

## Week of February 14, 2021

### Matthew 7:1-12

<sup>7</sup> “Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged. <sup>2</sup> You’ll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the splinter that’s in your brother’s or sister’s eye, but don’t notice the log in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> How can you say to your brother or sister, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ when there’s a log in your eye? <sup>5</sup> You deceive yourself! First take the log out of your eye, and then you’ll see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s or sister’s eye. <sup>6</sup> Don’t give holy things to dogs, and don’t throw your pearls in front of pigs. They will stomp on the pearls, then turn around and attack you.

<sup>7</sup> “Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door is opened. <sup>9</sup> Who among you will give your children a stone when they ask for bread? <sup>10</sup> Or give them a snake when they ask for fish? <sup>11</sup> If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.

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### Christian Platitudes

Everyone has heard various Christian platitudes at some point in their life. These are things like, “When God closes one door, God opens a window,” or “God never gives you more than you can handle,” or “let go and let God.” Maybe there are some platitudes that you genuinely like or that have been helpful to you at some point in your life. Or maybe you detest them. Even though they’re used again and again by many people - hence their being called platitudes - theologians tend to look down on them. It’s not because of their over use, but because of their lack of substance. What’s really being said when someone going through a hard time hears, “let go and let God?” Is that person being told to ignore their problem and God will just handle it? And if that’s the case, does God just not care about personal responsibility? It’s the questions that arise from platitudes that are at issue. There’s almost always truth buried within them, but they’re too shallow to offer any real insight and tend to be manipulated depending on the person using them.

Jesus makes several statements in these first twelve verses of Matthew 7 that some might consider to be platitudes: “Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged,” “Why do you see the splinter that’s in your brother’s or sister’s eye, but don’t notice the log in your own eye,” “Don’t throw your pearls before swine,” “Ask, and you will receive,” “you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you.” While some people may use Jesus’ words as a simple moral saying, they’re so much more. Context is everything - these aren’t just simple truisms that Jesus threw out, but part of Jesus’ most important sermon to the crowds beginning to follow him. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus established the basis for who he was, what his ministry was all about, and what it means to be a child of God. We can get a clear understanding of Jesus’ message by looking at the bigger picture of all these sayings.

The first big point is about how individuals relate to one another. Jesus’ multiple examples were to underscore a fundamental principle we must all understand - no one person is better than another. All of us, from the most important to the least significant, stand as equals in the eyes of God. We all have equal worth, we all receive equal love, we are all equally called children of God. Because of that equality, we may never, for any reason, claim to be superior to another. This does not mean that we cannot point out the moral failings of others, but it does mean that we should also realize that all of us have had our own moral failings, too, and God alone serves as

the judge of us all.

Secondly, Jesus reminded the crowd that God, as parent of all, will give us anything we ask for. We could be like Janice Joplin and pray, "Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz," but that isn't the point of Jesus' proclamation, nor is God likely to purchase any of us a new car. The point is connected to the first - because we are God's children, if we seek forgiveness for our own moral failings, we will receive it. None of us will be prevented from receiving the one thing that is absolutely necessary - God's love and mercy. And if it's available for us, it is for others, too.

These aren't meaningless platitudes, but an instruction manual for how we should live our lives and interact with others. Jesus needed people to know that creating any system that calls some better than and others worse than is antithetical to God's creation. God is the author and ruler, and God will treat us all with the love and respect we deserve as God's children. We should do the same for one another.

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*God of Mercy, in a world where your words are twisted to be shapeless, toothless, and without meaning, give us the wisdom to see the great joy that comes from your law when treated with reverence. Help us see that love is the rule by which you created the world and call us to your service. In love forgive our failings, and through love recreate our lives so that we can model what we have received because of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*