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Blind-spots and Log-jams
Matthew 7:1-5

The manager of a minor league baseball team was so disgusted with his centerfielders' performance that he ordered him to the dugout and assumed the position himself. The first ball that came into center field took a bad hop and hit the manager in the mouth. The next one was a high fly ball, which he lost in the glare of the sun until it bounced off his forehead. The third was a hard line drive that he charged with outstretched arms; unfortunately it flew between his hands and smacked him in the eye. Furious, the manager ran back to the dugout, grabbed the center fielder by the uniform and yelled. "You've got center field so messed up that even I can't do a thing with it."

It's way too easy to be a critic. We tend to blame other people for our own mess-ups. It's far easier for us to see faults and weaknesses in others. It's far easier for us to pick, and judge and yet...many times the faults we see so clearly in others are some of the same ones we ourselves struggle with. Do you struggle with a critical spirit this morning? Is there someone right now that it is way too easy for you to tear down with your words and criticize? Have you found yourself at times putting on that "holier than thou" sneer all over your face when you walk past that person? It's easy to destructively, critically judge others isn't it? But what if they knew all about your hidden closet dirty laundry of thoughts, feelings, behaviors? How would you like them to apply that same standard to you?

Jesus continues to preach his sermon on the mount in Matthew 7 by exposing the sin of our own destructive critical spirit and the hypocrisy of our own words. Jesus calls us to carefully examine ourselves in the mirror before we proceed to lovingly, constructively help

others. My challenge this morning is for us to take God's approach as we help each other discover and deal with our blind-spots and log-jams in our life.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 7. Chapter 7 begins with one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, especially popular with those insisting on tolerance being the highest virtue. It is probably the most misunderstood and maligned verse. Lets read together Matthew 7:1-5 READ.

Judge not that you be not judged. How often have you heard the preamble to a conversation. "I don't mean to judge but..." then they go on to critically rip apart the other person. That line seems to be way too popular in Christian circles. That line has driven more people away from the church because it is so easy for even pagans to spot its destructive nature...for often they have been on the damaging end of its sharp edge. The Christian church family ought to be a place where we help out each other and it's supportive. In truth and love we ought to be challenging each other to rise to higher levels of righteousness than the rest of the world. Church ought to be a place where relationships are being restored with God and with each other...then the community around us can see and be attracted to a life of following Christ. Unfortunately, there are times when sadly church ends up being a place where people feel condemned and manipulated, used, unloved and uncared for.

There are few things more exhausting than being on the receiving end of harsh criticism. I know... I've been there before. That seems to be part of the baggage that goes along with being a pastor. If you are up front you are a very easy target to shoot at. For some reason people feel real safe in shooting at leaders who are not allowed to shoot back at them. But you don't have to be a minister to get criticized. People are by nature very prone to be critical and condemning. In fact you can't do much of anything without being criticized by someone. Just try

volunteering as a little league coach. There will always be a parent that doesn't like their kids position on the bench or out in the field or your choice of plays. Whether you are building a shed, cooking a meal, or knitting a sweater, planting a garden, umpiring a game, planning a special tea for the ladies, or even just mowing your lawn, there seems to always be that critic snapping at your heal. It's pretty sad when all this comes into the church and people think their critical spirit is a spiritual gift. Guess what? God doesn't agree. Criticism is not a spiritual gift.

Here in Matthew 7:1 Jesus states emphatically "Judge not that you be not judged" What does this mean? Am I to never stand in judgement of another? Leo Tolstoy thought it meant we should do away with all the courts of law. What does it mean to "not judge?" Is it wrong to be an umpire and judge a baseball game? Is it wrong to judge a pie eating contest or talent competition? Is Jesus telling us it is wrong to give a recommendation for a student who wants to go to college...for by doing that we have to judge. Is Jesus telling us that we are not to give employee job reviews? What does it mean to judge? Definition wise, "to judge" can mean anything from a simple evaluation to a scathing censorship and condemnation.

In Matthew 6:14 in the Lord's prayer model for his disciples, He calls on them to forgive as we have been forgiven. If we fail to forgive others then we prove we have never really received God's forgiveness of our own sin. To judge then is to condemn people rather than forgive them. Jesus is using the word judge here to expose a spirit of habitual, harsh, destroying criticism that puts people down and picks them apart. This type of judgement often comes out of a self-righteous attitude that the Pharisees exhibited. When Jesus said, "Do not judge" he was talking to those who have a critical judgmental, condemning spirit. This is a person who has never understood what it means to be forgiven by God

and have never fully understood how beggarly poor in spirit and in need he really is.

Jesus statement is not calling us to turn a blind eye on sin. Jesus is not telling us that we should never constructively evaluate and make judgement decisions. Even down in v.6 he tells us we are to discern or judge whether or not we are trying to share our Christ life with those who are spiritually ready, dogs or swine who are not ready. Later in Matthew Jesus warns us to judge who is telling the truth of God and who is a false teacher. All through this sermon Jesus has been critical judging the fake religious actions of the Pharisees. Do not judge does not mean we are to turn off our brains and throw wisdom out the window. Do not judge means we are not to stand in holier-than-thou sneers of condemning and destructive judgement, why? because it just shows we have never understood how much we have been forgiven and in desperate need of God's grace and mercy.

So as we look at verse 1 and 2 we see the first point this morning. Do not judge lest you be judged. Point 1 Don't take the place that belongs to God. Don't play God. When we critically condemn and judge others we are denying them our forgiveness and set ourselves up in the place of God. When we judge we are implying that we ourselves are perfect, that we don't have any weakness. Yet...none of us humans know enough to judge in a condemning way. None of us know the entire story of anyone else's life. When a man falls in temptation we don't know how many times he has already resisted temptation before he fell. God is the ultimate judge of man. He has set the standards for men to live and flourish by. But man continually sets up their own standards to follow instead of following God's. When we set the standard and judge by them we are taking the place of God.

A destructively critical spirit of others is like a buzzard flying around a sickening animal waiting for death, looking for weakness so

they can strike and peck and tear flesh. The critic focuses on things that are of little importance, but treats them as vital. We criticize others because it is so easy. If we can point out someone else's sickness we think we are moving forward to highlight our own health. If we point out another's failures we think we are showcasing our own successes. But that self-judgement will become our own gallows. Just like Haman in the book of Esther built a gallows and asked the king to kill Mordicaï. That same gallows was used against him and he became the recipient of a rope cocktail.

We may try to dress up and clean up our criticism and call it discernment but strip away the words and if the motive left behind is more destructive than constructive. If it is more centered on building up than building them up then it's flat out destructive criticism. A new study from the University of Arizona finds that a spotless kitchen may harbor as many bacteria as a less tidy one. That's because the most germ-laden object in a kitchen is often....the sponge. Researchers tested sponges and dishrags collected from 500 kitchens across the US and found that one out of five sponges contained salmonella bacteria. Almost 2/3rds had at least some other bacteria that when ingested could make people ill. And all these from some of the cleanest scrubbed kitchens in America. Sometimes our attempts to clean others up can do more harm than good. This will happen when a Pharisee, destructive critical spirit tries to do the cleaning. Condemnation, self-righteousness and judgementalism are the salmonella of the soul.

Do you like being criticized? Then stop being critical yourself. Don't jump all over other people unless you want to receive the same treatment.

Don't try to take the place of God.

Point number 2 We all have "Blind spots and log-jams" Admit it we all have them. If we knew what they were we might move to try and

change them, but we can't see them that's why they are called blind. Jesus assumes that we all have areas that we are either oblivious to or that we ignore. By its very definition they are blind to us otherwise we would be able to easily see and deal with them. Jesus assumes that in the Christian community there will be disagreements that give rise to tensions and problems of relationships. Jesus assumes there will be areas of fault, struggle and weakness that are not readily known to us as well as blind spots, not known to those we live with. We all have blind spots and logjams.

Look at verse 3 How can you say to your brother Let me take that splinter, that speck of sawdust out of your eye when you have a big hurking log sticking out of your own eye. Isn't it interesting that a splinter is a little piece of the log. The sliver is a slice of the beam. The splinter fault we can spot in other people is often a big log issue in our own. Personality counselors tell us that we often see in others the very faults we have ourselves. True? Maybe there is some truth in the statement; "It takes one to know one". We tend to be more critical in the area that we personally struggle in. The logs are those character flaws that everyone else can see in us, but us. The speck is not as easy for others to see in us unless they are up close. But it is a specific irritant to our own eye.

Don't try take the place of God in judgement and condemnation because v.2 in the same measure that we extend judgement so to we will be judged. We all struggle with blind spots so we need to take great care in the measure that you expose the blind spots of others. The rabbi's would teach that God deals in two measures. One, the measure of mercy and secondly, the measure of justice. Which do you want to be measured by? When we are the ones who are judging we typically push for justice. We want it proven right, but if we are the one who is sitting in the defendants seat, we would like other people to exercise mercy toward us.

Some of us struggle with a double standard in our judgement. If a teenage girl gets pregnant we know she has sinned. The Bible is very clear about fornication. So what's our manner toward her? Do we insist the sinner be punished and banished? If so do we then apply that same standard to ourselves? Perhaps we haven't committed the act or maybe we just didn't get caught. But what about our fantasies and lust, movies and reading material? Jesus has just mentioned earlier in this sermon that anyone who lusts has committed adultery in his heart. If we demand justice for others we ought to expect strict justice for ourselves...or do we? Some of us who are destructive critics want to hold double standards. They want mercy for themselves and justice for other people.

What about lying? We hate the co-workers and bosses who lie constantly to us. And we can't just say well those lies just don't matter. The Bible is very clear the lying is sin. But how do we respond? If we demand justice of them, then are we just as concerned with our own lies as we are with the lies of other people? Are we responding in justice or mercy? Do we apply the same measure to them as we do to ourselves? Do we ever shade the truth when we are telling stories? Do we ever exaggerate just to make ourselves look a little better? Do we lie about our taxes? Do we lie to our spouses trying to rationalize that if we told them it would hurt them and we really don't want to hurt them?

Do not get me wrong. Sin is wrong and must be challenged and dealt with. But what is the approach, the manner in dealing with the sin? Is it born out of mercy or justice? I don't know about you, but when I stand before God, I don't want justice...I want mercy. I'm going to need mercy. Sometimes we are so blind we just don't get it.

A middle manager was convicted of embezzling 100's of thousand of dollars from the corporation. But he was like a mother bear when it came to the office petty cash box. Everyday he made sure that every single penny had to be accounted for by the people that took from the

petty cash fund. He was real big on other people's accountability, but blindly oblivious to his own log-jam.

A few years back I remember watching a very popular TV preacher pace back and forth across the stage punching the air, weeping and railing against sexual sin and another TV preacher who had fallen morally. He did all this, even sitting in a judgement council until he himself was captured on film entering a hotel with a prostitute. The construction crew I was working with at the time had a field day of preacher jokes. This double standard is a horrible witness for the cause of the kingdom.

Sometimes we get so sure of ourselves that we fail to thoroughly, honestly examine our own hearts. James 1:22 challenges us to look in the mirror. Avoid that shallow self-exam. Look in the mirror and see if there are any blind spots that need to be surgically removed. In the Old Testament story, Nathan the prophet approached King David and told him about a rich powerful man who envied a poor man's prized sheep and went and stole the sheep right out from under the poor man. David once being a shepherd, was rather sensitive about anyone who would dare steal a sheep. He flew into a rage and ready to execute swift justice to this sheep stealer. But then Nathan pointed out David's blind spot and said, "You the man" as David had stolen his best friend's wife and then murdered to cover it up. David was all ready to execute justice for stealing sheep, but not for stealing wives. We all have blind spots and we need to wake up to our double standards. That hypocrisy may be concerned with sin...but it's not concerned with our own sin, it's only worried about the sins of others.

If we are really concerned about sin (and we certainly ought to be), we need to be concerned with becoming righteous ourselves. I know some of us are sitting here thinking, Boy, I sure hope she is over there listening good to this, I sure hope he is not asleep. Folks, this is about

you and I not them. We need to take some steps to get the log-jam out of our own life before we move to help others out. So..how can we do that? We certainly are going to need to help each other see what they cannot see, see the blind spots. So we come to point number three this morning: How can we best help others see their "Blind spots?" Look at verse 5 Hypocrite take the log out of your own eye first, then you will see clearly enough to help your brother take the speck out of his eye. Moral instruction must begin with moral integrity, authenticity before God. Before you go about helping others with an eye surgery, first make sure you yourself have at least the big logs out of your own eye. It's far easier for me to take criticism from somewhat who is at least relatively log-jam free. If you are not mostly right with God, then it's best for you to keep the critical comments to yourself. They won't come out right and your lack of integrity will negate their influence for the positive good. We need to be able to see clearly enough to help out other. The more clearly we can see the better shape we will be able to help.

Practically here is something I would like us to begin doing. Think of a close friend who loves you and knows you well and I want you to ask them; "Hey, level with me...are there any blind-spots or log-jams you see in my life that I'm simply blind to?" Then when they are honest enough to tell you the truth, don't go jump all over them and defend yourself. Tell them thanks...if you still don't see it pray about it. Ask God to reveal truth to you. If we are going to help others see their blind-spots, we are going to need to be open to working on our own. Remember Jesus assumes that we all have blind-spots and log-jams.

Secondly, we need to approach other peoples blinds-pots with a personal humility and brokenness. Remember the first beatitude in chapter 5 Happy are those who recognize how beggarly poor in spirit they really are. Blessed are those who weep for their own sinfulness and long for God's mercy. Once we recognize the need and sinfulness of our own

self and hunger and thirst for righteousness and have cast our own selves in reckless abandon upon His grace...we will no longer judge in a destructive and condemning way. It is a person who knows they have been forgiven who is more willing forgive. A forgiven person is a forgiving person.

Thirdly, exercise loving care and tenderness as you expose other people's blind spots. The eye is one of the most sensitive parts of the body. We must take great care and gentleness when we seek to perform optical surgery on a friend of ours. The hammer and crowbar are not the tools of an eye surgeon. Jesus warns us the importance of the "manner in which we judge" What is our attitude? Is our desire to crush, ruin and condemn? Or do we desire to restore and challenge and build up? Do we want to kick others down or lift them up? Which do you want God to measure you by? Justice or mercy? We all have blind-spots and log-jams in our life and God wants us to help each other see them and work on them...but lets help each other out of love and mercy and forgiveness as we remember how much we ourselves have been forgiven.