

Matthew 7A

- We've reached the third and final chapter of Jesus' first major sermon in Matthew
 - His entire sermon is focused on true righteousness
 - Beginning in Chapter 5, Jesus taught on the degree of righteousness required to enter into the Kingdom
 - And His conclusion in v.48 is that we must be perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect
 - That only those, whose righteousness is equal to God's righteousness, may enter the Kingdom
 - And of course, the only way any of us can equal the glory of God, is if He assigns us His righteousness by our faith in Jesus
 - Then in Chapter 6, we studied how a Kingdom-bound believer lives-out righteousness here on earth while we await the Kingdom
 - And Jesus' conclusion in Chapter 6, was that we ought not live a hypocritical life, trusting in this world's reward
 - Instead, Jesus taught we should give, pray, fast or whatever we do, seeking to please God and receive a Heavenly reward
- Now we reach Chapter 7, and Jesus' theme remains true righteousness
 - But now, Jesus begins preparing His disciples for how righteousness works in a culture and world of unrighteousness
 - He's preparing us for a spiritual war, a war between the forces of the enemy and the soldiers of Christ
 - And like in any war, the enemy will use various tactics to try to weaken and defeat his adversary
 - He'll try to divide us, he will set us against one another, he will try to discourage us
 - And in some cases, the enemy will send his forces behind enemy lines to disrupt us from within

- Knowing all these things will come upon the Church, Jesus begins to prepare the Church, beginning with a command that helps hold us together

[Matt. 7:1](#) “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.

[Matt. 7:2](#) “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

- We open with the favorite Bible verse of every rebellious teenager and every Hollywood actor or politician who’s ever been caught in some scandal (most quoted verse in the Bible)
 - They famously declare, “The Bible says do not judge...,” hoping to silence their accusers
 - Of course, what they really mean is, “How dare you hold me accountable for my mistake!”
 - But holding someone accountable for their mistakes is *not* what the Bible means when it commands us to “not judge”
 - This misunderstanding is a classic example of what happens when we take a verse out of context and divorce it from its intended meaning
 - Taking any verse out of context is pretext...it’s a pretext to making the verse say what we prefer, rather than what it actually means
 - In fact, anyone who interprets Matthew 7:1 to mean that we can never judge someone’s sin, is seeking license to sin
 - That’s the card we play to silence our critics and to avoid having to face the reality of our mistakes
- In reality, the Bible not only permits us to hold others accountable for their mistakes, it often commands us to do so
 - For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:12, Paul says the Church is to judge disputes between members of the Body, rather than taking each other to court
 - And Jesus says in Matthew 18, believers must confront a sinning brother or sister, to call that person to account
 - We do this in the hope of encouraging him or her to be obedient to Christ

- Elsewhere, Paul asks the Body to carefully evaluate a man's character before elevating him to leadership over the Church
- And 1 John tells us to judge the fruit in a teacher's personal life before accepting their testimony and teaching
- And so on and so on...
- So the life of the Body includes many instances of assessing right and wrong, evaluating character, settling disputes, checking qualifications, etc.
 - By definition, these are all "judgment"
 - So obviously, when Jesus says, "Do not judge", He wasn't prohibiting all forms of accountability
 - Nor was He asking us to turn a blind eye to sin in the Body of Christ
- So let's understand what Jesus *did* mean when He said, "Do not judge"
 - First, remember the context of Jesus' sermon is true righteousness
 - And more specifically, that righteousness *cannot* be obtained by following manmade standards, like the Pharisees' Mishnah
 - You remember, we've learned that the Mishnah was a huge book of rules and regulations that these men invented for Israel
 - The Mishnah regulated every aspect of Jewish life, supposedly to ensure that Israel followed the Law of God
 - But in reality, the Pharisees' rules took the place of the Law and added countless additional burdens
 - Those burdens had absolutely no possibility of producing righteousness in those who followed them
 - And no one could possibly keep them all anyway
 - So, they always had something on someone at all times
 - Meanwhile, the Pharisees sat judging Israel from the seat of Moses within the legal system of Israel
 - Pharisees were the judges and prosecutors of Jewish Law

- They judged anyone accused of violating the Law, but mostly, they judged people for violating the Mishnah's rules
- And this overlap in Jewish culture, between the rules of religious life and the law of civil life, produced a culture of judgment
 - The same men who decided if you had committed a crime in Jewish society, also judged whether you were pleasing to God
 - So naturally, people in Israel came to believe their righteousness before God was measured against a set of manmade rules
 - So that if a Pharisee said you had violated the Mishnah's rules and must be punished, then it also meant God was displeased with you
 - That gave everyone license to judge one another in matters of righteousness, while calling it God's judgment
- Jesus says do not judge others, meaning, do not judge others' righteousness according to your rules or any rules
 - All believers have been credited with Christ's righteous by our faith alone, which means our spirit is already righteous
 - Nevertheless, our sinful flesh still exerts its influence on our walk
 - So from day to day, we will exhibit varying degrees of righteousness in our walk
 - On my best days, my walk may approximate true righteousness
 - And on my worst days, you may question if I'm saved at all
 - But regardless of whether I'm having a good day or a bad day, my righteousness before God is never in question
 - The Bible says my spirit is perfect, and my salvation complete, by my faith alone
 - Nothing I have done, nor could ever do, can separate me from the love of Christ, Who has died to cover all my sins with His precious blood
 - And this isn't just true for me or you, but for every Christian the world over

- We all know this intellectually, or at least we should know this, yet the temptation is to judge each other's righteousness
 - We take note of someone's walk during a brief moment in time, and based on that moment, we size them up in our mind
 - Perhaps they display a weakness in an area where we have strength
 - Or perhaps they committed a mistake that we used to commit, but have since conquered in our walk
 - And so, we feel justified in looking down our noses at them and judging them as less righteous than we are, less pleasing to God
- And when we do this, we forget what grace has done for all of us sinners
 - We forget how much we've been forgiven and we conveniently overlook how far we still have to go in addressing our own shortcomings
 - In the worst cases, we judge as the Pharisees did...according to our own standards or expectations, rather than by the Word of God
- And no matter how we judge, we damage the unity of the Body
 - And that's exactly what the enemy wants to see us doing
 - We create a pecking order, just like the Pharisees did...the good Christians and the bad Christians
 - We're saying that some believers are closer to Christ than others – and that's not true
 - Those who are righteous (by our standards) and those who have fallen short (again, according to our standards)
 - We promote legalism, and we deny grace
 - We encourage pride and self-righteousness
 - And we discourage the weak among us from pursuing Christ
- Jesus says do not judge one another in this way, because frankly, the Lord doesn't need your help to bring someone else into righteousness

- The Lord has already given every believer His Spirit and He has given all His Word
 - As Peter says:

2 Pet. 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

2 Pet. 1:3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

- Peter says that God's divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness
 - God's power has granted us everything we need to arrive at godliness
 - He says sanctification will come through a true knowledge of Christ, beginning with the Word of God
 - Moreover, He gave us His Spirit, Who works with the Word of God in our hearts like a sword, cutting and exposing our mistakes
- Now let me ask you...if the Spirit of God, working with the Word of God, is not enough to prompt obedience in someone's heart, how much do you think you can do?
 - How much help are your judgments and advice?
 - How much power do you have to compel obedience with your scorn or guilt trip?
 - Can you argue them into obedience? Do you have better arguments than those in Scripture?
- Nevertheless, the temptation is to help God by pointing out flaws and directing others' behavior to our liking
 - Most of us have either been guilty of doing this to others, or been a victim of someone else's legalism
 - When we put some new layer on top of faith to create an *appearance* of righteousness, we distract people from following Christ
 - And usually, their rules aren't even biblical...rules like, do not drink, do not smoke...

- And then, when we encounter a Christian who drinks or smokes or dances or has a tattoo or long hair...or God forbid, a Christian who does all those things...then we judge their righteousness
- We conclude they could not possibly be pleasing to God, at least not the way we are
 - We judge them as being less righteous than we are...
 - Not because they are violating Scripture, but because they are violating our rules, which we equate to Scripture
- When we do, we become hypocrites like the Pharisees, forgetting that we are *all* sinners and we *all* needed God's grace to be righteous
 - And likewise, we forget that we *all* struggle at times to meet the demands of Scripture for living-out our righteousness
 - And the last thing any struggling Christian needs, is to be burdened with even more rules – especially useless rules
 - Manmade rules never made anyone more righteous
 - It didn't work for the Jews with the Mishnah, and it won't work for us with our rules in the Church
- But this judging is even worse than that
 - Because when we judge others, we actually impede our own walk of righteousness
 - Judging others inflames our pride and encourages self-righteousness and hypocrisy
- It's impossible to judge another person's righteousness without assuming a place of superiority over that person, at least in the area under concern
 - Generally, we only judge others in areas we ourselves are not prone to stumble
 - So, the one who doesn't drink or smoke will be quick to judge the one who drinks or smokes
 - The one who has no interest in tattoos, looks down his or her nose at anyone who dares to get one
 - Whatever you find wrong in someone else's life will likely be something you don't struggle with, or have strength to face

- It's selective outrage, focusing on the offenses that won't convict us, so that we might appear to have our act together
- That's exactly what Pharisees did, and it's our hypocrisy
- That selective outrage gives us away, though, because it's proof we know we're no better than those we judge
 - If we were truly interested in the cause of righteousness, we would focus on all sin, especially on our own
 - But should someone point out our weaknesses, suddenly we run back to Jesus' command not to judge
 - It's easy to be sanctimonious about someone's disobedient kids...until your child runs away from home at 16
 - It's easy to condemn Christians caught in adultery...until someone finds pornography on your phone
 - This kills unity in the Body
- And in those moments, when we face our own disappointments, we need to be reminded that our righteousness comes from Christ
 - By our faith alone, we are perfect – complete and assured the Kingdom – because by His grace, God gave us His righteousness
 - So that when the Father looks down on us, He sees Christ's perfection assigned to us...and nothing can improve upon that perfection
- And then, we can remember that everyone else in here is in exactly the same place
 - No believer in here is more acceptable to God than anyone else
 - Your faults don't disqualify you and their faults don't disqualify them
 - You will struggle, they will struggle
- But together, we can face those struggles and make progress by the power of the Spirit and by the counsel of God's Word
 - Some days, our walk with Christ will be strong and our life will reflect righteousness at virtually every turn

- And some days, we will identify with David in the Psalms, when he declared “Oh Lord my sin is ever before me...”
- None of us ever equal Christ’s perfection in our walk; but on a good day, we’ll get close – and that’s always our goal
- And yes, along the way, fellow believers play a role in helping us obey by teaching us, encouraging us, even exhorting us to obey
 - And on rare occasions, we may have to judge a believer’s behavior for the purpose of correcting it
 - But that’s not judging their righteousness, assessing their worth before God, or their worthiness of our forgiveness and acceptance
 - Judging others in those ways does nothing to strengthen them in their struggle against sin
- In v.2, Jesus says we will be judged by God, according to the way we judge others in the Church
 - Jesus says God will use our standard to judge us, showing us grace when we show it to others
 - Clearly, Jesus is not speaking about His eternal judgment of us (that would be a works-based Gospel)
 - He’s referring to how He will respond to our failings while on earth, in this life
 - So if we’re harsh in judging others’ performance, then we’re daring God to judge us in a similar fashion
 - Do you demand perfection from other believers? You’d better be prepared to be perfect
 - Are you unwilling to acknowledge their progress against sin in their life? Don’t expect God to acknowledge yours
 - Are you unsympathetic to their weaknesses, then looking to God for sympathy?
 - If we become so hard-hearted that we put ourselves in the place of God, judging their righteousness, while ignoring our own faults...
 - Then we must expect the Father in Heaven to use our standard to judge us

- It's not that His grace has failed in our life, no more than it has in theirs
- But what's good for the goose, is good for the gander
- If we honestly think we're helping someone else obey by our harsh judgment, then how can we complain when the Lord uses the same methods to compel our obedience?
- So, if you see a fellow believer stumbling in some area of life and you judge them...
 - You decide they are unrighteous and unworthy of your fellowship, or some other privilege in the Body
 - Perhaps you share your opinions with them, communicating your displeasure, to make them feel unapproved, shamed, rejected...
- Meanwhile, you drop to your knees in prayer asking the Father to overlook your stumbles...
 - And you expect the Father to overlook your failings, to bless you in spite of your failures...
 - You're failing three ways
 - You fail them, because you discourage a struggling believer
 - You fail yourself, because you cultivate a heart of self-righteousness and hypocrisy
 - And you fail Christ, because you trample His grace by denying its power to redeem and sanctify
- In vs.3-5, Jesus makes His point, using one of His best-known illustrations

Matt. 7:3 "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

Matt. 7:4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?"

Matt. 7:5 "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

- Jesus describes a person carefully working to remove the smallest speck of sawdust in his friend's eye

- That speck of sawdust is so small, that even the person himself barely notices it
- Now imagine a friend approaching with a gigantic log projecting outward from his face
- It's so big, that it blinds him and prevents him from getting close enough to truly help his friend
- Yet, this man with the log insists he can help his friend remove the speck of sawdust
- Jesus' point is both obvious and subtle
 - The illustration obviously makes fun of the man's hypocrisy
 - He who thinks he can help his brother, even as he ignores an even bigger problem in his own life
- That's how God sees us as we judge another's weakness, while we make excuses or overlook our own sin
 - That's the way Pharisees operated in Jesus' day
 - They were experts in everyone else's sin, yet they acknowledged none in their own life
 - They kept everyone under their thumb by deciding the rules, and judging who had kept them well enough to earn approval
- If that kind of hypocrisy is allowed in the Church, we end up with another generation of Pharisees
 - We'd be run by unholy, ungodly individuals who portray themselves as gatekeepers to God
 - It's a complete distortion of grace, and it's a violation of everything Christ has taught in this sermon
- But Jesus' illustration also makes a subtle comparison between these two individuals
 - Notice that the speck and that log are both made of the same material: wood
 - In other words, these two men were both in the same predicament...neither could truly solve the other's problems

- We all have sin in our lives, to one degree or another
- We all have major blind spots of sin in our lives, weaknesses that are serious impediments to our walk with Christ
- So none of us are experts in how to live righteously
- So, while we are called to hold each other accountable for sin, that's not the same thing as judging each other's righteousness
 - For example, as a leader in the Church, I have an obligation to exhort you to obey Christ
 - And I certainly assess right and wrong according to the Bible, when called upon to do so
- But I am never called to judge another person's righteousness
 - I can't say that any believer in here is less righteous than another believer, or that anyone here is more worthy of God's approval
 - In reality, we each commit so much sin in the course of our lives, that if we piled them up, none of us could even count that high
 - So the difference in sin between any two members of the Body of Christ amounts to nothing more than a rounding error
 - We all have wood in our eyes
- Knowing that, why spend time judging another's worthiness before God?
 - As the illustration says, why not spend time working on your own wood problem?
 - So begin this way...have you confessed Christ as your Savior?
 - Then, your faith has made you righteous...as righteous as Christ, because it's His righteousness you possess!
 - Have you sinned today? Confess it to Christ and ask for His forgiveness and you shall have it
 - Or do you think you have no sin today? Then, the Bible says you are a liar (which means you just sinned)
 - Has someone else sinned against you? Forgive them, knowing Christ has forgiven you for worse

- And are you preoccupied by the failings of others? Are you tempted to point out their faults?
 - First, remember that it's the Spirit Who convicts and teaches, not you
 - And it's the Lord Who sanctifies them and delivers them approved to God, not you
 - And that their failings are no greater than yours, that your righteousness and their righteousness comes from Christ
- So, we are all equally righteous by our faith and we are equally sinful in our walk
 - We all have wood in our eyes
 - And we can certainly be of help to one another in our common fight against sin
 - But not by inspecting righteousness in another person
 - But rather, by modeling righteousness to one another
 - Notice Jesus says in v.5, that trying to fix another person's sin while leaving our own sin unaddressed is hypocrisy
 - Taking advice on righteousness from a hypocritical sinner is like taking financial advice from someone in bankruptcy
 - After all, if you're such an expert in compelling others to obey Christ, why waste all your good advice on others?
 - Why not take full advantage of it yourself?
 - Turn all that expertise inwardly and address your own faults
 - The point again, is that we all have weaknesses, and we all need help to obey, and that's the role of the Body of Christ
 - To help one another, not to grade one another
 - And there is a biblical way to help each other live more obedient, righteous lives
- In the illustration, Jesus says we can do our fellows believers a service by taking the log out of your own eye

- In other words, model obedience in your own life as an encouragement to other believers to do the same
 - No one follows a hypocrite
 - But we naturally follow people who set the right example and encourage us to imitate them
- So obey the voice of the Lord, allowing Him to strengthen you against your flesh's desires
 - And then, as you strengthen your own walk of obedience, Jesus says you will see more clearly how you can assist others
 - Your experience in combating your own sin, will improve your insight, your compassion, your patience and your empathy for others fighting their own battles
 - But even more importantly, those around you will be more likely to take your advice, because they will respect your own godliness
- When we move from critiquing to modeling, we also move from judging to loving
 - Judges find fault, but friends forgive
 - And the one who knows how much they've been forgiven by God will be the one to forgive others the most
- So remember three things:
 - First, your righteousness before God is complete in Christ
 - You cannot be more acceptable to God than you are right now
 - You can't be more righteous, more loved, more forgiven
 - Secondly, if that's true for you, then it's also true for every other believer you will ever meet
 - They are no less righteous than you
 - They are no less accepted by Christ, no less loved by Christ, no less destined to reign with Christ than you
 - And nothing you can offer them, no rule you give them, no critique you offer, can improve on that truth

- So that even as we may find fault with them, remember Christ died to pay for their sins too...just as He did for yours
- So lastly, if you want to help others live obediently to Christ so they can obtain the greatest eternal reward, model righteousness in your own life
 - Don't judge their walk and don't focus on their missteps
 - Judge yourself first, working to restrain your own flesh
 - And as they see your good works, they will glorify your Father in Heaven
- And in time, your example will encourage them to press onward
 - They will seek your counsel as a friend, not a judge
 - And they will respect your counsel all the more, knowing it comes out of a love for them and for Christ
 - Rather than from a heart of hypocrisy

F.B. Meyer once said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are three things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. Finally, we do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.