

## MATTHEW 6:1-12 – sermon Tregear 2/5/2021

Well, we're coming to the end of this part of Matthew's gospel called the sermon on the mount. Jesus is telling us what is involved in being in the kingdom. We've been hearing from Jesus what the characteristics of a kingdom person are.

And today these words are very familiar. In a sense these 12 verses are simple words but with profound truths. This is actually a difficult passage and you will need to be listening carefully. I'll be suggesting different ideas or ways we might approach this passage. So let's get into it

### **1.v.1 – 6 The disciples' attitude to one another – our relationships with one another**

v. 1-6 – Jesus says, "Don't judge", in the sense of condemning or finding fault with others, and also in the sense of being blind to our own faults. Man, it's so easy to find fault with others, to be critical of others – they don't measure up to my high standards. How easy to be hypocrites. And it's not just the politicians, or the people in the public spotlight, but I'm ashamed to say, it's even my brothers and sisters in church.

In the context here, Jesus is talking to Jews. A lot of his words in chapter 6 were aimed at the hypocrites. Again and again Jesus says don't be like the hypocrites. The prime example of these religious hypocrites were the religious leaders. So some would suggest that these first 6 verses refer to the Jewish leaders who were judging Jesus. Jesus, the one who was the true and righteous judge was being judged by these religious leaders. So Jesus warns them. They see the speck in Jesus' eye and they ignore the log in their own eye. Again the word hypocrite is used. They do not get that they are judging the Messiah, the one who has true authority to judge.

It's important to reflect on Jesus' words in the context of who he is talking to. But I think, too, that there is a message for us today in the midst of this.

It's a call to NOT look down on others for their moral failures; to not give in to the temptation to play God.

Who am I to cast judgement on my brother or sister?

When we judge others, we forget that we are human ourselves and that God is the only true judge. It comes down very much to pride. When we are motivated by pride it is easy to see ourselves as better than others and to look down on others; when, as Kingdom people, we are motivated by humility, we will recognise ourselves as forgiven sinners and citizens of a Kingdom ruled by our Father who treats us with mercy and grace.

And so I will see my brother or sister in church as someone loved by God and so someone to be loved by me no matter what they have done or how they appear to me.

An example could be someone who has wronged you and you refuse to talk to them – you are judging them because you are saying their sin or wrong against me is so bad that I can't forgive them or talk to them. So this is exactly what Jesus is talking about here. You are judging them. I am so glad that God does not treat us like this.

As Christians, we can tend to be very good at spotting wickedness in others, and on the one level this is to be commended. Much of Matthew Chapter 6 which Rob was teaching us about the last 2 weeks is a call to do exactly that when we see pagans or Pharisees at their worship. Jesus wants us to be discerning and careful and to confront one another over our sins, which is why he instructs us in Matthew 18:15-17 about how we should do so. (*Matthew 18:15-17 - "If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest , and so on, Jesus giving instructions on how to deal with problems between people in the church.*

So in v.6 - Dogs and pearls – what about this? Doesn't it imply that Jesus' followers are to make quite a serious judgement – namely that some people come into these categories, so should not be given holy or precious things? What's Jesus meaning?

None of the other gospels mention this saying of Jesus. In the context here it's coming on the back of teaching about judging and hypocrisy so it would seem that Jesus is saying, "Yes, be careful not to judge others, BUT also be discerning about who you share the great treasures with. We must have a sense of judgement. As a Jew you would not invite a non-Jew to share in your religious feasts for that would be like throwing meat consecrated for sacrifice to an unclean pariah-dog.

We've got to remember that Jesus is talking to a group of Jews, who followed the laws to be clean and holy. Possibly Jesus is talking into the Jewish world of his day – and referring to people from outside. "Dogs" was a regular abusive term for Gentiles; pigs were kept only by Gentiles, since Jews didn't eat pork. He seems to be warning his followers not to try to explain the meaning and life of the kingdom to people who won't even understand the Jewish world within which it makes sense.

If this is right, it fits with what Jesus says later, in Matthew 10:5,6. (<sup>5</sup> *These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do NOT go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.)*

The early mission of the gospel is to Jews. After the crucifixion and resurrection, of course, everything is different; the gospel must then go out to embrace the world. For the moment, the disciples are to treasure the gospel like priests in the Temple guarding their holy things. There are other interpretations – the most common is that there will be some people who will be so hard to the things of God that you may need to stop bringing them the good news because of their constant rejection. This is quite an extreme saying of Jesus. So, are there times when we should not share the spiritual truths, the pearls of great price, the teachings of Jesus with others? It is a difficult question to answer and there is certainly some disagreement between commentators about what Jesus meant. For most of us, in our situations, the challenge is not who should we NOT talk to about the gospel, but who is God prompting us TO talk to. This teaching of Jesus is for exceptional situations only; our normal Christian duty is to be patient and persevere with others, as God has patiently persevered with us.

Keep thinking about this verse but I wouldn't get too hung up about it. The key one for most of us and that we will need to deal with day by day is by what standard are we judging others. If I am going to speak to my brother about a fault that I see in his or her life, carefully examine my own life. Am I guilty of some huge failing that I am blind to? It's not a bad question to be asking of each other – "Can you see something in my life that needs correcting? Please tell me if you see something in my life or my words that needs correcting."

Pray, pray, pray in all of this. God has given us his Spirit – let us cry out to him for wisdom in how we speak to each other.

## **2. v. 7 – 11 The disciples' attitude to God – our relationship with God**

So that leads us into the second section of our passage today. Most of the commentaries I read talked about this section being about prayer, about persistence in prayer. Don't give up on bringing our requests to God. When Luke records these same words in his gospel they come after a story that Jesus has told about a person who knocks and knocks on his neighbour's door until his neighbour finally opens the door and gives him the bread that he needs. So Jesus says, "Ask, Seek, Knock". They are such simple words aren't they? Yet they are so profound. Ask and it WILL be given you; seek and you WILL find; knock and the door WILL be opened to you. Two things here. Firstly, the very act of asking is an act of submission. Just as Rob was sharing with us about the Lord's Prayer.

When we pray. "Your will be done..." we are saying to God we submit to you; we acknowledge your authority – you're the boss. And we can't live the life we are called to in the Kingdom if we don't have you in our life. So when we "ask" we are saying to God that we need him; we are crying out to him. We are not self-sufficient or independent.

Another possible meaning here which fits this context is the link to chapter 6:33 – Jesus says seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” So the thing that we are to seek after is God’s kingdom, and this has been Jesus’ message all along hasn’t it from Matthew chapter 3. So when Jesus says here, “Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you”, it makes a lot of sense that to a bunch of Jews, remember they are not Christians or Jesus followers yet, it makes a lot of sense that Jesus is saying, “Ask for the kingdom and it will be given you; seek for the kingdom ( the same words as 6:33) and you will find it; knock on the door and the door will be opened.” Yes, you will receive the kingdom when you ask. But again there is the same submissive spirit that is needed that recognises that I can’t live the Kingdom life apart from God’s spirit living in me.

But we come back to these words and you may be thinking, “Does Jesus really mean that God is going to answer every request we make?’ That he is like a father longing to give his children what they want and need? Can we truly take him up on such remarkably open-ended promises? Now it may be a problem with our faith but I think it could also be a natural human reluctance to ask. You may think you shouldn’t be asking for things all the time; its selfish to ask for things; or maybe that God has better things to do with his time than to provide whatever we suddenly happen to want.

But it’s interesting the example Jesus uses. It’s natural for children to ask things of their parents.

So Jesus’ words in v.9 -11 are a strong reminder to us that God desires to give us good gifts. Ok, that’s fine you say, but why doesn’t God answer my prayers; “I prayed to pass an exam, but I failed.” “I prayed to be healed, but I’m still sick.” So why pray, it doesn’t work! God is not saying that these promises are unconditional. If they were then prayer would be like magic, the person who prays would be like a magician like Aladdin, and God would become our servant who appears instantly to do our bidding like the genie in Aladdin’s lamp. Sounds great but that would not be good.

How could I pray knowing that anything I asked for God was pledged to give, God HAD to give it to me. Am I always going to pray wisely and unselfishly? It would become a great burden on us. But what does Jesus say – God is better than the best parent and wiser than the wisest parent. He WILL give good gifts to his children; and he is all wise, he knows which gifts are good and which are not.

Prayer remains a mystery; I don’t understand why God doesn’t answer my prayer and heal Adam straight away; or why Phoebe’s dates continually change for her operation. But I do

know that I have a good, powerful and wise Father and he says to me, “Ask, Seek, Knock”. So I want to obey. I want to go to him trusting. I’m going to pray your will be done on earth, but I’m also going to pray, “Give me this day my daily bread.” Some wise Christians have suggested that maybe as God’s kingdom comes, it isn’t God’s will to bring it all at once. We couldn’t bear it if he did. God is working like an artist with difficult material, he’s working with each one of us; and prayer is the way some of that material co-operates with the artist instead of resisting him. So, in prayer, we’re co-operating with God, opening ourselves up to him, trusting him, submitting to him.

For us, let us treat God as our Father, and let him know how things are with us. Ask, search and knock and see what happens! Expect some surprises on the way; but don’t expect that God will ever let you down.

### **3.v. 12 The “Golden rule”**

v.12 sums up the message so far, the message that began at chapter 5:17 as Jesus began his reinterpretation of the law. Jesus hasn’t come to abolish or get rid of the law and the prophets, that is all the teachings of the Old Testament. No he has come to fulfil them. How? By teaching Israel who God really is, and what copying him, trusting him, loving him and obeying him are really like. And when it comes to behaviour in the world and with other people, the whole law can be put into one sentence: do to others what you’d like them to do to you. No one has lived that, no one can live that – except one person, Jesus, the Son of God. We can’t do the Sermon on the Mount in our own strength; we can’t keep the Law in our own strength. Only Jesus has done this. But because he died on the cross and rose again we can believe on him, trust him and receive the Holy Spirit who works in us to change us and give us the power and the strength to live this life, this life which keeps the Law.

Jesus was neither the first nor the last great moral teacher to offer this so-called “Golden Rule”, and it sums up a good deal of his teaching. What distinguishes him from all the others who have said similar things is that underneath the moral lesson is the love of the heavenly Father. God, in relationship with us, reaching down to us, shows us how to live this life and he gives us the capacity to live this life. The Holy Spirit living in us.

What should distinguish us as Jesus’ followers, as Kingdom people, though unfortunately it doesn’t always, is that, knowing this love, we should find ourselves able to obey this rule, and the other rules that follow from it, gladly and freely. In doing this we will truly reflect God’s love and be a light and salt in the world.