



MONDAY 24 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 7:1-2 & Ephesians 1:17-23

Plug In...

The word 'judge' can mean different things in different contexts. For example, this same word here in Matthew 7:1 is used in Titus 3:2. In Titus, it simply means Paul has 'decided' (i.e., 'judged') to stay for the winter. Or, consider Jesus actually commanding elsewhere, make a judgement call (John 7:24). The word can be about judgement in a law-court setting and then used to evaluate heart motives (e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:5).

In Matthew 5 & 6, Jesus has been testing heart motives, challenging heart motives. Throughout, Jesus set a standard for where the heart should be at. Now, a warning that one should judge definitely the motives of someone's heart.

Chew It Over...

The most famous Bible verse was once Jon 3:16. Now in the age of 'tolerance', Matthew 7:1 gets quoted. Verse 6 shows that Jesus is not advocating the kind of tolerance spoken of today – tolerance, where one is not allowed to judge another's truth as wrong. Jesus clearly models there is a right way and a wrong way to follow. Jesus warns against taking up the position of final judge. We do not

possess the God-only capacity to definitively determine someone's standing, let alone motives. Ultimately, we don't know if someone is praying for public praise or for God alone.

How do you balance the tension between knowing a tree by its fruits (Matthew 7:15-20), yet not judging someone's heart motives?

Prayer Suggestion

Ask the Lord Jesus to help you identify where you have been inappropriately sizing someone up. Ask for a non-judgmental spirit; ask also for discernment. Ask the Lord to help you pray in humility the prayer of Ephesians for any you are concerned about (1:17-23).



The Lakes

TUESDAY 25 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 7:3-5

Plug In...

"A person may think their own ways are right, but the LORD weighs the heart." (Proverbs 21:2). Jesus warns of this danger here. He's not advocating indifference to truth, or telling his followers to no-longer discriminate between right and wrong. Rather, one can really help, and will best help, another if they take a good hard look at themselves first.

Chew It Over...

Someone has said: "it's the law of critical gravity". Explained, we will always start off by judging ourselves as right and the other as wrong. News splashes, online forums, coffee catchups, have all become venues to express judgement. We're noticing this is a culture of outrage. It's the air we breathe. How can we stave the critical, self-righteous spirit of this oxygen? First, humbly accept Jesus' diagnosis: we're self-glorifying, self-worshipping creatures (monsters?). Our default setting brings glory to ourselves through being outraged at others, all without consideration of ourselves. Next, repent by reviewing the plank in our own eye and by God's help remove it.

Review where you've been correcting, criticising, shaming, ignoring, speaking against people recently? (conversations? forums? over the back-fence? growth group?). Who was the last person you complained about? This could be a window on the presence of a judgemental spirit.

Prayer Suggestion

Ask Jesus that he will help you hear the words "hypocrite!" and cause you to repent. Beg Jesus that you won't respond to his merciful rebuke with arrogance and ignore. Ask for help to remove the protruding plank. Seek the Holy Spirit's power to help others with genuine love, to be about their care and benefit. Ask for a posture of tentativeness and caution; that our next steps are couched in the forgiveness that we have received (Matthew 6: 12,14).



WEDNESDAY 26 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 7:6

Plug In...

Jesus is addressing disciples: brothers and sisters in the kingdom (NB: the lessons are for the brothers in v.3). Disciples are to engage in a particular form of critique. One where they don't assume the prerogative of God and claim to know definitively heart motives. One where they deal with each other in humility and self-awareness first.

In the immediate context, what is called 'holy' is the teaching of what constitutes righteous behaviour within the kingdom and *how* of helping one another stay on the path of righteousness. This is a great and blessed treasure given by Jesus to his disciples. So, now they must be careful with sharing this with people outside the people of God. [NB: in the Jewish context, dogs and pigs are associated with Gentiles which historically are unbelievers – see: Matthew 15:21-28.]

Jesus is saying don't throw this kingdom-based morality before people who will just trample it, turn on you, and tear you up.

Chew It Over...

Some of the current debates in society, make it immediate to relate to this. Many just don't get the ethics Christians talk about. They seem illogical; they seem outrageous to them. The morality we talk about is perceived as irrelevant, annoying, and if anything: the minority view.

How do we relate constructively to society when it comes to critiquing morals, defining morality? How much do we want to comment? How do we promote the good life without enforcing a kingdom ethic on them that is unachievable without the gospel and God's grace? When is the time to say something; when do we decide this is throwing pearls before dogs?

Think of a current issue and how you can speak into it without communicating the message: "society! clean up your act, get culture running right, and then God might come to you"?

Prayer Suggestion

We need to request from God His massive wisdom and insight to discern how to engage with society well at this time. Ask that God will help us to love those hostile to us; to know how to help contribute to finding the 'good life' that they seek, while not pushing an unachievable ethic on them that doesn't include the gospel. May we have opportunities to share what grounds the good life, to declare the gospel. Ask to be shrewd as snakes in these discussions, yet innocent as doves.



THURSDAY 27 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 7:7-8

Plug In...

Jesus doesn't specifically say what to ask for. The earlier petitions from the Lord's Prayer were *asking* for God's Kingdom to come (6:9-13); Jesus had said *seek* first the kingdom of heaven and all the things you previously worried about God will look after (6:33). So, the broad context shows praying, asking, seeking is shaped by God and His Kingdom priorities. One cannot pray to God like He's a vending-machine; one prays to the Father about things that accord with His kingdom, His character. That said, the type of prayer is remarkably open-ended. In fact, it is about asking the Father to open doors that are closed; doors which we cannot get open ourselves.

Chew It Over...

Your worries, issues, problems, do you talk to God, ask Him to open the door? Ask Him to give. Or, do you deal with all your worries (large or small) by short-circuiting the talking to God dynamic? How often do you talk it out with others; self-talk it out as you turn over and over a concern as you toss through a sleepless night. A.S.K. first! Ask, Seek, Knock. What an act of faith to trust talking to our Father. Talk to God first over-above hashing it out with ourselves or others ad nauseam. Next issue, worry in life, forget trying to open the door yourself. Remember A.S.K. *your* Father.

Prayer Suggestion

Talk to your Father. Keep on talking. Ask, seek, knock all day, all week long, because you are talking to your Father first about all things.



FRIDAY 28 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 7:9-11

Plug In...

This illustration of how a good father treats his children, shows that it is not the persistent prayer that moves God into action, but His *good fatherly* character – it is who He is that moves Him to action. Jesus gives the illustration to give us *confidence* prayer will be answered. Of course, a child who knows what his father is on about also knows what to seek as the gifts that will be given.

Chew It Over...

Think over how Jesus' remarkably open-ended prayer-promise does not turn on us labouring in prayer. It turns on God's character as one who listens and gives to those that simply ask Him. [Maybe this changes up some ideas of prayer-warfare you've heard about.]

Consider how the character of God described here may help us understand the seemingly unanswered prayers, or the delayed responses. How can your prayers more and more ask for *good things* from the Father?

Prayer Suggestion

Ask the Lord for all the things spoken of in the Sermon on the Mount: humility, love for enemies, the right spiritual attitude, the kingdom, etc. Ask the Lord about whatever is on your mind. Affirm your trust that God is your good Father, and will give us what we really need, even when sometimes we don't realise we're asking for a snake.



WEEKEND 29-30 OCTOBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 7:12

Plug In...

“Do to others what you would like them to do to you” runs straight out of the gracious and generous character of God we’ve just seen in the Sermon on the Mount. From His grace, the Heavenly Father has been so generous to Jesus’ disciples. It started with including them in the promise of the Kingdom; power and provision that they will be like their perfect heavenly Father; an ethic of living that is true righteousness (done for God’s glory, not self-glorification); the role and ability to carry out with success the light Israel was destined to be as they gather around Jesus Christ. The Law and the Prophets expected that God will one day create Israel as a light to the nations that would not fail (e.g., Isaiah 49:6). Through the forgiveness of sins, God included sinful Jews and sinful gentiles as the people of God. A people who have received grace, mercy, and generosity will go and do likewise to others.

Chew It Over...

Consider how Jesus’ directive looks forward and anticipates behaviour. To follow Jesus in this, we first have to ask: *what would I like to have done to me?* Once we have the answer, we are to take the initiative and do it to others.

It is amazing that we don't have to read tons of books on ethics to figure out what to do. Simply, ask yourself the question within Jesus' directive. Then, decide to go do it for others around you. Be generous like God.

Prayer Suggestion

May God give us pause in each situation to figure out what we know to be love, and how we would like to receive it. May God give us generous initiative to go and do that to our neighbour.