

How Do You Value Other People? Matthew 7:1-6

No discussion questions this week – I simply ran out of time. If you're leading a small group, you'll have to come up with your own questions, or you can call me and we can come up with some questions together.

We are continuing our sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount this morning. In Matthew chapter 6 we saw some challenging and life-changing teaching from Jesus that addressed our motivations, priorities, and lifestyles, and now in chapter 7 Jesus turns his attention to addressing the way we value people and how we respond to them based on that. What should that look like for followers of Christ?

I think the natural thing most people do is look at people and value them based on some kind of internal standard. There are certain qualities we see as admirable and good and others we see as undesirable or bad. In Western cultures like ours, I think our values tend to be varied and individualistic. I think we pick many of them up from different groups or camps we belong to – could be our family of origin, church family, political party, workplace, etc. In Eastern cultures like we're going to see in ancient Israel, values tend to be more common and shared by the whole community and largely influenced by religion. In either case, it seems like everyone has a standard of values by which they see people and measure them up.

I want you to think about how you see people – what qualities do you see as admirable and good? Which do you think are less desirable or bad? I've thought of some of the qualities people often use to measure people up, probably without even knowing it most of the time:

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| 1. Race, skin-color, accent | 9. What kind of house they live in |
| 2. Gender | 10. Where people send their kids to school |
| 3. Age | 11. What their political views are |
| 4. Body size/shape | 12. What religion they belong to |
| 5. Hair color and style | 13. What church they belong to |
| 6. Clothing style | 14. How smart they are |
| 7. Where someone grew up | 15. How athletic they are |
| 8. Where they live now | |

16. Where they work
17. How much money they make

18. If they have a criminal record

People are constantly shaping others up based on these kinds of things and then determining some level of worth that's based on what we value. If I was preaching in shorts and a t-shirt today that would raise me up in some of your minds but lower me on others. If I wore a suit it would do the same thing. If I was 25 years old it would make a difference in what you think about me and if I was 70 it would do the same.

The same kind of thing was happening in 1st century Israel. People were measuring people up and determining their worth and treating them based on that, only in that culture it was much more prominent because they functioned with an honor-shame dynamic.

According to Table Talk Magazine (published by Ligonier Ministries): *“Unlike most modern Western cultures, many societies in the ancient world functioned on the central social categories of honor and shame. Theologian David deSilva defines honor as “the public acknowledgment of a person’s worth, granted on the basis of how fully that individual embodies qualities and behaviors valued by the group.” In honor-shame societies, honor is like a currency that gives people status and power (much as money does in modern Western societies). Honor is granted according to what the society values. Conversely, one receives shame by not conforming to the established standards of good and bad.”*

So this kind of honor and shame mentality was deeply engrained in the people of Israel. They valued people according to how they adhered to the community standard. And in ancient Israel that standard was the Law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers that were added by groups like the Pharisees. So, to the extent that a person lived in accordance to that standard, they were either honored or shamed.

That meant certain people were seen as better than others and honored for it while others were treated as less important or even shunned. Scribes and Pharisees were the most honorable and tax collectors and prostitutes were outcasts. Jews in general were honorable; Gentiles were dogs. Men were

more honorable than women. Those who were ceremonially clean were more honorable than the unclean. Healthy more honorable than the sick or disabled. Rich more honorable than poor. Free more honorable than slave.

So as we look at what Jesus says in our passage today, we're going to see him addressing that practice and way of thinking about people. Does that way of thinking fit in with what life would be like in Christ's kingdom? What he says to them is going to apply to our lives today as we look at how we measure people and determine their worth as followers of Christ.

Read Matthew 7:1-6.

"Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

⁶"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

So you have to interpret this passage in the context in which it was given. A lot of people misunderstand and misuse these verses because they don't look the context, but hopefully we can avoid that based on what we see today.

Jesus starts by saying: "Judge not." The people listening to him would have heard that in a specific way because of their honor-shame culture and their standard of the Law of Moses and traditions of the Fathers. He was telling them to stop measuring people's worth according to that standard and casting judgment upon those who didn't meet the standard as they thought they should.

He follows that up by warning them, saying that if they continued to judge people in that way, God would judge them in the same way, and the implication is that if God did that, it would be a real problem. When we judge other people, we tend to forget about all the ways we've fallen short or violated the very standard that we're using to judge others, and Jesus is saying that if God would hold them accountable to their standard, which was all the

laws of God in their Scriptures, they would be found guilty in more ways than they could imagine.

When I think about the behavior Jesus was trying to confront, I picture the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Pharisees often prided themselves on following the rules, thinking they were righteous because of that and then looked down on tax collectors and sinners and shamed and shunned them for not following them as good as they did. They would follow all the little laws – most of which they actually made up and weren't actually in the Law of Moses. Extra things having to do with ceremonial washing, tithing, Sabbath regulations, dietary laws, clean and unclean laws. And they prided themselves on keeping them. And when other people didn't, they were quick to judge and point them out.

You may remember that they really struggled with Jesus healing on the Sabbath or associating with sinners and the unclean or when his disciples didn't wash their hands the right way, or fast the right way. The Pharisees were judging and shaming people because they didn't keep the community standard.

That's the kind of behavior Jesus is confronting, and in verses 3-5 he uses a humorous illustration to point out how foolish it was. They were pointing out specks in people's eyes when they had a log in their own. When they saw someone not follow one of the little laws about food and drink, or handwashing, or the Sabbath they would be quick to point that out but they were blind to their own greed, lust, self-righteousness, self-indulgence, malice, and lack of justice, compassion, and mercy, all of which were far more important than the little laws they were judging people for. They were living lives of hypocrisy and leading the rest of the people to be that way.

So Jesus tells his listeners to stop that behavior. Stop the honor-shame dynamic. That kind of behavior was creating a wall of division between righteous and sinners. The righteous would look down on sinners and treat them as outcasts. They would want nothing to do with them.

But in Christ's kingdom, things would be different. Christ was calling his followers to join him in the work of advancing his kingdom. And to do that they could not continue judging sinners, looking down on them, and having nothing

to do with them. They would need to reach out to them and show mercy and compassion so they could share the gospel and call them to repentance and forgiveness of sin.

So Jesus tells his listeners that they must first look at their own lives and remember their own forgiveness. It starts by seeing your own sin and unrighteousness before God. There must be confession of sin, repentance, and humility. It is only when we are first aware of our own sin and have experienced God's forgiveness and mercy ourselves that we are ready to see people as God sees them and reach out to them with the same call to repentance and forgiveness rather than avoiding them.

One of the places where you see the contrast between the judging that was happening in Israel and what Jesus was calling his followers to do is when Jesus went to Matthew's house after calling him to follow him. Luke 5:29-32 says: *"And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."*

In order for Christ's followers to carry on the same work he was doing, there would have to be a radical transformation in the way they thought about other people and responded to them.

Now, he adds one more statement in verse 6: *"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."* This too would prepare his followers for the work of the kingdom. I think he says this because there would be some situations when, if they did what he commanded in verses 1-5, and they preached the message of the kingdom to all people, there would be some situations when people rejected it and even attacked and persecuted them for it. You see this all throughout the book of Acts with how most of the religious leaders in Israel responded to the gospel and how many of the pagans responded in the Gentile regions.

When people responded in that way, Jesus is saying, “Don’t keep preaching to them.” The gospel is falling on dead hearts and deaf ears, so don’t give dogs what is holy or throw your pearls before pigs. This wasn’t devaluing them; it was using wise discernment. The ESV Study Bible says: “*Believers are to be merciful, forgiving, and slow to judge, yet they should wisely discern the true character of people and not indefinitely continue proclaiming the gospel to those who adamantly reject it, so that they can move on and proclaim the gospel to others.*”

Christ has called us to join him in his work of advancing his kingdom here on earth and to do that we have to be aware of how we think about people, value them, and respond to them. If you see the tendency to judge people, devalue them, and try to avoid them for any of the reasons I mentioned earlier or because of some kind of sinful behavior, Christ is calling us to remember where we’ve come from and start thinking a different way.

We are no better than anyone else. God has chosen to call us, to be merciful to us and forgive us of all our sins through the work that Christ has done in his death and resurrection on our behalf. And now he is calling us to join him in the good work of advancing his kingdom, reaching out to people who are still in darkness like we were, to shine the light of Christ and hope of the gospel into their lives and invite them to turn to Jesus, repent of their sins, and receive forgiveness.