

Luke 6:36-49

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[0 : 00] I want to go back to the Gospel of Luke with you, and we find Jesus teaching there in a passage often known as the Sermon on the Mount. And as I was thinking about this passage, I was reminded of a place that we used to visit a lot when our kids were younger, St Andrews.

We lived in Fife, and often on a Saturday we might take the kids up to St Andrews and go to the beach, and they loved to walk around the ruins of St Andrews Cathedral.

And St Andrews Cathedral, medieval cathedral, must have been just an incredible structure, massive foundations that you can still see. But largely now, it's just a broken shell and some ruins. And that picture of St Andrews Cathedral, a shell and some ruins, is a pretty good metaphor, a pretty good picture of the 21st century church in the United Kingdom.

It's just a shell of what it used to be. And inside that shell are the ruins of Christianity. We've lost so much of the Christian faith and the Christian vibrancy that there once was in our churches.

[1 : 22] And we're in a passage here where there's lots of vivid pictures, really memorable pictures, you know, that have stayed in our culture.

Judge not, lest you be judged. That's still common currency in our culture. The blind leading the blind. Get the log out of your own eye before you take the speck out of mind.

So you've got these sort of really beautiful and memorable word pictures here. But also really vivid pictures of ruin, of collapse, of disaster.

And what Jesus is showing us here is this. He's not talking about the ruin and collapse of our lives personally. We can't read the Sermon on the Mount in an individualistic way.

It's not about how I live alone. The Sermon on the Mount is about how we live together as the church. It's about the vision Jesus has of the coming kingdom of God and how we live together as citizens of the kingdom of God.

[2 : 33] How we create an alternative community based on love and grace and mercy. And that alternative community, that kingdom community, gives to the surrounding world an insight, a view of the new creation, of the ultimate kingdom of God in all its goodness, love, joy and justice.

And so the Sermon on the Mount is about how you and I interact together as citizens of God's kingdom, how we live together as a community of God's people.

And Jesus has got a really vivid, powerful warning in here, doesn't he? That if we don't live these kingdom ways, then the church community will face ruin.

It will collapse inwardly. It will be swept away when the storms come. And so this is a really helpful and vital picture of us of what it means and what it looks like to have a vibrant church.

And at the very heart of what it means to be the community of God, at the very heart of what it means to be a vibrant church, is this idea of mercy.

[4 : 02] Mercy fills the life of the church because mercy fills the heart of the Father in heaven. Mercy fills the life of the Lord in heaven.

Mercy fills the life of the Lord in heaven.

Mercy fills the life of the Lord in heaven. Mercy fills the life of the Lord in heaven. We cannot begin to measure the depth of God's compassion for us. And God is saying that same amazing depth of love, compassion and mercy must be in the heart of the believer and in the heart of the believing community as they live together.

and when we have that when we have that merciful core to the life of the church then it changes so much do not judge you will not be judged do not condemn and you will not be condemned so um I've been reading a really lovely book which many of you I hope will have read it's called Gentle and Lowly by Dane Ortlund and there's a little bit in in that book where Dane Ortlund says this he says um you know that uh mercy doesn't just pass through our lives like passing through a hotel it says

mercy abides in our lives the way we might abide in a home and so I want to say that that for the church mercy should not just pass through the church like a hotel but rather mercy should dwell or abide in the church like a home so my church Cornerstone I long for it to be a place of just outstanding mercy and your church Bon Accord we we hope and pray that it too is a church where mercy is at home where mercy abides and abounds and I think there are three levels to that that Jesus kind of pulls out here for us and first of all in how we relate to each other I'm calling that the critic and then secondly uh he digs down a bit further beyond our behavior and how we relate to what's going on in our hearts and then thirdly he goes deeper than that to the foundation of our lives rooted in the word of God so there's the critic there's our hearts and then there's the foundation in his word that's the kind of three levels that we're traveling through because that's the kind of three levels that we need to think about if mercy will truly abide in the life of our churches so let's just think about the critic okay the critic now we all know this person the critic they're always sitting there in their armchair pointing out everybody else's faults where they come short what's wrong with them how they're not quite living up to scratch or meeting the standard and Jesus just gives us a magnificent picture of this person doesn't he because he says this person he's like a guy who's walking along with a massive plank of wood through the back of his head coming out of his eye and it's just enormous 20 foot logs these would have been used in the foundations of building houses and they were huge and so it's a ridiculous picture of this guy with this enormous plank of wood coming out of his eye and staggering about and trying to find the speck in other people's eyes now it's very hard to see a speck in anyone's eyes from any distance but especially if you've got a log in your own eye and so Jesus is pitching pitching for us something really ridiculous farcical and he's saying it is farcical for you or me to take on the role of critic in life because we are not the judge there is only one lord there is only one judge there is only one god and it ain't you and it ain't me we leave it to god himself to be the one who condemns and vindicates he alone is lord and judge and so we are not to put ourselves in the critic's seat always finding fault with someone else always slightly disappointed talking about other people in the church

to our friends oh see so and so you know and we we allude to certain shortcomings certain feelings or talking about colleagues or other family members and demeaning ways that undermine them take the feet from beneath them now Jesus says do not judge lest you be judged does he mean we don't make any judgments at all no of course we all we all make judgments all the time different kinds of evaluations and we all make moral judgments and Jesus tells us important that we do make moral judgments and that we speak truth to one another in love so Jesus is not saying that we we avoid all moral judgment he's not saying that you should never go to someone and speak about things in their life that concern you but he's saying what you do not do is you do not take the seat of the critic and sit in judgment over them condemning them putting them down and belittling them in all these different kinds of ways we have to have a moral way of living we have to have a moral way of talking and we need to be able to talk to others about things that we might be concerned about in their in their lives if we feel that they are harming themselves or harming others but what we're not seeking to do is to confront others in a condemning way where we where we come from a position of superiority of arrogance and pride because we're obviously right and they're obviously wrong we can do this about our faith and religion with those who disagree with us we talk down at them we treat them like they're stupid we can do it with groups of people that we differ from and we're really condemning of them and in a world like ours where there is such fundamental disagreement about basic moral issues it's really easy to join that game of being there standing there condemning and pointing the fingers at others but we don't take the position of haughtiness and pride to look down and when we confront others how do we do it we do it with gentle humility think of an eye surgeon try to get a speck out of somebody's eye gently carefully with precision with tremendous skill and wisdom moral conversations speaking to others about concerns we have about their life takes that same wisdom gentleness skill and love that's how Jesus wants us to be with each other engaging others lovingly and kindly for their good why because if we want to engage with others in moral conversations we do it out of mercy because we have a deep compassion and concern for their lives we're not there to condemn to write them off we're not judging the person because what condemnation does is it judges a person rather than the action it writes them off and it buries them and instead of condemnation there will be engaging with people lovingly and there will be forgiving people extravagantly Jesus says that doesn't he says don't condemn you won't be condemned forgiven you will be forgiven verse 37 given it'll be given to you a good measure pressed down shaken together running over poured into your lap with the measure you use it'll be measured to

you so he's saying go after this stuff with tremendous generosity of spirit and of heart [13:45] and be utterly forgiving of others i was reading a book with a couple in our church recently and some marriage prep we're doing a book called marriage matters by winston smith great book if you want to read a book in marriage and um he in the book he's got a chapter on learning to forgive as god forgives so in marriage as in all our other relationships we need to learn to practice forgiveness four things he said about forgiveness that i found really helpful so i'll share them with you briefly first of all forgiveness is a decision to release god released us from the penalty of our sin and so we decide to release others from the wrong done to us we don't keep dwelling on it secondly a decision to sacrifice god decided to take the penalty and pain of our sin on himself at the cross it is costly to forgive and so we have to be able to absorb the pain of the wrong done to us to accept the wound and refuse to pay back or take revenge so a decision to release to set free from the penalty of sin the decision to sacrifice to bear the cost of wrong a decision to pursue good god chose to bring good from bad he uses our worst failures to bring the greatest goods and so when we forgive we're trusting god to bring good out of bad out of the wrong done to us and then there's a decision to grow god is patient isn't he isn't god so forgiving he gives me a lot a lot of second chances okay get thing same things wrong again and again and again the same stupid words come out of my mouth again and again the same um critical behaviors or whatever they are and and god is patient he gives me time to change and grow he doesn't say one more sin mcmillan and you're done he bears with me for the long haul and so when we forgive we bear with people for the long haul because we know it takes time to change and that's the generosity of spirit that god wants from us as we learn to forgive others so first of all take yourself out of the critic seat sitting in judgment over others condemning them and then secondly jesus says if we're going to be merciful not only do we stop this this this this way of living with a critical spirit towards others and often churches are very harsh places aren't they where people are always criticizing each other for not quite measuring up you know some people have a picture of what a good christian is and they tick every box you know you must go to every meeting every prayer meeting give a tithe you know wear these clothes you know we have a tick list of what we think a good christian is and then we rank people accordingly and people have always been judged and criticized and it's not church as jesus saw it's not a place of mercy it's not a place where the weak are dishonored or it is a place where the weak are dishonored it's not a place where the weak are honored and cared for and lifted up so how do we get to that kind of culture of mercy and jesus says well let's look at the heart so he goes after another really bonkers picture here of a man out picking grapes from briars so he's got a thorn bush and he's trying to find grapes in it and it's not going to work briars don't produce grapes thorn bushes don't produce figs bad hearts don't produce good fruit the fruit we produce the kind of words that come out of our mouth the kind of attitudes we take to others that reveals so much about us it reveals who we are in the depths of our heart

that's what jesus says isn't it the good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart the evil man brings evil out of the evil stored up in his heart if there's harsh hard critical judgmental things coming out your mouth it's because that's what's in your heart if your words are angry and bitter it's because your heart is angry and bitter if your words are gentle and kind and loving and merciful it's because your heart is gentle kind loving and merciful for out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks often we want to reduce christianity to this very shallow superficial thing about behavior you know that it's an outward performance of certain righteous acts and we have to be seen to do the right thing and we're afraid that anybody will see anything different about us and jesus really dislikes that superficiality because it's hypocrisy the world hates hypocritical christians and hypocritical churches and so does jesus he doesn't want us to be hypocrites he wants us to be true to be honest about our lives our failings our shortcomings and we need to be able to be honest about them knowing that when we are honest that we're not going to be condemned and slammed by other people in the church but that they will respond mercifully so what's coming out of our mouths harsh words of condemnation or loving words of kindness if your mouth condemns people if you're quick to slag others off to criticize to belittle to undermine maybe it's your spouse you're always having a digger maybe it's another member of the church maybe it's the person who lives next door maybe it's a parent or a kid maybe it's a colleague but if what comes out of your mouth is unkind cruel bitter then that's coming out of your heart your heart has been revealed as a place that judges and condemns that struggles to forgive that's a desert when it comes to generosity your heart has been revealed as a dry thorny prickly place your heart is death valley nothing good grows

there nothing but snakes and scorpions and venom and biting now we can all be as lovely as we want to be when we want to be can't we even I can turn on the charm we can all be pleasant and gentle when life is good but when the heat comes when the hard thing comes when suffering comes when loneliness comes when homeschooling comes when work pressure comes when redundancy comes when depression comes when relationship breakdown comes when suffering comes often it's thorns and misery that grows up within us when the heat comes when the hard things comes our hearts are revealed as bad and loveless and selfish places

Jeremiah 17 talks about this in this way it says cursed is the one who trusts in man who draws strength from mere flesh whose heart turns away from the Lord that person will be like a bush in the wasteland they will not see prosperity when it comes they will dwell in the parched places of the desert in a salt land where no one lives do you see what's happening there there's a picture of this man in the wilderness in the wasteland and in these challenging harsh circumstances Jeremiah says he's cursed because he depends on his own strength cursed is the one who trusts in man who draws strength from mere flesh because his heart he turns to his own resources his own strength his own coping mechanisms his own wisdom instead of turning to the Lord his heart turns away from the Lord and often that's true of us when hard things come we turn back to sin instead of turning towards God so when hard things come what's coming out of your heart when often when hard things come we don't even want to know what's in our hearts do we because instead of looking inside we look away we look at other people and we say this is your fault you've made me like this you've done this to me you annoyed me you upset me you let me down we look at our circumstances we look at our employer and we think it's their fault and Jesus is saying stop it it's not what goes into a man that's the problem it's what comes out of a man it's not what's out there you need to really worry about it's what's in here take a deep dive into your own heart to see what's coming out love, compassion, forgiveness honesty, hope change or is your heart simply a place of condemnation?

so third thing I want to say is that this heart needs to be rooted in God's word so again there's this great and very vivid picture that Jesus tells of a man who is building a house digs deep lays a foundation on the rock and then floods come that house is well built it stands strong under the storms and the pressures of life when the heat comes it's okay but then there's somebody else who hears what Jesus is saying but doesn't live it out doesn't live this life of mercy they're like a person whose house is built without a foundation the storms come and it collapses what kind of community are we building?

one rooted in lives that are rooted in the word of God what kind of life am I living? is it a life rooted deeply in the word of God?

[24 : 27] we've all seen flash floods and TV sweeping away houses and villages devastating power and that's a great picture of what can happen to us in life isn't it?

often swept away as we are by catastrophe by suffering by illness by hurt for our hearts to stay true to God for our hearts not to become bitter for our hearts remain full of love and compassion when we suffer we need deep foundations in the good news of the gospel we need habits of life I spoke about habits of rest this morning but we also need habits of life that take us deeply into God's word because God's word is a story of love and grace that renews us that restores us that rescues us that reassures us that comforts that provides hope even in the hardest places because it's the story of love that brings Jesus near and it's the presence of Jesus that is our peace in the storm and so when hard times come to us personally or to our church then we're not swept away we're not collapsing we're not facing ruin because we're rooted so deeply in the gospel story in the love of Jesus and in his presence in our lives and that's what we need isn't it because the Sermon on the Mount is not moralistic it's not a set of do this and all will be well with you that's not how it works is it Jesus is not saying here's how to live here's the rules if you live like this you'll get God's favour you know sometimes well sometimes it's put like this that religion works from the outside in if I do the right things if I follow the rules if I follow the way of God if I do what he asks if I do all these things on the outside then I will get grace and peace in here in the depths of my heart that's the way religion works from the outside in but the gospel says no if I have peace in my heart if I have grace in my heart if I have peace and love deep within then that will work its way out into a life that looks like the kind of life that Jesus is asking us to live of forgiveness generosity kindness and humility and so we begin with the new heart with the heart that is at peace with God a heart full of blessing and religion and religious obedience can never produce that heart that heart comes from the presence of Jesus

breaking into our lives in grace and mercy and forgiveness and it creates a new heart within us full of grace mercy and forgiveness towards others

I love watching Bob Mortimer and Paul Whitehouse go on fishing I'm not a fisherman but it's these two old codgers old comedians they love hanging out and they go fishing all the time it's in the BBC and they've both had terrible heart problems and so they always talk about heart healthy food and you know worrying about what they're taking into their heart will either bring health or harm and I do want to say you know what are we taking into our hearts is it the gospel story are we feeding deeply in God's word and God's truth in God's story of creation fall redemption and restoration does that story frame our lives and our story are we laying great biblical foundations in our family life our personal life and our church life because the storms are coming aren't they and will you praise him in the storm will you praise him when you don't understand what he's up to in your life and in the world will you praise him still when the hurt is unbearable will you praise him when another church member hurts you or lets you down or grieves you

Jeremiah 17 says blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord whose confidence is in him they will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream it does not fear when heat comes its leaves are always green it has no worries in a year of drought it never fails to bear fruit how do we bear the good fruit of the gospel in our lives in all circumstances you know love joy gentleness kindness self-control goodness truth how do all those fruits appear in our life no matter what's going on well Jeremiah draws a contrast between the one who turns away from the Lord and the one who trusts in the Lord whose confidence is in him that person he says is like a tree planted by the water so even when the heat comes its leaves are always green we plant our lives in the gospel in the good news story of salvation through Jesus

[30 : 16] Christ we hear the voice of Jesus there are so many voices that want to hold sway in our lives and in our hearts critical voices from the past the boldly held opinions of our peers but do we hear the voice of Jesus and his word the Bible is a love story it's a narrative of hope it's the redemptive work of God in history and that's the story of love that needs to grip us anew every day so that we live out of its goodness that we live out of its mercy so that we are doers of love and goodness and not just hearers so here's this picture of the ruin that can come to people and to communities to churches not rooted in the gospel with hearts changed by the gospel living out the mercy of the gospel let's pray father in heaven bless your word to us this evening help us to hear its truth its goodness and its beauty and may we be deeply changed by our own experience of your grace today amen toast and may we