

Seeing Clearly

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[0:00] Everyone, it's lovely to be together this morning. My name is Graham and I'm the pastor here of the church. And then we're going to pray and we'll get into it together.

So this is me reading from the NIV. The NIV is also on the screen behind me. This is Jesus speaking. Do not judge or you too will be judged.

For in the same way as 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's 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.

Do not give to the dogs what is sacred. Do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet and turn and tear you to pieces.

[1:29] Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds.

And to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. For this sums up the law and the prophets.

And God will bless the reading of his word to us this morning. Father, we just pray as we think about this passage today, realizing, Lord, how difficult a subject this is in so many ways.

[2:28] Father, we pray that what we know not, you would teach us. What we have not, you would give us. And particularly what we are not, you would make us. And we can pray that boldly and expectantly because we pray it in the wonderful name of your son, Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Well, folks, keep that passage open in front of you. Complete the phrase, popularized by Elton John. I'm going to go with 1986, but I can't remember off the top of my head.

What seems to be the hardest word? Question. Have you ever wondered why that's true?

See, while you're thinking on it, here's what I reckon on the flip side is the easiest word. Particularly when it comes to critiquing the motives and the failings of others.

If sorry seems to be the hardest word, I tell you what, I think guilty seems to be the easiest word.

Same question. Have you ever wondered why that's true?

[3:35] And at this point, let me be the first to put my hand up and say, Hi, my name is Graham and I've got a judging problem. I'm my own best self-defense lawyer.

I love to play judge and jury. I cut myself meters worth of slack, but I offer a shoelace size worth of it to others.

And I desperately need Jesus to change my heart. And if you're like me, you're thinking the exact same thing. Do you know the good news? Is that that's the precise thing that Jesus speaks into today because he's desperate to heal us of it.

Now, let me give you two bits of context that will color in the background to these verses. They're really important. Here's number one. Remember the disciples are swimming in the cultural waters dominated by the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day.

Do you know what their favorite hymn is? The chorus goes like this. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, earned by a star like me. They get grace in the head, but they think that God shows them that grace because of their religious devotion to his law.

[4:56] And that's why they, maybe we've tracked with this over the number of weeks in the Sermon on the Mount. That is why they are intent on lowering the bar when it comes to the law.

Therefore, making it easier for people to try and obey it or for them to feel like they're obeying it. Because then they can feel really good about themselves because their good deeds have got themselves into God's good books.

But the gospel doesn't work like that. And Jesus unmasks them and says, they are proud lovers of self. They are like Snow White's apple.

They look really juicy and life-giving on the outside, but you take one bite of it and it's full of poison on the inside. And because they get grace in the head, but it hasn't penetrated their hearts, do you know what's their speciality?

Judging others. Bit of context number two. In stark contrast to the inner life of the Pharisees, Jesus is speaking to his disciples about how through his death and resurrection, how united to him, they can know God as their father.

[6:10] And that, dear friends, is the most wonderful privilege that any human being could know. As the late English theologian D.I. Packer put it, if you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his father.

And Jesus has been spotlighting, in light of that privilege, the things that might trip up disciples in terms of living out that truth.

And we thought about a few of these things over the last few weeks. We thought about money, if you remember that. We thought about worry last week. And this morning, we are thinking about judging.

So Jesus is particularly talking in the context here about relationships between people in the church. And he's going to land it, if you've got it there, at verse 12.

Have a look at it there if you've got it. Do you see verse 12? And do you see the first word of verse 12? It's the word so, which tells us that the purpose of everything that Jesus has just said in the previous 11 verses is designed to get us there.

[7:34] So if you like, that's where the heat of this sermon is. That bit, that's where we're aiming today. And with that verse in mind, can I tell you what's been in my head all week what I've been thinking about?

Here's the question. How would I like to be treated by others? Particularly when it comes to my failings.

What's on your bingo card? Can I give you mine? Here it is. I'd like people to be patient with me when I make mistakes. I'd like people to be quick to forgive me when I get it wrong.

I'd like people to be quick to reach out and say, I was slightly offended by that comment you made. I would love to forgive you. Do you see it?

I'd love people to say that. I'd love people to give me the benefit of the doubt again when I get it wrong. And on and on and on and on, this list could go about how I would love others to treat me when it comes to my failings.

[8:35] It's quite the wish list. Now I'm going to fly a kite here and say that your list is probably quite similar to mine. And here's a thought for you at the start.

Would you not love to be part of a church community like that? Which means we desperately need to pay attention to how Jesus gets to that soul.

Yeah? And so we're going to take in what Jesus is saying here just under two headings. If you're a note taker, these are the two headings. If you're not, just get into the habit of that. Just try and break it up like an orange.

Just don't bite it all at once. Just try and break it up. Here's number one. We've taken in verses one to six. Jesus is saying, you need to work hard to see clearly. And I think verse one is a prime contender for being the most misquoted verse in all of the Bible.

You see it? Because we'll come on to see that Jesus is all for judging rightly. What he's dead against is judgmentalism.

[9:44] And to make his point, he uses a bit of observational comedy. Friends, if you're here today and you think Jesus wasn't funny, let this prove you wrong.

And he's taking it straight from a setting that Jesus would be very familiar with, the carpenter's workshop. So Bogdan, are you here? Bogdan, I saw you itching at your eye earlier and I really don't

want you to get conjunctivitis.

So can I just come here and I'm just going to take it out of your eye. Okay? So Bogdan, this is only going to work, bro, if you stay still. Okay? Bogdan, you're making this a lot harder than it needs to be.

Bogdan, I don't think you're getting this. You can sit down. Okay. So, here's the question. Do you see how Jesus is using humor to make a serious point?

And what do they say humor does to people in terms of receiving really hard things to hear? It lowers the defenses. Yeah? So, in this story, Jesus probably doesn't even need to say it as people laugh at what he's saying.

[10 : 54] What does everybody hearing this know needs to happen first? The man needs to take the log out of his own eye. Yeah? That's exactly what he's saying here.

I'd imagine this is a bit like when you're on a plane and they tell you to fit your own oxygen mask first before trying to help others. It's got that, those kind of vibes to it.

So, you see what Jesus is saying, right? If the Chuckle Brothers did a sketch like that, we'd have been hysterics, wouldn't we?

He's using humor to make a serious point. And so, here is the serious point. First diagnostic question of this passage. Friends, are we willing to see our heart issues?

And it's worth reflecting on that phrase that Jesus uses there. Do you see it? Do not notice. Again, look at it in the text. Or pay no attention to.

[11 : 53] Do you see that in verse 3? Now, it could be the things in our lives we are willfully refusing to face them. And Jesus is saying that's a problem.

I read one commentator this week and he put it like this. I thought it was really interesting. It's so often the case that what we condemn in others are the very weaknesses we know exist in us. And that we're scared to face up to in ourselves. And that's kind of true, isn't it? How often the failings that I dislike in other people and are so quick to pick up on are the exact things that are issues for me.

Some questions for you, friends. When was the last time that you and I held our hands up and said, I think I got it wrong? When was the last time we owned a mistake?

When was the last time we said, Fair Cop Gov? When was the last time we said, Sorry? See if the honest answer to those questions is, I can't remember.

[13 : 06] Then can I lovingly suggest that we shouldn't take that to mean that in life we're playing a blinder. It is much more likely to be the case that that is an indicator of a proud heart.

Where would you love to change? We always need to remember that the best looking Christian is one growing by the Spirit into the likeness of Jesus.

And so where would you love to change? But something else do not notice could mean, if you think about it, is that we just don't see our problems.

It's one of the first things they teach you when you're learning to drive, isn't it? How to use your car mirrors properly and very quickly, just before mirror signal maneuver, what do they say you've got to be aware of?

Your blind spots. We've all got them. Problem is, by very definition, we just don't see them. And that's why we need people around us who are lovingly invested in us enough, who can gently and lovingly point them out to us in love.

[14 : 24] But back to the comedy sketch, let's assume that the log is out. What does Jesus say is now able to happen for that person? Have a look. What are they now able to do?

Take the speck out of their brother's eye. And don't miss how radical a thing that is. Particularly in our world where we are bombarded with that slogan, each to their own.

And that is where it stops. I mean, who are you to judge others? Do you not remember Thumper Rabbit from Bambi? If you can't say nothing nice, don't say nothing at all. But according to Jesus, your brother has still got a speck in his eye.

And if you love him, you'll speak into the speck. Which takes us to the second diagnostic question that this passage asks us.

Friends, are we willing to say the hard things? Our job is not to be like girls in a hen do who will only say nice things to the bride-to-be, or to be like the guys down the pub with their mates who put the world to rights, but talking about the serious things of life is completely out of bounds.

[15:38] Hear me when I say, friends, that echo chambers might be comfortable and affirming, but they are terrible places for the development of our character. And that's why the local church, this network of people, is the God-given arena for us to grow in godliness.

That's why if you're here today, maybe you're a student new to the city, you've literally just arrived, maybe you're starting a job here, can I plead with you to prioritize finding a local church?

Do we have people in our lives who we have given express permission to to tell us the things that we might not want to hear, but that we need to hear? And do you notice what has happened by the time we get to the end of this comedy sketch?

Blink and you might miss this. Look what's happened. Do you notice that both people are now seeing clearly? What a win for the health of the church.

Now listen, really quickly as we move on, this idea of seeing clearly carries on to what Jesus talks about when he says, throwing pearls before swine. Don't have an awful lot of time to get this, but I just wanted us to touch on it.

[17:00] I take it Jesus is talking about if the gospel is the pearl by the swine he's got in mind, I take it those who continue to reject the gospel. He's got in mind those people who we speak to who aren't interested in seeing clearly.

And that can be hugely discouraging just to own that. Remember living in halls at uni, right next door to a girl called Alice. Alice and I got on great guns, but she made it very clear from the start, abundantly clear, that she just wasn't interested in any of my God stuff.

And that's fine. Just kept trying to take opportunities, kept trying to speak to her. But then the Lord opened my eyes to say, there's actually another 600 people in this hall so you need to keep speaking to.

And so I take it, friends, that it's true that there is a time when we need to leave people with the Lord and perhaps move on and to start speaking to other people in our lives who don't know Jesus.

We want to tease that out a bit more. Just grab somebody who you've come with this morning or one of the elders. We'd love to pray into that a bit more with you, but we need to move on. Flowing on from seeing clearly.

[18:15] Second thing that Jesus says is, verse 7 to 12. Look up and ask trustingly. So when Jesus says, ask, seek, knock, I think this is Jesus just saying the same thing three times in complimentary ways.

Why? Because he knows that we so quickly forget. What's the key to education? Repetition.

Do you see how he says it? Not once, not twice, three times. Because he knows that we're slow to believe this. And what this says is ultimately another opportunity to gaze at the heart of our Father.

And to get us thinking along those lines, Jesus says, do you see, I want you to think about what kind of parent you are or perhaps the kind of parent that you had.

And again, this is where I need to hold my hands up and say to you that nothing has revealed my heart issues quite like being a parent. And there have been moments when in the cool of the day when I've honestly reflected on my actions and I've thought to myself, perhaps impatience is a bigger deal in my life than I think it is.

[19:27] Perhaps I'm not over anger. I'm actually, I still am deep down an angry man. I go good cop when I should have gone bad cop. I often go bad cop when I should have gone good cop.

But here's the thing. See, despite all the messed up work in progress nature of my heart, I have never, ever wanted anything than to give my children what is good for them.

And that's Jesus' point is he uses another bit of first century humor. You know, if I could translate what Jesus is saying at verses nine and 10, have a look at it there into modern terms.

This is the equivalent of wrapping a, he's saying you would never do this. You would never wrap a Christmas present, put it under the tree and on Christmas morning, invite your child to open it and say, what's that little rosy?

Does it look like a squishmallow? What is it? No, it's a live hand grenade. Ha ha ha ha. That's what he's saying, isn't it? And here's Jesus' point.

[20:26] You would never dream of doing that and you are, do you see the word he uses? You are evil. You would never dream of doing that and yet you are evil. How much more then?

And we've seen that logic that Jesus has been using over the last number of weeks. How much more then will your perfect heavenly father give you exactly what you need?

And again, two quick diagnostic questions. Here's the first one. Friends, will we trust his definition of good? Back to the parent-child thing again.

You know, there are times when our kids ask for things and it's just a no. Other times, it's a not now. Right?

Maybe a mobile phone, one day, not when you're 10. Right? Not now. Sometimes, it's a yes. But the thing is, whichever option you choose, the thing is, you're trying to communicate that the answer that we're given is rooted in the fact that we love you.

[21 : 31] How much more then does our heavenly father who is for us and has his full affection on us because our lives are united to Christ, how much more is he the perfect parent with no speck in his eye?

How much more will he give us what is good? And friends, what if that definition of good included that which is tough?

How many of us in this room have stories that God took us through trials, trials that we would never have chosen, but that we came through them knowing our heavenly father so much better than we ever did before.

There'll be a lot of stories in this room like that. But maybe just go and pastoral for a moment. I know so many of you are in this room just now and perhaps you're in the place or you've been in the place and you hear me say that, you read this text and you think, not convinced.

Because I've been praying for something for years and it just feels like I'm getting voicemail. And dear friends, the only thing I can say in love and desiring to walk with you through life and that's what church community is all about.

[22 : 50] Just encourage you to see that Jesus knows what that is like. He knows what it is for him to pray to his father and for his father to stay silent.

Because fast forward to the end of Matthew's gospel and I have no idea when we'll get there but we will. On the cusp of the cross in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus would cry out and remember the thought before him of the cross was utterly terrifying.

That is why he sweats, he sweats drops of blood and he prays, Lord, would this cup pass from me and yet silence. But fully submissive to the will of his father, he goes there.

And so the plea, pastorally, is all of us to consider Jesus. And because he went there, because he did that in our Genesis 3 east of Eden world where evil things happen and we can call them evil and life is full of loose ends and hurts and heartaches, this word good means that we can play the long game knowing the father's heart.

we can look forward to heaven and to him and not that he's at the finish line just waiting for us to come.

[24 : 20] He's with us through every single heartache and pain and tear that we shed. And so second question and we land with this, will we embrace his example of good?

And perhaps if that last application point was wide, I think this application point is narrow and it's probably where the grain of the text is leading us because I think in the context of those verses, Jesus is still talking about relationships with other people in the church.

So he's not changed the subject. This can so often read like an AOCB. We were talking about that in sermon prep this week, an AOCB to the Sermon on the Mount where he's just chucking in things randomly. I think there's a lot more purpose to that than that.

He's not changed the subject. And I think this is where we need to close it today as we think about our life together. You know, I was up in, we were up in Aberdeen for John and Ali's wedding on Thursday.

And it's actually the first time that I've been back in Aberdeen since I graduated from there in 2008. Shocking. But we're driving the streets and I'm giving Alex the tour.

[25 : 31] This big part of my life that she never knew and I'm giving him the tour. That's where our halls of residence were. That's where the lecture halls were. And that was my first flat when I moved out of university.

And I scored a great goal on that football pitch as if she was caring. But all these memories come flooding back to me of that season of my life. But do you know what else came flooding back to me in that same moment?

It was all the mistakes I made. particularly when it comes to how I treated people. And it struck me afresh because I knew we were preaching this this morning.

Just how patient our Father is with us. And the thing is we probably have no idea. And knowing his patient, patient with me who is evil character should change how we view and relate to other people.

[26:35] Do you see it? Because see if that word good is simply about material things, if God gives me the good things, that's not going to help me love and treat others like I want to be treated, is it? And that's what convinces me that's the connection between these two things.

However, what if within that definition of good are the character traits that you and I need in order to love people in our church family the way that we'd love to be treated?

Lord, help me. Give me the good thing of being more patient with people. Lord, give me the good thing of not being defensive when I'm challenged.

Lord, give me the good thing of dropping my pride, swallowing it, and admitting when I got it wrong. Because what's going to convince me, friends, to get down off of my high horse and face up to that log in my eye?

When everything about the Pharisees wants to lurk in my heart, that I want you to think I'm better than I am. What's going to convince me to get off my high horse and deal with that speck? What's going to convince me to treat others the same way that I'd like to be treated, particularly when I feel the sharp end of the faults of others, and for that change to be more than skin deep?

[27:47] It's only knowing that my father has always and will always treat me who is evil with his good.

You see it? He is a God who is so generous and patient even to those who are evil. Do you know he's a God so good that he would give what?

His one and only son to those who didn't deserve anything but hell and judgment. And that son is the very one speaking, and that is the son who would give his life on the cross as a ransom for many.

Friends, this is the kind of father that we have. Let me pray. Lord, we just ask, Father, as we think about the challenge of this passage, your word has perhaps uncomfortably touched some nerves in our hearts, Lord, I pray that you would give us the humility to change.

Lord, we recognize our inability, Father, often to do the thing that we need to do to change, but Lord, thank you that this is not about us. You have given us your spirit. And we pray that he would be at work in our lives, pruning, chipping away revealing what is bad, and that, Lord, he would be about his work of forming us more into the likeness of Jesus.

[29:19] So, Father, thank you for your commitment to us. Thank you for your love for us. And, Father, we pray that you would just be with us now as we move into a time of communion together, as we savor, just a bit more slowly, savor the blood and the body broken for us.

So, Father, we pray all these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen.