

Saturday Communion Service

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Date: 01 November 2014

Preacher: Duncan Peters

[0 : 00] I'd like this evening to turn back to the passage that we read from Luke chapter 6.

And I want to look particularly at the section from verse 36, and I'm kind of, I suppose I would put the sort of divisions that the NIV has put in a slightly different place.

Verse 36 down to verse 42. But first, just a few comments on the Sermon on the Plain as a whole. This is a well-known sermon that Jesus preached, and the theme of this sermon, if we could sort of sum it up, is that it's how to live as the community of God's people.

And the community of God's people are Jesus' disciples. And there are parallels with really the establishment of God's people in the Old Testament.

[1 : 09] In the Old Testament, the people of God were the Israelites. And the founding of Israel was really when God brought them out of Egypt, where there were slaves under Pharaoh, brought them out under the leadership of Moses to Mount Sinai.

And then Moses went up on Mount Sinai, met with God there, and came down, received the law from God, came down, and gave the law to the Israelites.

And we find parallels with that here, because Jesus goes up a mountain to pray, and then he comes down the mountain, and he gives this teaching, law, if you like. Also, Moses came down the mountain to the Israelites.

The Israelites were made up of 12 tribes, descended from the 12 sons of Jacob. And Jesus chooses, he comes down the mountain and chooses 12 of his disciples, whom he designates apostles.

And that was very deliberate on Jesus' part. It's like, if you imagine a, say a, you know, a field, a football field, or just a field, or a school playground, perhaps, where you've got loads of children, they're kicking around footballs, and then a guy in a tracksuit comes out, and he picks 11 of them.

[2 : 30] Everybody knows what he's doing, because of the context. Everybody knows that he's picking a football team. Well, in this context, Jesus choosing 12 was equally significant.

People would know what he was about, because at that time there were different sort of Jewish groupings, with different ways, different claims of how to be the true Israel. And Jesus, in choosing 12 apostles, is really kind of reconstituting the people of God as his followers, and the apostles as the leaders of his followers.

So in the Old Covenant era, the Old Testament era, Israel was the people of God. But Jesus here is forming a new Israel, or renewing Israel, as those who are made up of his disciples.

The new community of God's people, who would ultimately be made up of not just Jews, but of people from every nation who believe in Jesus.

But Jesus comes down from the mountain, and he gives this teaching, this sermon, which is law, principles, how to live. Now, we have to understand that, because Jesus is not saying all this stuff, showing people how to be saved.

[3 : 52] Many people think that the purpose of God's law is that if you keep these rules, then God will accept you, and you'll be saved. And it's actually completely the opposite way around from that.

That was true in the Old Testament, too, at the time of the Exodus. God first saved the Israelites from the land of slavery in Egypt, and brought them out, brought them out to Sinai, and then he gave them the law, the principles by which they were to live.

So the purpose of God's law is to show how the saved community is to live, how they should live. And Jesus is speaking to those who are already his disciples.

We see that in verse 20. He's looking at his disciples. He's speaking to his disciples. They're already his disciples. They're already those who have been saved, who have come to know Jesus, and now he's telling them how to live as the community of God's people.

So that's just to give sort of a general introduction to the sermon on the plain. So now I want to come to this section in the middle, verses 36 to 42. I want to just begin by quoting a couple of proverbs, some of which you may know.

[5 : 11] First of all, people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. You've probably heard that before. Another one perhaps not quite as well known is, he who points the finger points three back at himself.

You can see that. So if you're pointing the finger in accusation, you're pointing to someone or against someone, you're pointing three fingers back at yourself. And I came across this Arabic proverb that the camel never sees its own hump, only that of another camel.

And all of these are sort of saying a similar thing to what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is saying, in verse 37, do not judge, and you will not be judged.

Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Now, we have to be clear what he's not saying here. Jesus is not saying never make critical judgments about people using your discernment and wisdom.

We know that because later on, he tells us to discern and to recognize people by their actions in verse 43 and following. He's talking about recognizing people by the fruit that they produce in their lives.

[6 : 22] So he's not talking about, he's not saying, you know, just don't bother being discerning, don't bother using your wisdom in assessing people. Nor is he saying, making any comment about law courts.

Law courts are something that every society needs, and the Bible fully recognizes that throughout the whole of the Bible. What Jesus is saying here is he's really coming to the problem that we as human beings, we like to judge and to condemn other people.

And so often, when we judge and condemn other people, it makes us feel better about ourselves.

We lift ourselves up by putting others down so that we look good in comparison to them.

Sometimes we may even take delight in finding fault in others because, well, we enjoy doing that and also because it makes us look good. But so often, we do the same things that we accuse other people of.

But of course, we make excuses for ourselves. You know, maybe you do something wrong. Maybe it's you just, you know, you lose your temper or something. And you make excuses for yourself.

[7 : 37] I'm not, I'm talking about myself as much as anybody else. You know, we say, well, I was under a lot of pressure. I was having a really hard time. I was really tired. Things were going really badly for me.

That's why I lost it. But when it comes to someone else losing their temper, we don't make the same allowances for them. And also, when we judge other people, when we condemn other people, we do so without knowing all of their circumstances.

Maybe their upbringing. The experiences that they've had in life. We may know some of those things, but we're never in a position to know all the circumstances in another person's life.

Let me give you an example. I could go out onto the streets of Aberdeen tonight and see a drunk guy. And he's filthy and he's also abusive.

He's just, he's drunk and he's shouting abuse at people. And it would be easy for me just to despise that person. Think, well, he's really made a mess of his life. No doubt he's made a mess of other people's lives.

[8 : 45] His family and others. But I don't know all of that guy's circumstances. Maybe as a child he was constantly abused or neglected.

Maybe he suffered severe rejection and exclusion as a teenager. Maybe his wife cheated on him.

Maybe he's lost his job, lost a child, suffered terrible ill health or had a terrible accident.

Now, it's not that these things excuse that behavior. But I don't know all of that. And I haven't suffered all of that.

If I had suffered all of that, how would I cope with life? Possibly no better than he is coping. A little later on in Luke's gospel, Jesus says, From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.

And from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. So instead of judging, say, that drunk person, I should remember the blessings that I have received from God.

[9 : 53] That I have been given much in terms of upbringing, health, and so many other things. But the question for me, the challenge for me is, what am I doing with what I've been given?

I have been entrusted with much, but what am I doing with it? And if we concentrate on that, that will make us far more reticent to judge other people. But we can also apply it, sort of applying it individually there, but we can also apply it collectively to groups of people, perhaps to people from other cultures and backgrounds.

Because it's so easy to judge other cultures, people from other cultures and backgrounds, perhaps other ethnic groups from ourselves, when they behave in different ways from the way we behave. And when they seem to have different values from the things that we value. And it's very easy to criticize their behavior, when we don't really understand their background, their culture, the situation they're coming from.

Just to give a trivial example of that, I remember this is not where we live now, it was in a house where we used to live. And we were woken at, I don't know, 2 a.m., sort of early hours of the morning, by the sound of drilling and hammering coming from next door.

[11 : 13] And the guy next door would come back, he worked in a carry-out, and he'd come back late, and then he was doing some renovations on his house. So he would be banging with his hammer and drilling in, well, the middle of the night.

And of course we couldn't sleep, it woke us up. So I went around and said, you know, we can't sleep with all this noise going on, could you please stop doing that? And he was very apologetic and said, oh yeah, of course, and he stopped.

Now, in our culture, of course, in British culture, it's not really acceptable to bang and drill and do that kind of thing in the middle of the night, because we value peace and quiet in the middle of the night.

But this guy had come from a country where there's just no concept of noise pollution. There's just noise, you know, 24 hours a day, horns beeping and just, you know, noise all the time. So he thought nothing of drilling and hammering in the middle of the night.

It's a trivial example, but it's so easy to become annoyed, to judge, when we don't know the background of another community, another culture. Well, Jesus says, do not judge and you will not be judged.

[12 : 25] Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. And then for with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And what he's saying there is that when God judges you, he will use your standard of how you have judged others.

Now, Jesus is here speaking to disciples, so the judgment he's speaking about is not the judgment about our final destiny, whether that is eternal life or eternal destruction. If we are his disciples, then we are promised eternal life with him forever.

But believers will be judged. There is another judgment, a judgment of believers, and believers are judged by their actions and their attitudes. And our situation in the kingdom of God will be affected by that judgment.

And we need to remember this. And if we remember this, then it will deter us from judging others harshly, from fault finding, for looking for the evil in the other. Jesus goes on, he says, So instead of judging on condemning others for their sins, instead of that, forgive.

And give liberally, whether it's giving physical goods, or giving credits and appreciation for people, giving encouragement, giving service.

[14 : 03] Give liberally. And all of this is really the outworking of what Jesus says in verse 31, that do to others as you would have them do to you.

Treat others how you want to be treated. Judge others how you would like to be judged. Forgive other people how you would like to be forgiven.

But then, in verse 39 and following, Jesus goes on to tell a parable. He says, Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?

And he's saying to his disciples, Be careful what leader you choose, what teacher you choose. And he's probably aiming this at some of the Jewish leaders, teachers, maybe the Pharisees and other groups who were around at the time.

Because they were so often judgmental and unforgiving. And Jesus warns that in verse 40, A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

[15 : 10] In that society, in those days, there were no libraries or no internet for students to do their own research. The student was completely reliant on his teacher.

And Jesus is warning, If you take a Pharisee as your teacher, you'll end up no better than them. And so often their attitudes were judgmental and unforgiving. And then in verse 41, He says, 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, Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite. First take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

So this parable of the speck and the plank, Jesus is saying a blind guide is bad enough.

A blind eye doctor is just a disaster. Someone needs to be able to see to treat your eyes. Now, the language he's using here is kind of comical.

[16 : 25] It's sort of cartoon language. But Jesus is making a serious point. Because so easily we see the small faults of others while we miss the massive plank-sized faults that we have.

And so Jesus is saying, When you see a fault in someone else, and of course we all do that. We do it every day. We see the faults of others very easily. He's saying, When you do that, first of all, examine yourself.

And get rid, first of all, of your own faults, which may be much bigger. And it may be that the plank in your eye is the proud, critical, fault-finding attitude, the lack of love for others, the aggressiveness, the prejudice, the harshness, that you have in fault-finding in others.

And that's maybe much worse than the fault that you're seeing in someone else's eye. But then he's saying, When you've removed the plank from your own eye, don't just ignore the speck in your brother's eye.

No, seek in love for him to remove that too. Now, the eye is something very sensitive. To remove something from someone's eye, you have to be very careful.

[17 : 47] You have to be very gentle and sensitive. Otherwise, you'll end up hurting the eye even more. And it's the same with dealing with people's faults. If, having removed the log from our own eye, we then seek to remove the speck, from another's eye, we need great care, great sensitivity, great humility, great gentleness in doing that.

And, our motive must be to restore their sight. So, easily we can, you know, and some of us, we're all different, but some of us may like, you know, pointing out the faults of others.

And, we do it because it gives us satisfaction. And that's completely wrong. Our motive must be to restore that person's sight. In other words, our motive must be love for the other person.

But finally, just, there are three, sort of foundational truths that underlie what Jesus is teaching here, about not judging, and so on.

The first of these foundational truths is really about human nature. And, Jesus is saying this about not judging, not because he has an optimistic view of human nature, of how good and nice everybody really is underneath.

[19 : 07] That's not what it's about at all. What underlies this is, really, is that Jesus has a realistic view, not of how good we are, but of how bad we are as human beings.

How bad you are, how bad I am. So, when you see others doing really awful things, you don't look down on them, but you think, well, I'm capable of that too.

Given the wrong circumstances, I could be in that person's shoes. If I don't do that, the only reason is because of the grace of God, restraining me, building into my life, restraining factors.

And I cannot, I'm not in a position to think of myself as better than that other person who's doing whatever it is that's awful. Or, maybe I am doing the same things that I accuse others of, but I'm simply blind to it.

So, Jesus' words here are based on a realistic view of human nature. And of the evil inclinations that we all have as human beings.

[20 : 13] The second sort of foundational truth underlying this teaching is that God is the only rightful judge. God is the one who will judge all people.

And he is the only one in a position to judge all people. Because God knows all the facts. All the facts about every individual person. All the facts of their life, their circumstances.

All the pressures that they are under. All the mitigating circumstances. Everything. God knows it. And so, he's in a position to judge absolutely fairly.

And that's so unlike us, because we have limited knowledge. We can observe a situation, observe a person, and the things that they're doing. But we only know so much.

We only know a limited amount. We don't know their motives. We don't know the factors in their life that has led up to that point. And not only is our knowledge limited, we're also prejudiced, which God is not.

[21 : 17] So, don't judge another person. Because God is their judge. And God is our judge, too. So, treat that person with the mercy that you would like to receive yourself.

Then the third foundational truth is the mercy of God. Verse 36 says, Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.

God, our Father, is a merciful God. And I should show, if I'm a disciple of Jesus, I have received mercy.

And I should show others mercy. I need mercy myself. I have received mercy myself. So, I should show that mercy to others.

And I should forgive because I need forgiveness. And because I have been forgiven. And God's mercy towards me was costly, enormously costly.

[22 : 25] It cost God the most precious thing that he had, his own beloved son. And of course, we're going to remember that tomorrow morning at the communion.

We're going to commemorate, we're going to remember Jesus giving his life, his body being broken, his blood being shed for us. And that was what it cost for our forgiveness.

Our forgiveness cost God. An unimaginable cost. Now, being merciful and forgiving towards others for us is hard and it is costly.

It is not easy often to be merciful. It's not easy to forgive people when they've done something against us. It's often really hard to forgive. But in the light of the much greater cost that our forgiveness cost God, how can I not forgive that person?

How can I not be merciful towards them? Jesus says, be merciful just as your Father in heaven is merciful. Amen.

[23 : 36] May God bless his word to us. Amen.