



## Judging, Asking, & Seeking

March 20, 2022

*Ian Simkins*

If you're just joining us, we're in the midst of a pretty long series in the Sermon on the Mount. And the Sermon on the Mount is essentially this: it's Jesus' vision for the kind of life that is possible when we actually apprentice under Jesus as both Rabbi and Lord. Not just some intellectual assent, but what does it mean to order and reorient our lives around him?

In chapter five, we dealt with the Christian's character and influence and righteousness. Chapter six was a lot about motivation. And finally today, we made it to chapter seven, where Jesus is going to talk about relationships, which I know that none of us have any relational tension whatsoever, so we should all be good there. But what I'd love to do is actually read the first half of our passage, and then I'm going to pray over us, and then we'll dive in. Sound okay? All right.

Matthew 7:1, he says, "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 that 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. 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 turn and tear you to pieces."

The word of the Lord, everybody. Why don't we pray? Lord, for some of us, those are brand new words. For others of us, they are very familiar. Maybe too familiar. God, I pray that these coming minutes together, we wouldn't just simply sing some songs and hear some words. I pray, Holy Spirit, that you would do a work in us and through us that only you can do. God, shed light where maybe there's been darkness. God, would you loosen our grip on the things that we've been white-knuckling in our life? And may we leave

different as a result, God, of your presence and power in our life. We thank you, God, and we love you. And we pray all these things in the beautiful name of Jesus. And everybody said, "Amen."

I read a story in the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. And the way the story opens up is there's a subway car and it's relatively uneventful. It's pretty quiet. Some people are reading their newspaper. Some people are chatting with a coworker. Some people just seem to be lost in thought until a father and his children enter the subway car. And the whole tone shifts immediately, and the kids are really rambunctious.

They're being really loud. They're yelling and screaming, and they're throwing stuff. They're even messing with people's newspapers. And the whole tone in the subway car shifts immediately. You could just feel the collective water level of irritation rise until eventually somebody confronts the dad and says, "Hey, can you keep your kids in order, please?"

To which the father responded, "Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. You see, we just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think. And I guess they don't know how to handle it either."

Every single person you know is fighting a battle you know nothing about—every single person. Everyone's fighting a battle you know nothing about. And just because someone carries it well doesn't mean it's not heavy. This is why I think Oswald Chambers says it so brilliantly. He says, "There is always one fact more in every life of which we know nothing. Therefore, Jesus says, 'Judge not.'" Therefore, he says, Judge not.

Now, if you were to ask Christians, my guess is the vast majority of us, if we were asked what's your favorite Bible verse, most would say, something like John 3:16, right? "For God so loved the world he gave his son so we don't have to perish... eternal life..." That whole one.

My guess is, though, if you ask those maybe outside the church, this might be their favorite passage: the "judge not" passage. In fact, here are the verses that we just read,

right? Chapter seven, one through six, right? That looks familiar, if you can see that there. The problem is many of us read this passage a little bit more like this: we stop at "do not judge." And nothing else that follows is pertinent. In fact, I saw a meme just recently and said, "People are so judgmental. I can tell just by looking at them."

Does that resonate with anyone—"I can tell just by looking at them how judgmental they are"? So before we go any further, I'm going to do a little repeat-after-me, because this is for all of us. So repeat after me. "I recognize that this sermon is for me, not the person I wish was here to hear it."

Okay. All right. Are we all on the same page? This isn't the time to go, "Oh, this is this judgmental word. This is really something for somebody else." Okay, so we talked about this word "judge" here. The word "judge" is the word "krino". And it's a pretty enigmatic word. It's hard to pin down, but it essentially means to make a distinction.

Now, some words of clarification: when Jesus says, "do not judge", he is not prohibiting making moral judgments, discerning what is right and wrong. In fact, all throughout the sermon, he's giving specific commands about how we're to do that—verse six, which we'll get to in a second; later, verses 15 to 20, he talks about false prophets... We could not obey those commands from Jesus if we were not actually to be making moral judgments. Elsewhere, John 7:24: "Stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment." Ephesians 5:11: "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them."

As Christians, we are actually to discern right from wrong. What Jesus is forbidding here is a critical judgmental spirit. He's not talking about evaluating behavior, but condemning people. It's subtle, but it's massively important. I think we find a good parallel to this in Romans 14, where Paul says, "Why do you judge your brother?" Or, "Why do you look down on your brother? For we all stand before God's judgment seat."

Jesus isn't getting after making distinctions between right and wrong. He's talking about the kind of religiosity that turns our nose up at others and assumes they'll never be anything more. It's condemning those, not evaluating behavior. J.C. Rile gets at this

brilliantly. He says, "What our Lord means to condemn is a censorious and fault-finding spirit, a readiness to blame others for trifling offenses or matters of indifference, a habit of passing rash and hasty judgments, a disposition to magnify the errors and infirmities of our neighbors and make worst of them—this is what our Lord forbids."

And just to get out of the way, I have no moral authority to be preaching about this today. I do not do well in this category. It is so easy for me to be critical of things, of people, of systems, of what other people are trying or attempting or actually do. I have no moral authority to stand before you to speak these words. But I think that Jesus has a really timely word for us today.

So we know what Jesus means when he says, "Do not judge." But then he goes on to actually tell us why. This is part of what I love about the teaching of Jesus. It's brilliant the way that he does that. It's so easy for us to miss the brilliance of Jesus as a Rabbi, as a teacher. So he's going to tell us exactly why.

Reason number one: we're not the judge. We're not the judge. The first reason is a simple one. You're not the judge. I'm not the judge. Look at that verse again. "Do not judge or you too will be judged." Guess what? If we're going to be judged, what does that mean about our position in that whole scheme of things? It means that we're not the judge if we're also going to be judged. Some of us like to set ourselves up as judge, jury, and executioner. We have a harsh, critical spirit, and we're often looking for other people's faults.

And the reason that we're not the judge, I think, is a very simple one. It's simply this: we're not qualified. We think that we are, but we're not. Elsewhere, in Romans 14: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls." 1 Samuel 16 says, "You look at outward appearances"—which is understandable—"but God sees the heart." We can see actions, we cannot see the heart. That's why we're not qualified to be the judge.

Secondly, the vertical and the horizontal are connected. The vertical and the horizontal are connected. Verse 2: "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with

the measure you use, it will be measured to you." This is like the original "check thyself before you wreck thyself" passage. The "thys" were added.

If that verse shocks you a little, by the way... Candidly, it should. That should wake us up a little bit. That should rattle our cage because there is a link between vertical and horizontal judgment. Unforgiveness and a judgmental spirit not only affects our relationships with others, but it affects our intimacy with God. Jesus has already talked about this numerous times in this sermon, by the way. At the beginning in the Beatitudes, Matthew 5: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Again, in the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6: "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors." In fact, the Rabbi spoke of two measures that God uses to judge people: the measure of justice and the measure of mercy.

So let me ask, which measure do you use with others? Maybe more pointedly, which measure would you like God to use with you? Maybe a question we could all wrestle with is this: what does it mean to claim that you've been forgiven and yet refuse to extend forgiveness to others? The extent to which you are hard on others shows the extent to which you do not understand your own salvation. The extent to which we want to hold harsh criticism, hold bitterness and unforgiveness, lord that over people... The extent to which we do that is the extent to which we don't really understand what we've been forgiven of, myself included.

Greg Boyd says it well. He says, "You can't love and judge at the same time. It's impossible to ascribe unsurpassable worth to others when you're using others to ascribe worth to yourself."

Third reason: we should judge ourselves first. Judge ourselves first. He goes on in verse 3: "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"—which, we talked about, is an acting term, it's one who wears a mask—"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."

So there is still an element of removing the speck. He doesn't say, "Hey, just live and let live. Leave them alone." There still is a speck going on. He's saying you can't actually see clearly at all with that big old plank sticking out of your face. Now, he does use the word here "brother", which perhaps implies he's talking about people within the community of faith.

It blows my mind how often Christians try to hold non-Christians to the moral commitments that they've made themselves. That's not how this works. We want to hold to a different standard, the thing that we've submitted ourselves to. But they haven't. So we used the word here, "brother", and there's two little words that use this over and over again: "your own". Three times in this verse, Jesus speaks about "your own eye." We're very good at judging others. Not so good at judging ourselves.

Now, I do think it's unfortunate because... I think, sometimes when we read Scripture, don't we all have our Scripture reading voice right, where we get a little loftier, we sound a little more like a Holy person, and we tend to read Jesus that way? Is that just me? Am I the only one singing my Bible reading alone at home? Okay. I actually think this is one of the many cases where Jesus is being funny. It's unfortunate that we don't get footnotes like, "Hey, this is a real zinger by Jesus. Feel free to laugh." We're not given that in most study Bibles. But I want you to actually picture it, okay?

He says, Listen, you're bothering to pick out specks in people's eyes. Meanwhile, here's what's going on with you."

[Ian holds up a long 2x4 piece of wood to appear like a plank coming out from his eye.] I should have got a shorter plank.

Jesus says, "This is what you look like walking around like, 'Hey, man, you got some sawdust over there. I'd really like to help you out over there. Oh, man, something small going on over here. I'm the guy for the job. Let me help you out.'" Are we getting a picture of how insane this looks? Jesus is saying you're trying to pick out everyone else's flaws and errors. I mean, I don't mean to be too on the nose, but this would prevent intimacy,

wouldn't it? This would prevent getting too close to anybody. Like, "Here, let me help you out with this very detailed extraction of sawdust from your eye."

This is what he's saying. He says this is what we're like. Now, I never really thought about this until this week, but what is both a plank and sawdust made from? They're both made from the same material. Isn't that how it often goes with a judgmental spirit? I am far more harsh towards someone who is doing the thing that I struggle with most. Same material, same thing... But so often, and I would very rarely admit it, but the sin that has me most entangled tends to be the thing that I'm most eagerly pointing out in everyone else.

In fact, some commentators asserted that this plank could actually refer to a couple of different things—a main beam in a house, a large sailing mast, or even a battering ram. I think the example of a battering ram is very apt because when we approach others with a judgmental spirit, isn't that often how we come across? Isn't that often how people receive us?

And we'll often come up with reasons why we're doing this, why we're living this way. But maybe we need to ask this question: am I equally concerned about all sin against God, including my own? If we are truly concerned about God and his glory, then we will be more concerned about our own sins than anyone else's. If that's really the case, two things made from the same material.

Sort of like, have you ever gotten together with a group of people and it started to turn towards gossip? And I don't want to gossip about gossip right now, but you've ever heard someone say like, "Oh, I can't stand so-and-so. They're always late." And you're thinking to yourself like, "Bro, you're always late. You were late to this gossip circle. What are you talking about?"

The judgment that we often hold over other people's head is often the thing that we ourselves struggle with. Jesus is talking about a kind of judging that self-justifies, that self-elevates. "I am better than you because..." Fill in your own blank. He's coming against a form of legalism that finds fault in everyone else but themselves. And we've mentioned

this before, but I think it's worth repeating: when we come to Scripture, when we come to the word of God, this is first a mirror, not binoculars.

Our posture shouldn't be, "Lord, give me some ammo to take someone on Twitter down today." It should be, "Lord, reflect back to me where I'm missing the mark, where I'm tangled in some lie, where I've been believing something that's not from you or I've been perpetually in a habit or behavior that is toxic to me and other people."

It is first a mirror. And yet we so often treat it like binoculars, like, "I can't wait to tell so and so about what I read today in my quiet time." That's what Jesus is going after here. He's saying ultimately we can't help others with their sins until we first addressed our own. How can you possibly help them with the speck in their eye when you have a log sticking out of yours?

Now, this doesn't mean that you need to be perfect before you can help anyone out, right? Because if that were the case, no one would ever help anyone, ever. We know that. But it does mean that you need to confront and confess your own sin to God before you're in a position to help anyone else.

I have toddlers at home, and I didn't realize this, but when you have toddlers at home, it means everything is covered in food all the time—like food I don't even recognize buying. Sometimes it's food, sometimes it's slime, sometimes it's gunk, sometimes it's Playdoh. That was an unappetizing riff. My apologies. You know what I mean? It's just sort of everywhere. And sometimes, I'll foolishly lay my glasses down to do something, and then I'll pick them back up and there's like a gummy bear stuck to it. You know, it really obscures things. It really prevents me from actually seeing clearly.

It's not just obstructing—it's obscuring. And I say this with all the love in the world: some of us are being more formed by Fox News or CNN than God's Word, and it is obscuring the way that we see people. It's affecting the way that we live out in the world, in our neighborhoods, in our communities.



We need to be asking, what is responsible? What is most responsible for my formation? If the first thing we reach for in the morning is our phone, that's what's forming us. That's what we are a disciple of. We maybe don't say it that way because that would be creepy, but we do need to ask the question, what is the most responsible for my formation? Formation, by the way, discipleship is not a Christian thing. It's a human thing. We're all disciples of someone or something. The question is, do you actually know what it is? Do you know what's responsible for your formation?

So how do we actually know if we're judging in a fair way or an unfair way? Ask this question: does your judging bring restoration or condemnation? Does your judging bring restoration or condemnation?

One of the things I've tried to say over the years is that difficult words are necessary, but when you're actually speaking them, do you come with a scalpel or a hatchet? They both cut, by the way. Scalpels and hatchets, they both cut, but only one of them cuts to heal. The point of a scalpel is eventually to lead to healing, right? You need to cut something out that's actually not good. You don't want that in there. The purpose of a hatchet is not for a lot of healing. When you are bringing difficult words, confronting someone, are you coming with a scalpel or hatchet?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it well. He says, "Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating." I love the way that Paul puts it to the Church of Galatia. He says, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person." What's the word? "But watch yourselves or you may also be tempted." You should restore them, but we should do it gently. I don't know where along the way we lost the plot and forgot that it says "God, it is your loving kindness that leads us to repentance." Somewhere along the way we thought, man, it's our screaming match that will lead them to repentance. It's their "hot take", dunking on them in front of everybody on Facebook that will lead them to repentance.

People are not shamed into transformation, but they absolutely can be loved into it. And yet so often we're coming with hatchets swinging, and we're like, "Why does anyone want

to come to my church?" I have a couple of ideas. What does it look like to restore a brother or sister, but to have before us gentleness?

Okay, we're not the judge. The vertical and the horizontal are connected. We should judge ourselves first. And finally, the dreaded verse six. Some will refuse our help. It says this: "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 turn and tear you to pieces."

Can we all admit that's a weird passage? It's strange. I've read so many commentaries to try to get my head around this, and really brilliant men and women disagree about this. What I essentially think Jesus is getting at here is that not everyone will take it kindly when you actually try to approach them about the speck in their eye. When you try to live this way of Jesus, when you try to live gospel reality, not everyone will take it kindly.

So what about those who refuse to be helped? First, Jesus teaches that you can't force the gospel on anybody. So many of us are trying to pummel people with the gospel. The gospel is to be offered, and I think it comes from a good place. We know the gospel is amazing. We know it's transformed our heart and our marriage and our family. We want everyone to know God's love and forgiveness. That's good.

But you can only offer the gospel. You can't force it. That's the beautiful subversive way of the Kingdom. It doesn't make sense to a lot of us. Now, there's a couple of different schools of thought when it comes to—okay, so what is he saying? What's he doing here with the dogs and pigs thing? If you want to read more on your own time, here are some verses I would recommend: Phillipians 3 and Proverbs 26 talk about the image of dogs and those who disregard God entirely. 2 Peter talks about pigs being like false prophets. So maybe what Jesus is talking about here are those who deny the truth and those who twist the truth. Those who deny the truth and those who twist the truth.

Now, is that to say that we shouldn't continue to love people and serve them even when they deny? Absolutely, Jesus is saying, "Be mindful that sometimes this will not go well for you." Not everyone will be receptive to inviting people to apprentice Rabbi Jesus with you. Jesus is warning us that not everyone will accept the gospel.

William Barclay, brilliant mind, put it best: "It is often impossible to talk to someone about Jesus Christ. Their insensitiveness, their moral blindness, their intellectual pride and cynical mockery may make them impervious to words about Christ. But it is always possible to show men Christ, and the weakness of the church lies not in lack of Christian arguments, but in lack of Christian lives."

Would anyone today say that we have a shortage of Christian arguments right now? I would argue we have a surplus. There's plenty of them. They're not hard to find. What transforms the world are not Christian arguments, but Christian lives—lives submitted to the way of Jesus as King and Lord. This cruciform love, this enemy-loving kind of life that looks upside down to so much of the ways of the world. That's what transforms the world. But sometimes it's hard.

And some of you know this—you know this all too well already. Some people will call you nuts for living this way. Like, "What? You give up your time and your resources freely? You're serving where on a Saturday? You're praying for who—the person that said that about you last week? Are you nuts?" Some people will just outright reject you. Some of us in this room have been rejected, and it's been really, really hard. And the weight of that still stings. You know all too well.

And we won't always have all the answers. And it can be discouraging, which is what I think Jesus promises in verses seven to eleven—it's so important. Jesus invites us to ask instead of to manipulate. Verse 7: "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."

Now, just to be clear, these verses over the years have been used to justify some terrible theology. We assume asking, seeking, knocking means like a Lambo and a big house and just piles of cash. I've heard it taught that way before, but we know too much now. If you've been with us in the Sermon on the Mount for any length of time, you know that something else is going on.

The disciples, hearing about this vision of the Kingdom of God, I imagine must have been overwhelmed. Like, "We're supposed to live how? Our lives are supposed to be marked by what? Are you kidding me?" The disciples now know that to be a part of this Kingdom, this way of living, needs to be poor in spirit, to be a peacemaker, to be merciful, to be hungry for righteousness, to be pure in motivation, to have our speech in check, to have our anger under control, to be a people of generosity and prayer. When Jesus says, "Ask, seek, and knock," they are not thinking about a nicer house or a fatter bank account.

They're thinking, "Lord, to live this kind of way, I'm going to need strength. I'm going to need compassion. I'm going to need mercy. I'm going to need forgiveness and courage and faith and discernment and patience." These are the things we are to ask, seek and knock for. He goes on verse 9: "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, who 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?"

Now, I didn't realize this, but when I hear bread and fish... You guys know the story of the feeding of the 5,000? What did the little boy offer to Jesus? Do you guys know the number? What's the number? Pop quiz. All right. Five loaves, two fish. Does anyone else, when you hear that story, you picture like, loaves? Show me what you picture in size as a loaf. Right, like a wonder bread loaf?

I did not realize this, but in the first century, a loaf of bread actually was much more like the size of a hamburger bun. It was like, rounded. You can make, like, a sandwich out of it, and it looked a lot like a stone. I didn't realize that. He's not saying, those of you who are earthly, you wouldn't give your kids something completely unrelated—"He wants bread? How about a stone?" What he's saying is you don't give them something that mocks their request.

God is saying, "I'm not going to give you something that looks like I've honored your request, but it's actually something else entirely." He's not the God of the bait-and-switch, and he doesn't give us a snake. He doesn't give us something that's ultimately dangerous.

Why? Because he's a good father. And when we ask for daily bread, he gives it. That's why Jesus says in John 4: "My food is that I should do the will of the one who has sent me."

Now, I will warn you, when we pray, things like, "Lord, help me to grow in patience," sometimes your car will break down, right? Sometimes we'll pray, "Lord, I'd like to grow in kindness," and the most annoying person at your work will be placed in the cubicle right next to you. We don't grow in the fruit of the spirit in a vacuum. Sometimes how the Lord forms us and grows us is actually through difficulty. But God, like any good parent, has a long term view of what's best for their kids.

Right now, for example, my boys, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, want cinnamon rolls. That's like all they're interested in—cinnamon rolls and gummies. And really, anytime that I tell them no, it's the end of the world. It's Armageddon. In fact—I don't know where they learned this from—when I tell them, no, this is what they've been saying to my wife and I. They've been saying this: "Papa, you're breaking my heart."

Which of you taught them that, by the way? We need to talk afterwards. "Papa, you're breaking my heart." Now, am I a bad parent by not giving them cinnamon rolls morning, noon, and night, every day until they're 18? Some would say yes. I know I'm a bad parent for different reasons, but... No, because ultimately I know that for their health and their formation, that all day, every day is actually not for their flourishing. That doesn't lead to their best life. I would say it this way, and any parent knows: sometimes saying no is proof of a parent's love, not evidence of its absence.

Sometimes God's no to us is because he loves us, not the opposite. Why? He's got a longer vision than we do. He sees a road and a path that we can't. But if he really is a good father and I believe that he is, it changes the way we ask, seek, and knock—which by the way, is a progression. Do you realize that?

How much effort does it take to ask? Not a lot. My boys do it 47 times a day. Seeking requires a little bit of effort, right? Maybe like getting up out of your seat a little bit, unless you're just seeking on Google. But seeking requires some movement. Knocking. Knocking

implies what? A door? Yeah, knocking. Sometimes there will be obstacles that we'll need to, by God's grace and power and strength, work through.

Jesus is inviting us to a relationship with our Father in which we understand that he is more willing to bless us than we are to even ask for it. Do we understand that? By the way, think about the thing that keeps you up at night, that you long for more than anything in this world. Do you know that God desires to bless you even more than you desire to have that thing? Do you want to live the kind of life that Jesus describes in this sermon? Have you asked God for it?

Do you want to be used by God, like never before, so that you actually make a difference in the lives of others? Pray about it. Spend real time before your heavenly Father, and Jesus says God will respond. And when we live this way, we'll come closer in our relationships to what Jesus describes here. This is where we'll end.

In verse twelve, it says, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets." The Torah and the whole thing, this sums it up: "Do to others what you would have them do to you." The word "so" there was the word "sun", and it's like a signpost pointing backward to everything that was just said.

He's saying, "In light of God's goodness to us, here's then how we should live." Now, I didn't realize this, but at the time that Jesus said this... This is commonly known as the Golden Rule. There were other ancient versions of the Golden Rule. The Talmud—Rabbi Halal says, "What is hateful to you, do not do it to your neighbor." Confucius says, "Do not to others what you wish not done to you." That's hard to say. The Greek Stoics and philosopher said, "What you do not wish to be done to you, do not do to anyone else."

But Jesus, as he often does, takes it to another level. And as best we can tell, he's the first person to ever say this. This would have been revolutionary. Jesus is saying it's not just what you aren't going to do—it's about what you are going to do. There's a big difference between not doing something that caused suffering and doing something to alleviate it. Big difference. It's a big difference between saying, "I didn't cause that, that's not my

issue." It's a big difference between that posture and saying, "Someone's hurting, someone's in pain, injustice is happening." Christ-followers step in. We are present.

This is not tolerance or niceness. For Jesus, love is less of a feeling and more of an action. He doesn't say, "Feel for others what you would like them to feel towards you." He could have said that. He doesn't.

This means love is possible even when fondness is not, even when affection is not. It's to put another person's happiness ahead of our own. I want you to really think about that. Think about that question. "Do to others what you would have them do to you." Right? And if we were to be asked, "What would you like done to you?" I think at the surface level, most of us would say, "Fairness. I like to be treated fairly."

I actually don't think that's true. I think we would say fairness because other people are listening and that sounds right. I don't think we want fairness. We want preferential treatment, don't we? If you were to dream of your ideal day, it's like: "Sleep in as late as I can. There's going to be cinnamon rolls for Papa and no one else. And we're going to watch the game, and no one's going to bother me, and then everything will be up and to the right."

We want preferential treatment in all that happens to us. Jesus is saying, "Look for ways to treat other people that way." Not just the people you like, the people who are on your team, or in your camp, or voted the way you do, or believe the way you do, or talk or think the way that you do. Why? Because that's what Christ does for us.

That's what Christ does for us. That's what he continues to do for us. And Jesus says this is the summary. That's the whole thing. He's saying, "Don't be judgmental. Don't be undiscerning. Don't give up. Treat people with respect. Expect God to work through you."

People will know that we love them when we're gracious with their faults, when we're wise with those who are hostile, when we're dependent on God and prayer... Who wouldn't want to live a life like this? Imagine if we lived like that. In the next argument we got in with

our spouse, or the coworker, someone legitimately hurts you, and you thought to yourself, "How can I show them preferential treatment in this moment?"

Because willpower is not enough, by the way. A lot of us probably have spent a lot of our Christian lives trying to will ourselves to be nicer to people and have kind of fallen flat on our faces. The Golden Rule needs to become the narrative of our minds. What if our prayer became, "Holy Spirit, bring to mind the Golden Rule every time it's necessary—when someone is stomping on my last nerve, when that grudge or that bitterness rises to the service."

And by the way, "Help" is a complete prayer, too. I think it's one of the best, to be honest. "Lord, in this moment, I can feel all the heat. I could just feel the blood pressure rising. I want to lash out. I want to retaliate. Help. Help."

Dallas Willard said it this way: "The Golden Rule is devoted to the good and the lives of those around us, and this reaches far beyond the mere absence of harm. It aspires toward a remarkable richness in their lives, not simply the alleviation of their suffering."

Loving our neighbor is not the same as not hating them. That's a good starting point, by the way. But that's not what he's talking about. It's not merely the lack of hate. It's something else entirely. And it's not just a feeling, either. It compels us to act, and not just to act reactively, but to seek out the well-being of others.

This is my challenge for us this week, then: to seek out ways to treat people better than they deserve. You might say, "You don't know what this person has done. They don't deserve it." That's exactly the point.

Seek out ways to treat people better than they deserve. Why? Because in Christ, that's exactly how we've been treated. That's exactly how we've been treated. We got what we could never earn or deserve. Never have we received more preferential treatment than when a sinless man hung between two thieves. That's the gospel. That's good news. How, then, should we live?



Two questions to ask. Number one: what sin is obscuring my vision and causing me to be hard on the people that I care most about? Just confess it. Own it. The darkness is where it grows. Drag that out into the light. What sin is like a plank in your eye that's making it hard to see things the way they really are?

Secondly, what do you need to ask, seek, and knock for? What do you need to ask, seek, and knock for? Is it patience? Is it forgiveness? Is it a gentleness toward others? Maybe it's simply, "Lord, help me to see people the way that you do. Lord, give me your eyes in everything I say and do." Friends, when we live that kind of life, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it changes everything. Let's pray.

God, I have lost track of how many times I have done all of the things you just said that we are not to do, fallen way short, been judgmental, been overly critical, held grudges, did not do to others what I wished they would do to me. God, would you help us to remember that forgiven people are forgiving people? And God, I'm so grateful that even though my track record is far from perfect, you keep coming after us. You keep loving us. You keep pursuing us, God. Help us to loosen our white-knuckle grip on the way we've been living our life to step into the way that you called us to—the way of your Kingdom. God, remind us again and again of the extravagant gift we have in you, in grace, and mercy, and forgiveness. Help us to be a people that extend that, God, wherever we go. We thank you and we love you, and we pray all this in the beautiful name of Jesus, and all God's people said, "Amen."