



Chapter 7

“Who are *you* to judge *me*?!” Maybe these words have shot out of your mouth. Maybe they’ve been shot at you. Maybe both have happened within the same conversation! Nobody likes to be on the receiving end of another person’s critique, whether it be subtle or scathing. We all know the feeling, though, and this third and final chapter of Jesus’s *Sermon on the Mount* begins by addressing it.

Icebreaker:

1. Think back to a time when you have been the target of another person’s judgment. How did it make you feel and was the critique fair?

Even within God’s Kingdom Community, it’s inevitable that we will take opportunities to “help others meet our expectations.” Relationships are where the most intense battles of life are waged. Unsurprisingly, Jesus desires us to minimize the relational casualties!

Verses 1-12

It’s tempting to cite verse 1 as a kind of force field against anyone who might stick their nose in our business. We need to read verses 1-5 together, though, because we find they contain insight on how to “take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” Jesus uses an absurd illustration to make an essential point. This point is illuminated as we recall the beatitudes back in chapter 5, verses 3-11.

2. Read through each of the “Blessed are…” statements in chapter 5. Which do you find most relevant for the kind of attitude Jesus is calling us to in Matt 7:1-5?

Verse 6 shifts to relationships with those outside God’s Kingdom Community, and can be difficult to interpret. It’s likely that “pearls” represent the immense value of the gospel message itself. “Dogs” and “pigs” were common descriptions used by Jews about Gentiles; consequently, many see this as a warning about taking the gospel message to the Gentiles for this early period of Jesus’s ministry.

Verses 7-11 revisit the subject of prayer, but with special emphasis on God’s character rather than with a specific example of how to pray like we had in chapter 6. It’s best to read these verses mindful of their place in the sermon—coming directly after Jesus’s instruction on dealing with another’s sin within the community and on whether to engage someone outside of the community with the gospel message. This is likely the kind of prayer where we ask for wisdom (see also James 1:5).

3. What do verses 7-11 claim about God’s character? How should these claims influence our prayer habits?
4. How can we remind one another that God is a good, loving Father?

Verse 12 culminates all that Jesus has said up to this point. It's also a "bookend" to what we saw back in 5:17-20 where He claims to be fulfilling the Old Testament. All that the Law and Prophets said can be distilled down to this single (and "golden") rule.

5. Look back through 5:21-7:11. How does Jesus's previous instruction in the Sermon illustrate this "Golden Rule"?

6. Name obstacles that stand in the way of doing "whatever you wish that others would do to you." Be as specific as possible.

Verses 13-29

These remaining verses bring Jesus's teaching to a burning focus. There are two ways for His listeners. One is narrow and difficult. The other is wide and easy. One produces good fruit; the other, bad. It's deceptive, though, because the other way can look genuine from a distance. It's what's beneath the surface that matters most.

This beneath-the-surface difference may sound mysterious, but it's not. The difference between the way of life (wisdom) and the way of destruction (foolishness) is in whether one does or does not *do* what Jesus says. It's that simple. It's that difficult.

7. How do these final verses make you feel as you as you consider the vivid imagery Jesus uses?

8. Read James 1:22. What are one or two things we can do together to encourage each other to be doers and not merely hearers of Jesus's words?

Tying the Bow

So, what does a "salty" and "light-casting" community look like? It's a community of people whose actions are based on what's best for others. It's a community that seeks to express the same kind of love it has been shown by its King. It's a community aware of the danger of hearing and not also doing.

As we wrap up this section (chapters 5-7), we want to get better at listening and obeying Jesus words as we continue to get to know Matthew's Gospel. So, you are invited do two things before you close your conversation today:

(1) Share with your group some of the hardest passages in the *Sermon on the Mount* for you.

(2) Share a prayer request about how you would like to more regularly live out the *Sermon on the Mount* this next month.

Ok, time to lace those sandals. Jesus is about to stand up and walk down the mountain...