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Matthew 7: 1-5 Judging

Jerry Arnold

"Father in Heaven, please bless the sermon. We pray that it will be You that teaches us, and we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen."

In studying for the sermon this week, I ran across a story. And I really liked the story, but it fits in perfectly as an introduction as well, so I am going to share it with you. There was a man. He was a handsome man. He was a good man, kind, and he could get a date, and he could date girls, but he could never keep a date. He could never keep a girlfriend. And he had a friend that was concerned about it, and his friend said, "What's up with that? How come you can never keep a girlfriend?" And he said, "Well, the same thing happens every time, here is what happens." He said, "I meet a girl, we start to get friendly, we start to fall for each other, it's getting more serious and I take her home to meet my parents." And he said, "Now my mother has a critical spirit. She finds fault in people and things, and whatever, you know. She'd just always, "N, n, n, there is something wrong." And he said, "And every time I bring a woman home, she is not good enough, she finds fault in her, and she runs her off. You know the women leave."

Well his friend says, "I know how to cure that." He said, "How?" He said, "Find the woman just like your mother." So he thought, "Well, okay." So he hunts all around and he finds the most critical woman he can find. She finds fault with everything, she is just like his mother. So, they date for a while and then he takes her home. He's got this woman that's just like Mamma. Couple of weeks later he runs into his friend. His friend said, "Hay how is that going?" He said, "Oh, it was great. I took her home and Mother loves her. But Dad can't stand her." It's hard to live with, or to be around someone who has a critical spirit. And I'd like to study that with you today. Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 7 as we continue our series of sermons from Jesus' teachings called, "The Sermon on the Mount."

Matthew 7, our passage will be verses 1-5. We are, or I am reading from the New King James Version and that's what will appear on the screens. Jesus said, "Judge not that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'let me remove the speck out of your eye' and you look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye." Jesus says, "Judge not!" Do you know that that is a phrase that is often used? And it's often used when someone is confronted about something that is going on in their life that is unethical or immoral. So you confront that person, and they say, "Judge not."

Well, they are quoting scripture, and it does add some confusion. Many times when a church brings somebody for church discipline before the church, people would bring up this verse, "Judge not." We are not supposed to judge. However, that's not entirely true because Jesus wants us to judge. In the vary chapter we are reading, He tells us to judge. Look at verse 6. He says, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you in pieces." Now Jesus is not talking about animals there. He is talking about people with certain characteristics and some type of judgment has to be made whether or not you minister to them the way that He is talking about there. In chapter 7 verses 15 and 16 He also says, "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?"

Jesus warns us, "Beware of the false prophets! You'll have to make some judgment calls," He is saying. There will be dogs, and there will be pigs, there will be false prophets; and after weighing the evidence and testing the premises, you must discern whether they are right or whether they are wrong. He is not condemning judgment in that sense. In fact, He wants us to have it. The word that is used here in Matthew regarding 'judge not' is speaking about the habit of a censorious, sharp, unjust and unfair criticism. In fact, from this very Greek word, we get the English word, "critic." It is a warning against self-righteous severity. It is not about telling Christians they should be neutral on moral issues. We are not to be the judge. Jesus says, "Judge not!"

Now, it's interesting when we look at verse 1, "Judge not, that you be not judged." It's a principle, it's a truth. You are judgmental spirit. If you have a judgmental spirit people will judge you with the harshness that you judge other people with. It's just natural, it happens. But God is also warning us that He will do it as well. So not only do we face a judgment with mankind, but we face a judgment with God. In fact, let's read about it a little bit here in verse 2. "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you." This principle, how you measure out it's going to be measured back to you. It's that old saying, "What goes around comes around."

Now Jesus gives a parable, verses 3-5. And it's actually a humorous parable when you think about it. He says, "How can you say to your brother, 'let me remove the speck out of your eye,' and look, a plank is in your own eye." This is what the people heard when they were on the hillside with Jesus. How can you be critical of somebody who has just a tiny piece of sawdust in their eye when you have the main beam of a house in yours? The contrast is stunning. Jesus goes on to say, "...or how can you say to your brother, 'let me remove the speck out of your eye,' and look, a plank is in your own eye." And then He goes on to say this, verse 5: "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then..." catch this, "...you will see clearly." Now that's important to understanding of what Jesus is saying. "You will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye."

So Jesus in this parable is saying, number one, "The thing that's bothering you is a small thing. It's just a speck. It's a small thing. Especially in comparison with the large thing you have in your life. In essence, he is saying, you've got enough problems on your own. Don't worry about other people." Now Jesus, interestingly enough, does not say here why it is that people judge. He doesn't say, "Look, I know you were born to lousy parents and you had a lousy childhood, and consequently you are the way you are because of that." He doesn't say that. He doesn't say, "Look, I know you were picked-on on the playground and in the community. You were picked on at the church or at the work place, whatever. I know you were, and I understand why you do it." He does not say that. He doesn't say, "I know that you have overwhelming feelings of insecurity, and somehow you feel stronger or better when you find fault in others, and you think you are better than them. I understand all that." Jesus does not say any of that.

Jesus simply says, "Don't do it." Now that's good news because that means, no matter what wounds have been inflicted upon us in life, we through Christ, can have victory over judging other people. That's what He is saying. We can have victory over that. Don't do it. And pretty much, that's what we get from Matthew 7 verses 1-5. But it's spoken of by Luke as well. And Luke adds some information that is going to take us to another level. You see, the whole concept of judging somebody who is not doing it the way we do it, or would do it, the idea of being censorious or critical is so foreign to God that He is saying his people won't participate in it. And if there is going to be any judging, that is the work of God. Okay?

But what about Luke chapter 6? Let's go there because it adds some interesting information. In fact, information that seems to be unrelated except it's very clear. Luke is recording the same conversation. Luke chapter 6 we begin with the verse 37. Here is how Luke has Jesus saying it: "Judge not and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven." Luke has Jesus saying this in the context of

forgiveness, of being kind towards somebody else. That's how you are supposed to be. Don't judge, but have a kindly disposition towards people. Don't condemn them, be forgiving and you will be forgiven. He goes on, verse 38: "Give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use it will be measured back to you."

Now that verse is often used during offering appeals. "Give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over." So every \$100 you give to the church, God will note that and He will give it back to you in a fuller and more wonderful way. You can't out give God! And we hear those wonderful, wonderful stories like that. That's not what this text is talking about. Now, it may be true, you can't out give God, and it may be true that you need to give more, I don't know? But that's not what this text is talking about. This text is talking about giving, a judgmental attitude and reflection towards somebody or being forgiving towards them. If you are forgiving towards them, it comes back to you. And God Himself will be forgiving towards you.

Look at verse 39, this seems totally unrelated. "And Jesus spoke a parable to them, 'Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?'" Now what's that got to do with this? It seems so unrelated and it even gets worse in verse 40. He says, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." So now we've got the blind leading the blind and we've got a teacher. What's this all about? Remember what the plank does when it's in your eye? You have to remove it in order for you to be able to see clearly. If you can't see clearly, you are somewhat blinded in your sight. Do you understand that? Now let's look at this and how it intertwines together. "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?" This is what Jesus is saying -- You have teachers in your life. You have people that God has placed in your life to help you along this journey from here to heaven. You are a disciple; you are supposed to be a disciple.

But, the natural tendency of the human heart is to be critical. It just the way we are, it's the way you are. It's the way I am, okay, I said it. We are naturally critical! And we've all had that teacher that just really set our sails full of wind, and we just went across seas we never knew we could go. And yet, we've all had those teachers that just, "Oh, get me out of this class! Please, get me out of this class; I can't stand that person!" Well, often times because of a critical spirit we have a tendency to say, "I could teach better than this person or they are not good here, or they are not good there, or whatever." And we who are the student, kind of usurp the position of teacher. We are the ones who are being taught, and we say that the teacher is blind. Consequently, we are the one that's blind, now trying to lead the blind. That's what Jesus is talking about.

Who are you? Take the plank out of your own eye and you will be able to see. Leave the plank in there with the critical spirit and you are the blind leading the blind. Do you see how it all ties in? But let's go on. He says in verse 41: "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but do not perceive the plank in your own eye?" One more verse, "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye. Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye." So it's the same passage, but Jesus has added a concept here -- the concept of a teacher and a disciple, and we are going to enter into that in our thoughts. The same principle that applies in human relationships, applies in our relationship with God.

I want to ask you a question. Have you ever tried to lead God? Have you ever, as some call it, been ahead of the Lord? He's been too slow, He's been silent, uncaring, whatever, so you had to solve the problem yourself? In essence that's what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is saying those of us who have a big problem, run ahead of the One who can solve that problem. And we are literally the blind, leading whom we consider to be blind, and God is never blind. In the spiritual realm, many times, doubts are going to come our way. People are going to be sick in our families who do not get well. But yet, they get well in someone else's family. There will be injustices that will

come to us. There will be loss of money or loss of reputation. And it will all be totally unfair. And we can pray about it, and we can ask God to change it, but apparently He has chosen not to. And in those circumstances, in those times of doubt, in those times of confusion, in those times of pain we begin to question God. We are the student, but we are questioning the Teacher.

And God doesn't cast us off when we question, please understand that. But there is a process that sets in that is very dangerous. And that is this -- that in our questioning, we may easily transition to being critical of God. And when we become critical of God, we set ourselves up as a judge of God. And God is the Judge, friends. Nobody is higher than God. But when we become critical of God or critical of His ways, we are establishing ourselves as a judge above God. We are blind. And when we do that, we are in a very dangerous situation. Let me remind you of a story from the Bible. The man's name was Job. This is the oldest story in the Bible. It was the first book written. Many scholars believe that Moses wrote this. And he wrote it before he wrote Genesis, and Exodus and the other three books that he wrote. It's a story about a man who lived sometime, probably prior to the days of Abraham. And the reason they believe that is because he will live to be about two hundred years old. And that's how long people were living in Abraham's day or just before that.

Job, as you know, was a wealthy man and he served God. And I don't know how it happened, but in the story, Lucifer, the Devil, is in the presence of God in heaven. And God says, "Hey, have you seen my servant Job? He is faithful in all that he does. He is faithful to Me." And Satan scoffs and he says, "Well sure! Why not? You build a hedge around him. Everything he does, You bless! Let me at him, and I'll get him to turn from serving you." So God says, "Okay, but you can't touch him." And it just swift events, one after another, Job lost his sons and daughters. He lost his livestock and servants, it's all gone. And Job's wife is there nagging him, "Why don't you curse God and die!" And he says, "No, naked I came into the world, and naked I'll go out. Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." So Lucifer ends up back in heaven again. And God says, "What do you think of my servant Job?" And Lucifer says, "Well, yeah, sure!" You know, "Yeah, he is faithful now, but let me have his skin." You know, 'skin for skin.' "You let me get to his physical being and I'll get him to curse You." And God says, "You can do it, but you cannot kill him."

Satan comes back to earth and Job breaks out in boils, from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. These painful boils, so painful that he takes broken pieces of pottery and he uses those broken pieces of pottery to scrape the pus of his body. He is just in sackcloth and ashes. He has three friends that show up. They are so struck by the pain of this man that they just sit next to him for one week. They don't even say a word. They just enter into his pain. And then the discussion about God begins. These three men began to tell Job that he must have sin in his life or God would not be doing this to him. And the book goes on, and in the process Job begins to question God. He begins to doubt God, who wouldn't? He begins to be upset with God. We can all understand. We can all relate. Now he never stops talking to God, and that's praise worthy.

When you come to the end of the book, and I'd like you to turn there, Job chapter 38; if you know where the Psalms are, just keep going left and you will come to Job chapter 38. There is a scene in this book that is stunning. And that's when God shows up. It says in verse 1 of chapter 38: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind." So Job's got this question for God and that question for God, "Why this, why that, how come here, how come there?" He's got all this questions for God. And God shows up and says in verse 2: "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man, I will question you, and you will answer Me." You see, when God shows up, He asks the questions. So Job listens to questions, and God says things like this: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Where were you when it all came together..." and just a long list of things that it would be impossible for men to be involved in.

We come to chapter 40 after that long list of questions that God has for Job. And we read verse 1, it says, "Moreover the Lord answered Job and said, 'Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?'" "Job, are you wanting to correct Me? Are you wanting to be God? Are you wanting to be the Sovereign? The Creator of all that there is, are you questioning Me? Do you want to do that?" "He who rebukes God, let him answer it." Notice what happens. Job does answer in verse 4, he says: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further." He goes on, "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 'now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you and you shall answer Me: Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?'"

"Are you going to condemn Me Job so you can be justified in your discouragement and your dishonoring of Me? Are you going to do that Job? Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor and array yourself with glory and beauty. Disperse the rage of your wrath. Look on everyone who is proud and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low. Tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together, bind their faces in hidden darkness." Now notice this: judging is the realm of God.

We are going to go deeper. Last verse, God says, "Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you." If you can do all these things, then you can save yourself. Wow! Do you realize that when Jesus says, "Judge not that you be not judged," He is talking in the context of His disciples being there, and a whole group of listeners and the religious leaders of the day? The religious leaders of the day had made a living out of criticizing other people. And in the process of criticizing other people they were taking on the role of God – so much so that when God came and walked among them, they did not accept Him. They rejected Him. They questioned Him, thought themselves more righteous than Him. And in the process, all along, were thinking they could save themselves.

Now friends, having a critical spirit is bad on one level. That is, you are going to be hard to live with. And we may treat you kindly, you may be treated kindly, others may treat me kindly if I am expressing a critical spirit, it's all right, you know. Great! But, ultimately there is little respect, and love is prayed for in the heart, to be with a person with a critical spirit. That's one issue. But the danger of it is; we are entering into a realm that is not ours. And if we are critical of one another, we can be critical of God, and in so doing, we can actually get to the point where we think we can even save ourselves. In fact, I will guarantee you, the most critical people I know in the realm of religion actually believe what they are doing saves them. That's why they are critical of other people.

Today, two things: one, we are all struggling with criticizing. We all need forgiveness. And we all can have victory in that. And number two: salvation is a gift from God. We can never earn it. We can never have any righteousness of our own. We can never do anything where we can stand before God and say, "See! Isn't my splendor like Yours? Isn't my strength like Yours? Can I come into heaven now? Haven't I proved to You that I am just as holy as You are?" It will never, ever happen. It cannot happen! Salvation is a gift given to us by Jesus Christ when we accept Him as our Savior. Today, my question for you is, "Would you like to tell God you want forgiveness for having a critical spirit and you want victory over it? And would you like to tell God you want Jesus to be your Savior?" If you'd like to say that, then I am going to ask you to stand.

"Father in Heaven, we ask that You will forgive us through Christ. We pray that You will save us through Christ, and that You will give us victory through Christ. We pray in His name, Amen."