

Jesus On Judging Others.

For five years Lyn and I were part of a Bible Study Home Group that consisted of people from all over the world. Most were African, but we also had Chinese, Americans, Swiss, English and of course us as Kiwis. It was one of the most stimulating groups we had ever been in. Each week we would finish with takeaways. Not takeaways to eat, but takeaways to digest. The person leading the study usually asked the question 'What truth have you learned tonight that you are going to take away and apply to your life?' We do that because we believe that bible study is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Our study of the word of God is meant to change our lives.

Living The Learning

So as we have been learning from the Sermon on the Mount teaching on Sundays, have you been living out what you learn? When Jesus talked about having murderous thoughts towards other people, or when he talked about lusting after someone you are not married to, have you been submitting your thought life to the Lord, and asking him to renew the way you see other people? Have you found you have been developing a greater love for your enemies, and you have begun praying for them more often? Have you found you are giving to the needy without making a fuss about it? Is your prayer life a bit less ostentatious and a bit more genuine before God? Have you begun to fast regularly as a way of deepening your relationship with God, and you have been able to do that without others knowing? Are you investing more of your time and money in the Kingdom of Heaven? And if you are, is your motivation to please the Lord, rather than pleasing people? Are you finding yourself trusting God for your daily needs, and you find you are living by faith a lot more than you used to? All these are truths that have come out of our study of the scriptures on Sundays.

But When Others Don't Live it Out...

If you have begun to do these things, you probably will have noticed that you have been growing spiritually and becoming more like Jesus. Praying regularly, giving regularly, fasting regularly, changes us. Ordering our private world allows the Lord to change us from the inside out. If we live out the teaching of Jesus, the righteousness Jesus talked about will begin to reveal itself in our lives. But as we begin to practice these spiritual disciplines something else can happen to us. We begin to notice that other people are not growing as much as we are. We become aware of other Christians who are not applying the word of God to their lives the way we are. We become more aware of people who have broken relationships with others, who make no attempt to do anything about them. We discover people who make no attempt to be salt and light in the world the way we are. When we turn the other cheek, and go the extra mile, it becomes very clear to us that there are other followers of Jesus who don't do that. In fact, some of them won't even go the first mile.

Isn't it a curious thing that the more we make a serious attempt to become more Christ like, the more we find ourselves getting angry with people who never turn up to the annual spring clean of the church. When we start to order our private world and get to church on time, we get really ticked off with people who are always late. When we start getting our giving to God's work in order, and give sacrificially, it bugs us to see people who hardly give anything to support the Lord's work. We get cross about people who won't help out with the Children's ministry, or locking the church. We find it bugs us that when there is an event to be organised, it's the same few people who do all the hard work. We get irritated with slack Christians. The more we trust God, the more frustrated we get with people who don't seem to trust God much at all. The deeper our understanding of the Word of God, the more everyone else seems to be so shallow - even the preacher. Eventually we get to the point of setting up our own website so we can label as heretics anyone who doesn't agree with our interpretation of scripture. The final step is to form a new church with people who have reached our level of spiritual maturity. Listen to the words of Jesus.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 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? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5 NIV)

Jesus knew the condition of the human heart. He knew how easy it is for us to become self righteous and judgemental. We have a fatal tendency to exaggerate the faults of others and minimize the gravity of our own. We have rosy view of ourselves and a jaundiced view of others. In short we are like blind surgeons trying to do delicate eye surgery. Because we are blind we do huge damage in the process. We may be right in our diagnosis, it's just that often we are the wrong people to be doing the surgery. All of us are sinners. We are no position to stand in judgement on our fellow sinners.

King David

Perhaps the best biblical example of what Jesus is talking about was King David. He slept with another man's wife, and to cover up his sin, had her husband killed. David had his huge plank in his eye, but he was so blinded, he couldn't see it. Nathan the prophet came into the royal court to confront King David about his sin. But instead of confronting the king outright, he told a parable. It was a short story about of a poor farmer whose one little lamb has been stolen by rich powerful man with a large flock of his own. David was incensed. In seething indignation, and quite unaware of where the story was leading, he asked who this wicked man was. Nathan replied, "you are the man". David was fuming over a speck of sawdust in someone else's eye, quite oblivious to the huge plank in his own eye. Isn't that so true of us? We can so easily see what's wrong with everyone else, and are so blind to the state of our own heart.

The Cancer Of Self Deception.

The more I go on in the Christian life, the more I realise that I have within me a vast capacity for self deception. I can tell lies to myself so often that eventually I believe them. The temptation to be judgmental of others is powerful and dangerous. It poisons me to the point that I become deceived. I begin to look at everyone else as a spiritual pigmy and see myself as a spiritual giant. It starts in my thinking and before I know it, it comes out in words of gossip and slander, destroying someone else's reputation.

Years ago I heard the story of a Catholic priest in a small village in France. The village was so small that everyone knew everyone else's business. In the village was a woman who made it her business to dig up the dirt on everyone else, and then gossip about them. Her judgemental attitude and poisoned tongue destroyed so many relationships among the people. One day she came to the priest for confession, and she confessed her sin. The priest listened to her confession, and then told her there would be a penance. He gave her a very large sack, and told her to fill the bag with as many feathers as she could find. When the bag was full, she was to come back to him. The day she came back to the priest with the bag full of feathers. It was a windy day. The priest told her to go to the top of the hill above the village, and to throw the feathers into the wind until the bag was empty, and then to come back to him. She did. When she returned the priest said "Now I want you to go and pick up every one of those feathers, for each of those feathers represents the way you have judged others and gossiped about them. Such is the damage you have caused."

We Choose The Measure

We are the ones who determine how others judge us. When we are so critical of the speck in the eye of someone, we are issuing an invitation for everyone to examine the log of wood in our own eye. If we judge others without mercy, that's the way we will be judged. If we judge kindly we will be judged and treated kindly. If we are sharply critical of others, we invite them to be sharply critical of us. Yet some people never make the connection. They can't understand why people are so critical of them. Jesus said ***“For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Matthew 7:2 NIV)***

Why Jesus Says “Don't Judge”

When we judge someone else, we are making assumptions. We assume we know all the facts of the situation, when often we don't. Only God knows all the facts. We assume we know the motives of the

other person, when in reality, only God knows the motives of the heart. If we start guessing at peoples motives, we usually assume the worst about them. When we start being judgemental about other people, we begin setting ourselves up as God. And that my friends is the sin that runs like a thread all the way through the Bible. Every time we point the finger of judgement we are saying in effect "I know all the facts. I know your motivations. I know your circumstances. I know everything there is to know and I am qualified to judge you." Jesus says "Don't do it."

When We Need To Be Discerning.

The first part of this scripture, is about a heart attitude that is always finding fault with other people. But the second part seems to be contradictory, for Jesus is telling us that there are situations where we do need to make assessments of people.

"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces." (Matthew 7:6)

Jesus recognises that there are some people who act like dogs and pigs. The dogs Jesus had in mind were not the pampered house pets we know today, but wild scavenging mongrels that roamed the streets, sometimes feeding off decaying corpses. People like this were around in Jesus day. There were times when Jesus told his disciples that some Pharisees were like blind guides, and they were to be left alone. Paul abandoned his ministry to the Jews in Corinth because they opposed him and became abusive, and he shared the Gospel with the Gentiles instead. These people are scathing about spiritual truth. They love to mock and display their intellectual arrogance. They enjoy the sport of argument and ridicule. In a day when atheists are becoming extremely militant, and anyone with faith, especially Christian faith is being attacked, this is a timely word for us as Christians.

The gospel we have been entrusted with is a priceless treasure. Those of us who deeply appreciate what Christ has done for us, see this gospel as the most valuable thing in our lives. It's a pearl of great price. Jesus is telling us that without becoming judgemental, we are to be discerning about where and how and with whom we share the priceless treasure of the Gospel. This calls for wisdom and discernment. As the years have gone by I have learned to ask the Spirit of God to give me wisdom in how much to share with individuals. If they show that they are genuinely seeking to know Christ, then I gladly share more.

Order Your Private World.

This teaching from Jesus that we call the Sermon On The Mount strikes right at the core of who we are. It's not dealing with our public world that everyone sees, but with our private world. Jesus is speaking about anger and bitterness towards others, about what is going on in our thought life, about forgiveness and integrity, about our attitudes to those who hate us. He's dealing with where our heart attitudes are concerning money and possessions, and whether we really trust God, and in this scripture this morning, about being judgemental. It's a call for each of us to deal with our private world. Let's take a moment today to reflect on this scripture, and invite the Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out.

Visuals

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Leaving The Learning...

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