**Matthew 7:1-6 / Luke 6:39-42 'To judge or not to judge - that's the question!'**

This morning we are in Matthew 7, and we're looking at the paragraph stretching from verse 1 down to verse 6. It's part of your current Sunday morning series on the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived.

The Sermon on the Mount is a call from the heart of Jesus to kingdom living – it's a big challenge for you and I to get it right in a world where so many get it wrong. In political-speak, it's a manifesto of the King – it's a blueprint for living your life on the cutting edge of faith – it's for men and women in today's church who want to make a difference in their world … it's for good and godly people who want to leave a legacy for the next generation.

According to John Stott, this is 'Christian counter-culture' … this is swimming against the tide. This flies in the face of wokeism which is rampant in the shifting sands of today's culture. It bucks the trend when it comes to a designer label mindset; ah, my friend, this is a new way: first, **it's a new way of life** and, second, **it's a new way to live**!

And we certainly see evidence of that in today's study, where it's all about judging others! The all-important question is: to judge or not to judge!

There's no doubt that this is one of the most well-known verses from the Bible - you hear it quoted day after day in all kinds of situations. Someone does something or says something, and before you can say *Jack Robinson*, someone quotes the verse! It's like a plastic bullet ready to be fired at a moment's notice.

That said, while people often ram this verse down your throat and mine, and do it with a sanctimonious smirk on their face, the stark reality is … most times it is misunderstood and misapplied. People lift it out of context …

I have to ask the question, Does Jesus really mean that we are to never be discerning; that we are to never evaluate someone's behaviour, or question someone's actions?

Well, the straight answer on all three points is an emphatic triple 'no'. Read chapter 6 and you see ample evidence of his attitude to certain people - Jesus repeatedly called them 'hypocrites' … some he refers to as 'dogs and pigs' in 7:6 … he warns us of the danger of false teachers when he describes them as ravaging, rampaging wolves dressed in sheepskin coats (7:15).

For me, when we take those statements at face value - it's Jesus calling a spade, a spade … there was no attempt by him to dress it up and make it more presentable, he doesn't churn out a press release and put a glossy spin on it … no; simply put, Jesus is passing judgment on them. If you like, it's an **act** of judgment on his part … and, let's face it, he's well within his rights to do so!

There's a world of difference between what Jesus did and what you and I so often do - for him, in every instance and on every occasion, it was an

**act** of judgment, and that's ok … so often for you and I, we have an **attitude** of judgmentalism! And that's not ok!

We are to call sin for what it is … we are called by God to discern good from evil, right from wrong, good fruit from bad fruit (see 7:17). What we are not called to do is to judge people's motives, look down on people with a condescending attitude.

It's so easy for you and I to set ourselves up on a pedestal, six feet above contradiction - maybe we have known God's outrageous blessing on our life and ministry, maybe we've enjoyed an outpouring of his grace at some point, maybe we've seen an amazing answer to prayer, and we feel humbled and grateful about that - that's fine …

Just because God has blessed us big time doesn't mean that we walk among the church family with our noses in the air … you may see yourself as a super saint - you may have an amazing story to tell - well, you may, and that's great, but that doesn't give you the right to make others feel inferior in the local church!

And that's what the Lord Jesus is getting at here in these powerful verses … the American writer, Jerry Bridges, refers to judgmentalism as one of those so-called 'respectable sins' among the people of God. It's the kind of thing we do when we're dressed in our Sunday best. Well, one look at these verses and Jesus helps us see that there is nothing respectable about it at all!

In fact, in verses 1-5, **Jesus confronts it** head-on … he goes for the jugular, as it were, when he says it is dangerous in verse 1, it is detrimental in verse 2, it is dysfunctional in verses 3-4, and it is delusional in verse 5. Then, secondly, in verse 6, **Jesus counsels us** - more about that later.

I think we can see the pitfalls of such an attitude - we attempt to play God when we are not, we apply to others a standard we don't want applied to ourselves, our spiritual vision is blurred and distorted, and we lose perspective and fail to see reality as it really is.

Jesus said in John 13:35, 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' Get that? God's people, you and I, we should be known for how sincerely we love one another, not how severely we judge one another.

Let's unpack each of these negative aspects of a judgmental spirit in verses 1-5:

**It is dangerous (verse 1)**

I mean, it couldn't be any clearer or plainer than it is - these words have teeth, they bite; there's no opt out clause, it's not up for negotiation, there's no wriggle room - it's straight from the shoulder, it's a direct command from Jesus to you and I … 'do not judge!'

He says, don't do it now, don't do it ever, and if you are doing it, it's time to stop it!

The rationale behind it is, it will come back to haunt you … 'do not judge, or you too will be judged.' This is no idle threat, far from it - it's a fait accompli … if you play with fire, you'll end up getting burned!

**It is detrimental (verse 2)**

We see how detrimental it is, because Jesus clarifies exactly what he means … we take these words at face value and, again, there's no way we can misunderstand what Jesus is saying. Quite simply, these things have a way of catching up with us - when the payback day arrives, we have no one else to blame but ourselves … sooner or later, we get our comeuppance!

And here's a spiritual health warning: when we have a judgmental attitude, it will not be for our benefit or blessing - it will be damaging in every way!

It seems to me that the principle which Jesus is articulating finds its echo in Matthew 6:12, 14-15. Those are familiar words where the focus is very much on forgiveness … the stakes are high: we have been forgiven by God, therefore we must forgive others! Paul was on the same page when he wrote in Ephesians 4:32, 'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.'

We're talking here about showing mercy to folks who don't always get it right and who, more often than not, wind us up the wrong way. When it would be easy to criticise and condemn them, but we show mercy to them, that is an act of wisdom on our part - and it flows out of a recognition of the mercy God has shown to us. As the song says: our sins - your sins, my sins - they are many, his mercy is more!

When we judge a brother or sister harshly without knowing all the facts, it's downright foolish on our part … it reveals that we don't understand God's grace at all.

You see, when we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good in our own lives, when we have known bucketfuls of mercy and grace day by day, when we have felt the pure wonder of forgiveness - that should temper and transform our attitude to others.

**It is dysfunctional (verses 3-4)**

Jesus asks two pertinent questions in these two verses … and it's an illustration that we're all very familiar with. The contrast is ginormous, when on one hand, we talk about a speck of sawdust, over against a plank of wood! There's a splinter in my brother's eye - there's a timber beam in my eye!

I mean, it's ridiculous, isn't it - we can all see the funny side of it … but, hey, don't be fooled for the Lord knows exactly what he's doing here - these words are so pointed, so direct, so convicting, so in your face that you can't fail to get the point.

Your brother has a tiny pesky splinter in his eye, and you have a log of wood in your eye, and you are trying to help him …!!!??? Really …??? Why is that my response … well, take a look at verse 4, 'How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?'

That question pulls the rug from under your feet - you haven't a leg to stand on … it's Jesus saying, how can you even attempt to do this, why would you even try? I hope you can see the fallacy of it all!

You see, those who take on the assignment of a spiritual Peeping Tom, or assume the role of a spiritual garbage inspector - such folk are deaf, dumb, and blind to the enormity and magnitude of their own sin. This is where Jesus cuts to the chase when he challenges us to realise - we may be sensitive to sin in the lives of others, and be desensitised to the sin in our own hearts. We can see it in others - but we're blind to it in our own lives … my friend, that's a scary place to be!

One example springs to mind - you recall the story in 2 Samuel 11 and 2 Samuel 12 where the prophet Nathan confronted King David over his sin with Bathsheba. That epic confrontation ended not with a ringing endorsement of David, but with a stinging indictment, 'You are the man.' And there was nowhere for him to hide.

The lesson is: before I plunge the knife in to my brother's back and hang his dirty washing out for all the world to see, be careful, be cautious, take a few steps back, and ruthlessly inspect your own life, just in case there's a big plank lodged in your own eye!

**It is delusional (verse 5)**

Jesus doesn't go softly-softly here, does he? He's on full throttle as he tears into these individuals who think they're always in the right and who have a holier-than-thou mindset. That someone with great sin in their life would attempt to correct someone with a small sin in theirs is the height of hypocrisy! 'You hypocrite!' is how the all-knowing, all-seeing Jesus lambasts them!

Talk about a killer punch - this is it … having named and shamed such people, Jesus goes on the front foot to give some sound advice and he begins with the word 'first' … and that's there for a reason! You and I need to get our lives sorted out before we stick our noses into other people's affairs, and there's a proper way to do it …

'Take the plank out of your own eye' - that word 'take' is a command that calls for action, decisive action, immediate action. No fluffing your lines, no playing for time; do it, and do it now! 'Then,' and only then, Jesus says, 'you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.'

On that point, there's an important truth that we dare not miss … there's no doubt that Jesus gives the thumbs up for you and me to humbly and graciously correct a brother or sister in sin. That is our responsibility and shows our care and love for others in the family of God. It's the right thing to do … the issue here is that first of all, I must deal with me.

It's only when I have dealt with me and rooted out the planks in my own life, only then can I get alongside a brother or sister who has fallen in sin and failed their Lord. That is something the Bible warmly commends and, indeed, commands - Paul says as much in Galatians 6:1-2.

When we have opportunity to minister into the lives of others, having sorted out our own life, we do so with humility and real heartfelt compassion and a degree of sensitivity … at the same time, we must be very aware that lurking in the long

grass is the danger of arrogance, pride, and self-deception.

So, in verses 1-5, **Jesus confronts** the issue of passing judgment on others … now, in verse 6, **he counsels** us with a couple of choice one-liners: one, 'do not give dogs what is sacred' and, two, 'do not throw your pearls to pigs.'

Phew, that's strong language … and it's coming from the lips of Jesus. Not the kind of thing we are used to, but Jesus was always upfront and he didn't take any prisoners! He called Herod Antipas 'that fox' … he called the rightwing legalists - the scribes and Pharisees - 'a brood of vipers' and 'whitewashed tombs.'

Right here, he's simply saying that there are some people who act like animals … therefore, he reserves the right to call them 'dogs' and 'pigs.' And we have two reasons why we should treat them as such …

**The dogs - they tear up God's precious truth**

The canines mentioned here are not the cute and cuddly four-legged friends some of us have at home - nope, these dogs were as vicious as the pit-bulls we hear of in the media - they roamed the streets in packs - they were scavengers and dangerous.

Paul uses a similar analogy in Philippians 3:2 to highlight the dangers of false teachers … John aligns them with the least desirable people in our world in Revelation 22:15. There's no doubt that these folks are evil and wicked persons who have little or no time for the Lord and the gospel.

When it comes to biblical truth, what do they do with it? They tear it up, they rip it to shreds and trash it at every opportunity. Jesus goes a step further when he personalises it - their goal is to destroy the message, and if they get the chance, the messenger as well - they 'will tear you to pieces.'

On a practical note, Jesus is warning us not to force gospel truth on those who are not only not receptive, but are actually hostile to our witness. Cynics and mockers will seldom listen. It's time to move on and seek out receptive ears.

**The pigs - they trample on God's precious truth**

Pigs were unclean animals according to the Old Testament - we know that from Leviticus 11:7 and Deuteronomy 14:8. They are never spoken of positively in the Bible … and, like the dogs, they are an image of false teachers, as in 2 Peter 2:22. If dogs attack the messenger and tear up the message, pigs trample it under foot and drag it through the muck and mire, doing what pigs do!

'Don't throw your pearls to pigs' for they don't value or appreciate the beauty of the gospel; to them, it is meaningless waffle and something to ridicule, spurn, and mock. Again, that's a timely lesson for all of us who engage in evangelism - do not waste your time or energy among the pigs for they only treat you and your message with dirt - be wise and move on to someone else, as Jesus himself advised in Matthew 10:11-15.

To judge or not to judge, that's the question! In closing, let me leave with you a handful of ideas

as to how you can make the right call when it comes to exercising judgment without being judgmental. I've adapted these from a book by Danny Akin:

1. Always check your motives - why am I doing this? Is my heart in touch and in tune with God? (Proverbs 16:2; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5).
2. Examine your own walk with the Lord first. Am I walking and living in the Spirit? Is my life characterised by the fruit of the Spirit? Do I monitor my own sin as in Galatians 6:1-2?
3. It might be useful to seek out godly counsel from a believer whom you trust and who is familiar with the Word of God (Proverbs 10:13-14, 11:14, 15:22).
4. Practice the Golden Rule - there's a way to do things - you only get one opportunity to get it right as in Matthew 7:12.
5. Be careful not to make a snap decision or do it in haste. Take time to get the facts and listen before taking action (Proverbs 18:13).
6. Pray for the one who appears to be caught in sin before correcting them (James 5:15-16).
7. Don't forget the example of Jesus and how he helped and ministered to sinners (John 7:53-8:11).
8. Speak the truth and do it in love (Ephesians 4:15).
9. Keep in mind that some things are right and wrong, but some things are just different (Romans 14:1-6, 13-23).
10. Never forget that ultimately everyone must give an account to the Lord, not to me (Romans 14:7-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).