

Life Improvements --- Mountaintop Makeover --- The Speck & The Log -- 20/20 Vision

Isaiah 6:1-8 & Matthew 7:1-6

“Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye?” Matthew 7:4

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ² Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” ⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” ⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷ The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

We have been working our way through the Sermon on the Mount this year. Today we return to this most-famous sermon preached by our Lord. Before we begin, let us take a few minutes and review where we have been the past five months. The Sermon on the Mount is about building Christian character. Chapter five is about **walking in the light of the law --- walking in the Word**. And Jesus begins the sermon with a beautiful list--called the Beatitudes--and then moves into saying over and over again --- *“you have heard it said, but I tell you.”* Jesus defines Christian character in light of the Word; when it comes to anger, lust, divorce, and making vows --- *“let your yes be yes and your no be no.”* Then Jesus moves on to how we are to handle retaliation and loving our enemies in light of the law.

The next section of the sermon, chapter six of Matthew, deals with **walking with “our Father who art in heaven.”** Jesus gives us the model prayer called the *“Lord’s Prayer”* and then asks us to look at our giving to the poor and our methods of fasting through our Father in Heaven’s eyes. Jesus goes for the gold when he confronts His followers on how we handle our money. He says, *“where your treasure is, there is your heart also.”* Then he asks us to think about worry in light of *“our Father who is in heaven.”* Giving to the poor, fasting, prayer, finances, and worry all are a part of our Christian character that grows from walking with our Father in Heaven.

The last section of the Sermon on the Mount has to do with our Christian character in light of **walking in our relationships with the world**. This is a tough section. Some of Jesus’ hardest sayings come from this last section of the Sermon on the Mount. Our reading today is a hard word. Let us listen for God’s Word for us today. May our minds be open and our hearts be humble and contrite.

Matthew 7:1-6

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ² For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³ Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye. ⁶ Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.”

A man went to the doctor to talk about his wife. He told the doc that he thought his wife was losing her hearing. So the doctor told him to stand about fifteen feet from her and say something, if she didn’t respond, move about five feet closer at a time and repeat yourself so that we can find out how hard of hearing she may be. The man went home and his wife was beginning supper, he moved about fifteen feet from her and he said, “Honey what’s for supper?” She didn’t respond, so he moved five feet closer and repeated himself, no response, so he moved five feet closer and asked again, “Honey what’s for supper?” Still no response, so he moved up right behind her and asked, “Honey, what’s for supper?” She responded, “For the fourth time, vegetable stew.”

A young man had to appear before the judge for a minor offense. The day of his court appearance came and he went up to the judge and stated his name. The judge told him to go and take a seat. The young man replied to the judge, “Don’t you know who I am? I am the Governor’s son.” The judge responded, “well, then, you might want to take two seats!”

A man dressed in construction clothes, dirty from a day’s work went to the bank to cash a \$100 dollar check. After he got the cash, he asked the teller to punch his parking ticket so that it was validated. The teller told the man that they only validated parking tickets for deposit transactions. The parking fee was only fifty cents, but the man was so upset he contacted the bank manger and the manger refused the man’s request. Immediately, the man began to withdraw his money from the bank--a million dollars at a time.

Today’s topic is about judging others!

A CRITICAL SPIRIT

Briefly, I would like to say what Jesus is not saying. Jesus is not saying that we should never judge anything as right or wrong. There are too many references in the Bible about judging right from wrong. Just in this chapter alone, Jesus warns His followers to judge between what is holy and what is false. Jesus is warning his followers, *“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.”* Jesus is warning about the sin of being hypercritical. A hypercritical spirit is a destructive, negative, hurtful, mean, arrogant, and prideful spirit. We are called to be discerning and make judgments but our judgments are to be constructive and made in love--not destructive with a hypercritical spirit.

In his book *Men Sent from God* Richard DeHaan lists some of the criticisms pastors receive. The list is written “tongue in cheek”. “If the pastor is young, they say he lacks experience. If the pastor has gray

hair, he is too old for the young people. If he has five or six children, he is irresponsible; if he has no children, he is setting a bad example. If he uses a lot of illustrations, he neglects the Bible; if he does not use enough, he is not relevant. If he condemns wrong deeds, he is cranky; if he does not, he is compromising. If he drives an old car, he shames his congregation; if he drives a new car, he is setting his affections on earthly things.”

When we first went into the ministry, a pastor friend of mine called and asked if he and his wife could take us out for dinner. At dinner they talked for hours about the trials and tribulations of ministry. They said that as a pastor I needed to have the skin of a rhinoceros and the heart of an elephant. Then his wife had some advice for my wife. She said that when we came for the interview at the church, my wife should wear a short dress, drive up in the most expensive rental car, step out holding a glass of wine and a cigarette and ask, “Any questions?”

Our human tendency is to find fault in our family, find fault in our neighbors, find fault in our coworkers, bosses, fellow students, and, heaven forbid, find fault in our brothers and sisters in Christ--in the church. It is true that you can't do much without being criticized by someone. The downfall of humankind is that a critical spirit is part of our human nature. This is why Jesus addresses the problem head on in the Sermon on the Mount.

The questions I want each of us to pray about this morning are:

Who am I critical of?

Who am I judging?

Can I pray, “Please, Lord, judge me the way I judge _____”?

A CRITICAL SPIRIT IS THE SIN OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

A critical spirit or a judgmental spirit is born from our self-righteousness. Self righteousness is:

- 1.) Justifying self while condemning others!
- 2.) Playing God --- judging by our standards and wisdom!
- 3.) Claiming to be lawgiver and the judge at the same time!
- 4.) A terrible sin of unbelief --- self-righteous people do not trust in God --- they trust in themselves to determine what is right or wrong!

Up on the mountaintop, while giving the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had a little fun with the self-righteousness of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. But, he is also speaking to us today! Jesus gave them a word picture--the illustration of the speck and the log, the mote and the beam --- depending on what translation you have. Jesus says, “*Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is 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 neighbor’s eye.*” Jesus is asking all of us, “How can you take a speck out of your neighbor’s eye when you have this huge beam in your own eye?”

Literally, in the Greek, the word for “speak” is a speck of dust or chaff. The Greek word for “log” is a weight-bearing support beam in a house. It would be like one of these rafter beams that’s holding up the ceiling. Can you imagine carrying around one of those beams up there—and then trying to say to another (with a straight face) “Hey, let me help you pick out that speck of dust from your eye.”

Jesus has some pretty hard words for those that are self-righteous, he calls them hypocrites. The Greek word for “hypocrite” is “play-actor.” A play-actor of Jesus’ day would hold up a mask in front of their real face. It’s like going to a disguise party and being someone you really aren’t. The English translation for “hypocrite” is “somebody who pretends to have admirable principles, beliefs, or feelings but behaves otherwise.” These are strong words coming from Jesus!

Do you realize that most of the time when we are really critical of someone else, when we are on the hunt of fault-finding in others, we get the most mad at those who reflect the same sins, the same faults, the same distracting, annoying behaviors that we have? What I am saying is that most often when we are really critical of someone else, the thing that drives us up the wall, is really the thing that we’re most guilty of.

So What?

Friends, I tried to warn you that this was going to be a hard word from God’s word! Jesus is just about through the entire sermon—we only have 20 verses to go! He was really getting warmed up by this point—Jesus was coming to where the rubber meets the road. Christian character has to be lived out in the world. We are not called to be a holy huddle, sitting together on Sunday mornings and pointing our fingers the rest of the week.

Here’s the real “so what” for us today:

CHRIST-LIKE SPIRIT --- A HUMBLE HEART

The opposite of a critical spirit is a Christ-like spirit. When David was confronted with his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and of murdering her husband, Uriah, David had to look at himself. Remember King David was a prolific poet and song writer. Listen to his words in Psalm 51. *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me....the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* (Psalm 51:10; 17) The Apostle Paul confronted the conflicts in the Corinthian church—they were criticizing each other and being self-righteous—Paul wrote, *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”* (I Corinthians 13:4-8) When Peter confronted the church, he wrote, *“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”* (I Peter 4:8) The Apostle John writes, *“Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is love. There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear...”* (I John 4:7; 18)

Our Old Testament reading for today is from Isaiah. It's his call to ministry. He sees the Lord high and lifted up and the angels are singing, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; for the whole earth is full of His glory.*" The prophet Isaiah cries out, "*woe to me! I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.*" The angel takes a hot coal and touches Isaiah's lips. Isaiah's sins are forgiven and God calls him forth to do ministry.

The "so what" for today? Are you ready to give up your critical spirit? Earlier I asked you to think about who you are critical of, who you've been judging. Are we a people of unclean lips? Are we play-acting? Are we trying to take the speck of dust out of someone else's eye while we have a log in our own?

The answer for us this morning is to humble ourselves before God; to ask God to take away our weight-bearing support beam and to forgive us for judging others for the speck of dust in their eye.

Dear Lord Almighty: We are a people of unclean lips. We know you are seated on Heaven's throne and You alone are high and lifted up. You alone are exalted. Forgive us. We know better. We are guilty of play acting, of trying to pretend we are someone we're not. Love covers a multitude of sin—mine and everyone else's! Create in us a clean heart—once again. Renew Your Holy Spirit within us—once again. God, You are love. You are patient and kind. You do not envy, nor boast and are not proud. You are not rude and self-seeking. You are not easily angered (thank God!) and You keep no records of our many wrongs. You do not delight in evil. You rejoice with the truth. You protect, trust, hope and persevere. Best of all, You never fail. Cast out our critical spirit and make us more like You. We want to walk in the Word, walk with You—our Father, and we want to walk in right relationship in our world. Amen.

Let us pray ...

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