

**“A Look in the Mirror”**

Matthew 7:1-12; 18:15-17  
Sermon on the Mount Series

*“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight”*  
Jeremiah 15:16

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## Introduction

Here is the Scottish preacher William Barclay on Jesus' "Judge not":

There is hardly anyone who has not been guilty of some grave misjudgment; there is hardly anyone who has not suffered from someone else's misjudgment. And yet the strange fact is that there is hardly any commandment of Jesus which is more consistently broken and neglected.

Strange fact, indeed!

Again, remember Jesus is addressing the disciple group with his message of formation in his life.

That is what goes on between master and servant or journeyman and apprentice. The master instructs and demonstrates his manner of life, his way of doing things and the apprentice listens and watches carefully, performs under supervision, gets corrected and practices again and again until the master's ways are fully integrated in the servant.

Paramount in the way of Jesus is our attitude and practice toward those we are in conflict with.

Conflict is integral to my/our experience

and, on average, I/we respond to conflict with some degree of aggression which is rooted in my judgement that the other is wrong and I am right.

Jesus was often in conflict: with his own disciples, with Jewish leaders, and particularly with the Pharisees who prided themselves on being the Jews most rigorous in religious practice.

Jesus regularly judged this group and Matthew devotes an entire chapter – 23 – to this:

**Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence . . . You blind fools! You snakes! You brood of vipers!**

Sounds like judgement!

However, at the same time Jesus when asked to take sides in a dispute said:

**Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you? (Luke 12:14)**

Or to the Pharisees, said: **You judge by human standards; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgement is valid, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father, who sent me.** (John 8:15,16)

So, what does Jesus mean when he tells us: **Do not judge, or you too will be judged.**

## Text

As we approach this section of Jesus' sermon I agree with the Bible teacher, Frederick Bruner. He suggests:

Chapter 5 called us to the width of mercy (**Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy**); chapter 6 to the height of faith (**your Father who sees in secret will reward you**), and now chapter 7 calls us to the depth of justice. – see Matthew 23:23 – Jesus complains the Pharisees have neglected the weightiest themes of God’s Word: justice, mercy, and faith.

Furthermore, upon coming to chapter 7, the first unit is verses 1-12, comprised of two sections: verses 1 to 5 or 6 and 6 or 7 to 11, with verse 12 – the golden rule, applying to both sections.

This morning our focus is on verses 1 to 5.

In the previous section of the sermon, chapter 6, verses 19 to 34 we heard a general command to generosity regarding our physical possessions

**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth . . . but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . you cannot serve both God and Mammon.**

Such generosity is based on the generosity of God in the life of the believer (again chapter 6):

**do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear . . . your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.**

Now in chapter 7 verses 1 to 5 the focus shifts to justice

One of the weightiest themes: mercy, faith and justice, as Jesus tells us.

And once again when judgement arises

usually due to some conflict, be it personal, social, even international

the follower of Jesus is called to “generosity” in evaluating the circumstances.

Not always a natural reaction, especially if we or loved ones are being hurt in the conflict.

Now, Jesus pronounces a warning and a command:

The warning: **the measure you give will be the measure you get.**

The reference, of course, is to God’s great judgment of his responsible creatures

This is a prime theological conviction, a foundational value embraced by all Jesus followers

central to our existence is responsibility and accountability to God (from Genesis)

**So God created mankind in his own image, male and female he created them . . . so they could rule over all creatures, over all God created.**

And from Romans 14:12 **So then, each of us will be accountable to God.**

When we embrace this, when we construct the business of our life with this as foundational then how can it not give us pause when in conflict we now judge the situation, ourselves and others.

Will our standard of justice be in accord with how God judges us?

The first thing we know in God's perfect judgement of us is mercy, generosity.

**Psalm 130: If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.**

**Ephesians 2: All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.**

God's judgements are and will be perfect. But they start with mercy, generosity, an invitation to participate in the forgiveness won by Christ for all who will embrace it.

So, Jesus warn us: **Do not judge.**

He also commands (yes, commands – it is the way he journeys and if we do not obey then we are not actually following) a course of action: **You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**

What does this tell us?

Certainly, to first take ownership of our part in any conflict.

And, more difficult, to regard our part as significantly more serious than the other's part.

What does this look like?

To not react naturally – which is to strike back, unless, of course, the conflict is so great and dangerous our reaction is to run and hide.

But even then, in the solace of our hideout we console ourselves with thoughts of judgement toward the other.

How possibly do we not strike back but rather reflect on our own actions contributing to conflict?

### Application

The answer is found in Jesus' direction from Matthew 18.

**If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you**

Can we recall incidents of doing this? It is one of the more difficult challenges in life.

The go to position is; having determined another person faulted me, it is up to them to figure it out and come to me with an apology.

Why should I go to them? Because Jesus leads in this way. He said: take the plank out of your own eye first.

Jesus says: Take a look in the mirror! In this case mirror is the other's perspective.

How can we possibly take the plank out of our own eye unless in dialogue with the other we can reconstruct the conflict and see both sides?

When it is frightening or seemingly impossible to do this, Jesus continues to extend generosity

**take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed**  
(substantiated, realized, owned)

And of course, everyone's honesty in this is secured in that the eventual outcome, if necessary, will be a full public airing of the matter.

What ingredient is required? Generosity toward the other, even the other who has wronged me/you.

Where does this come from? For the follower of Jesus, right from Jesus who generously came down from heaven to those who had wronged him.

What does such action result in?

Being formed in the humility of Christ and being prepared for the kingdom of God and the judgement of God.

With Lent upon us, embrace a positive act, an act of generosity toward someone who is not usually the recipient of your generosity.

Amen.