to have a repentant heart.

You need to have humility. Jesus gives us that humility by taking on himself God's deserved judgment on us.

And I can only help my brother or my sister if I know that I am a sinner who desperately needs the forgiveness of God who is my judge.

And so I continually repent. I continually have to be taking these massive beams out of my eye by his grace. And then I come to my brother or sister, not over God's judgment or carrying God's judgment with me, but under God's judgment, together with the person that I am talking to.

[8 : 38] And it's when you have that humility that God can give you a genuine empathy, a genuine love for the person you are seeking to bring back to him.

And they can really hear you to call your call to turn back to Jesus far better when you come from a position of a fellow sinner who is in deep need of God's grace, a beggar who is looking for food with them.

That need for grace from God, our judge, brings a humility in our relationships, which is life-changing. And it affects our relationship with God, our Father, as well.

So if you look at verses 7 through 11, Jesus teaches that you and I are children, that we have a Father who is a perfect judge, and he knows our good.

It's only because he is our judge that he knows that. Two Christmases ago, I saw a very large coffee table book on one of those display tables when I was shopping in Costco.

[9 : 48] And I'll tell you the name of it. It was called Cars, Trains, and Planes, The Definitive Visual History of Air and Land Transportation. Now, that book, I knew, would be an incredible joy to my son, Nicholas, who is crazy about air and land travel.

And so I wrapped it for a Christmas present. And I gave it to him on Christmas Day, and he opened it, and I was watching him. And it was a huge surprise for him, and he was very excited to get it.

He was overjoyed when he opened it and started looking through it. Well, that was a year and a half ago, and he continues to love reading it. It is a constant source of joy for him.

And I know that it was a good gift because he has continued to do that for all of that time. And so it was such a pleasure to see him open that gift that I knew was just right for him.

And for me, it's an ongoing joy to continue to see his joy. And you and I have experienced that if you are a parent. You know that joy of giving that kind of gift for your child.

[11 : 05] But Jesus says in verse 11, Jesus tells us that God the judge knows us better than we know ourselves.

He is also our Father. And because he is perfect in his judgment, he knows what we need more than we do. And that is humbling.

And so Jesus says, He's saying, everyone who comes to the Father, no matter who you are, no matter who you are this morning, you will receive.

You will find. The door will be opened to you. And I think many of you are not doing this because you're forgetting that God is your perfect judge.

And he is your Father. I'm fortunate I have my name to remind me of that every single day. But you're going to say, now wait a second, what about unanswered prayers?

[12 : 33] What about the times when I came to my Father and I did not receive what I asked for? Well, Jesus here is saying, he promises that he will only give what is truly good for you.

We don't always know what is good. How much more will your Father give you good things for those who ask? He knows our hearts. He knows us and our eternity.

He knows what is before us. And he gives to us what we truly need, what is truly good. There is a world-known country and western theologian.

And his name is Garth Brooks. He had a hit way back in the 1990s, which was called I Thank God for Unanswered Prayers. And so the song that he wrote tells a story about being with his wife and an old girlfriend from high school that he prayed that he would marry one day shows up and he's very thankful for his beloved wife after meeting, thankfully.

And here's his theological words here. He says, Remember when you're talking to the man upstairs that just because he doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care.

[14 : 00] Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers. Well, he's actually right. Because all of our prayers, if all of our prayers were going to be exactly answered, we would have an intolerable burden upon ourselves.

Do you have that kind of wisdom to ask rightly every time? No. And I don't either. I need God to be the perfect judge, to be the eternal father who is eager to open the right doors and to show us what we really need.

He desires to give us the very best with eternity in mind. And so he changes us. He changes our prayers as we ask and as we seek and as we knock.

He changes our heart. And so humility says, that is the one I need to pray to every day. He has the best for me. Now I want you to notice in verse 12, this is the third sort of set of people relationships, the ones that are everywhere in our life, not just in our church or among our Christian friends.

He says in verse 12, it begins with the word so. And that word so is a therefore that's looking back to verses 7 through 11 that says, you have a father in heaven who looks after you and is eager to answer your prayers.

[15 : 30] Therefore, do verse 12. And that says, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to everyone.

Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. For this is the law and the prophets. It summarizes all the teachings of what it means to be obedient to God in your relationships.

It's an amazing thing. Very simple. But it says, reflect God's grace that you have received at his hands. It's very unlike the universal saying that was found in ancient religions which said, anything you don't want people to do to you, don't do to them.

And that was a saying that really was able to prevent revenge and things getting out of hand when it came to violence and wrong actions. This thing that Jesus is saying is very different.

He is saying, take the initiative to bless. Decide to give God's grace. It means actually looking at yourself intently with God's view in mind and ask, what would I really benefit from?

[16 : 43] What would be the best for me? That's what I will do to the person who I am relating to, the people in my life. I will give them that grace.

It's a very powerful thing Jesus is saying to us. That kind of humility deeply affects our relationships with all people. It does transform friendships, your work relationships, your family relationships.

It's vital when we enter into conflict as well because when you think about it, what is in your mind when there is a conflict that you have with a person in your life?

Well, you think, there are things where he went wrong or she went wrong that really annoy me that needs to be corrected. And so what needs to be solved is that thing that needs to be changed is done rightly.

So that's what we're thinking every time. But what is on the other person's mind? It's the same thing. She or he resents something that you need to correct, that you need to be made right.

[17 : 54] And what the gospel does, as Jesus teaches, is it cuts through so that you as a Christian back up and you look at what's really happening for the point of view of God, your judge.

And we can say, I can say, above all, I am a rotten sinner, but I am not judged because someone took up our cause.

I didn't cooperate, but Jesus paid the full price and he eliminated my sin and my punishment on a cross. So what should you do for your colleague or your spouse or your neighbor, your friend?

Forgive. It is to forgive. That's the implication of verse 12. Look how you can do what you can do for the person in your life in a way that reflects what God is doing for you now.

And that breaks that tit for tat. Our vertical relationship with God, the judge, breaks the stalemate. And you show other people the same grace that was shown to you.

[19 : 04] And that is the beginning of a logjam breaking. A right and a peaceful outcome can take place. But you see, it comes because God is our judge.

He gives us humility that gives the powerful grace that allows us to love rightly. So that's the first thing. In our relationships, God transforms.

God the judge because he gives us that humility. But secondly, our sermon on the mount ends as Jesus teaches that God our judge gives us the wisdom to live rightly as well.

And this is so critical for us as we live our lives because life is all about making decisions before God our judge that lead either to destruction or to life.

So look at verses 13 and 14. Jesus shows us before us two gates that enter two roads. And he says this, Enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter it are many.

[20 : 12] But for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few. You see, you've got two roads narrow and wide, two gates narrow and wide and two kinds of people, a whole lot and a relatively few.

And that road of Jesus is hard because it involves difficult business decisions. Doing what is right in God's eyes that may mean a loss for you.

It means forgiving and loving your enemies. It means doing the difficult thing of making God your Lord instead of possessions. It means saying, Jesus is Lord and not my sexual life.

In fact, he is Lord of that aspect of who I am as well. Your marriage on that road will be about sacrifice and not standing on your rights.

There will be the hard work of shepherding your children towards Jesus. And it will be about serving those who cannot give anything back to you in return.

[21 : 20] These are the difficult things in our life. And not only that, but in our relationships with the world around us, you will lose popularity and you will be ridiculed. You will go against culture values by believing that Jesus is the only way to the Father and to life.

And you're going to be ridiculed as you say that God designed sexual relationships to take place in a marriage between a man and a woman. A gift that God has given from the beginning of creation.

and you will be opposed as you uphold life in all of its forms, whether they are unborn children, whether they are very old people, or whether they are very sick people.

It's not an easy road to walk. It is difficult to walk this way. And so it sounds hard. It sounds discouraging. It sounds like you are a small minority that you are walking this road.

It's so much easier to be permissive, to go on that anything goes road of life where I think I am autonomous. I am free to do what I like.

[22 : 30] And our sin inside of us draws us to that wide road because we want to be mainstream. We do not want to be called extremist. So what is the attraction of the narrow road?

Well, very simply, the attraction is Jesus himself because Jesus who preaches this sermon, the greatest sermon ever preached, he is the content of that message.

He is the sermon himself. The reason the gate is narrow is because Jesus said, I am the gate. the way is narrow is because Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And on that narrow road, Jesus says, I am with you until the end of the age. He gives us his Holy Spirit so that he is with us, his living presence to the end of the age.

So Jesus himself makes it all worthwhile. Now, Martin Luther's words are really worth listening to here because he knew what it meant to feel very alone, to be him against the world because he stood for what Jesus said here because he believed what the Bible said.

[23 : 55] He was ridiculed and he was opposed. And he said this, he said, although I see my neighbor and the whole city, yes, the whole world living differently, nevertheless, I have an ally who is greater than all of them, namely Christ and his word.

So when I am all alone, I am still not alone because I have the word, I have Christ with me together with the dear angels and with all the saints since the beginning of time.

Isn't that a great quote? He goes on to say that you must go, you who must go by the hard way, the narrow gate, you will come into a beautiful space as large and wide as heaven and earth.

You see, that's the counterintuitive thing. It seems narrow now, but it is the only way that you go into the wideness of God's goodness and mercy and joy and beauty and majesty.

It is an awesome place as this road goes to. It is the road of life. And it is the road of life and blessing because Jesus and his word is your ally and he is greater than anything in this world.

[25 : 13] He has the words of eternal life. He is the very wisdom of God who leads us to life. His authority is awesome because he is God and he brings us to God.

And that's why Jesus has such strong words as you go down in our passage about false prophets. Because what false prophets always do, false teachers, is that they diminish Jesus' authority by distorting it, by distorting Jesus.

And Jesus says, beware of them. They are ravenous wolves in sheep clothing. And they do teach in the church today. It's very relevant for us now. They will always pull you to the wide and easy way, to the popular way.

That is what their common theme is. And they always do it by denying Jesus' lordship and his words. So for instance, prosperity teachers promise that you will have no suffering and no difficulty.

God will make you wealthy and healthy if you conjure up enough belief and faith in yourself. And so they make possessions to be their lord.

[26 : 25] there are liberal teachers, liberal Christians who are theologians and they will deny personal sin. They will deny that God is judge.

And they will dismiss our desperate need for Christ to save us. They will doubt the power of his word to give life. And they will deny the miracle of God's gift of the cross of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And so for them, Jesus is not the lord. He is simply a way, a truth, a life. And their lord is the human spirit.

It is us as human beings. But if you want real life, Jesus said, the life of blessing with relationships being made right forever, Jesus says, there's one thing you do, actively build your life on my words.

And that's why he says, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of God, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. And then he sums everything up, and I close with this, by saying that your life is like a house.

[27 : 41] He says, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them, he will be like a wise man who builds his house on the rock.

Isn't that amazing what he's saying there? He is saying that his words are God's words. And the storms of life and the storms of God's judgment on the last day will come into your life, but your life will not fall.

It will not crumble because you have obeyed, you have done the words of Jesus Christ, who is your Lord, the one who saves, the one who has brought you into relationship with God, our judge, and our Father.

So every day, as you are making decisions, you know that you are either moving towards destruction or towards life. And today, Jesus calls you by name.

He says, to come off the wide and permissive way if you have wandered onto that way of life. The way of blessing, he says, come to that way of blessing. The gate is close to you, to that narrow road.

[28 : 48] Go through it. Go through Jesus. And he says, if you are discouraged by the hardships of that narrow road that you may be facing as you follow him, Jesus tells you that he is your ally.

His word is your strength and you will stand firm in him. You are not alone. And so we pray with Paul this prayer, which I think is a prayer that is for people who are on the narrow road.

And I want you to pray it with me. It is a blessing. Just quietly as I say this prayer, pray this for yourself. Pray this blessing that God gives to us because he is our judge, because Jesus is our teacher.

It's from Jude 1.24. Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever.

Amen.