



## **Matthew 7:3–5**

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? 4 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? 5 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.

## Reflection

Yesterday we began the final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount which, as we've seen time and time again is all about what it looks like to live as members of the kingdom of God. And yesterday Jesus made it abundantly clear that being judgmental and overly critical towards each other has no place in kingdom life. He said so memorably, powerfully, and with great foreboding.

7 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 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.

Having stated the truth clearly and mem-

orably Jesus today illustrates his truth with characteristic flair. Imagine sitting amongst the crowds listening intently as Jesus paints this picture:

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? 4 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?”

And people say that there is no humour in the bible! After a sharp rebuke about judging each other imagine how the crowds would have laughed as Jesus illustrates his point. The humour would have taken the sting out of his message, but also made it wonderfully memorable, and even clearer

than before.

Perhaps Jesus is reminiscing about his years as a carpenter. Jesus paints a picture of one man struggling to see clearly, blinking vigorously, trying to get a tiny speck of sawdust out of his eye. Then along comes another man who starts trying to delicately help him, but he has no idea how to help, in fact he's mostly blind because there's a huge plank of wood that is sticking out of his own face. Far from doing any good, someone's going to lose an eye and probably get their head bashed by a swinging plank in the process. It's hyperbole, it's exaggeration, it's funny and it's really effective.

In verse five Jesus addresses this judgmental person rushing in to knit-pick over

someone else's sin, completely blind to their own much larger sin, who's about to do far more damage than good. He looks at their plank and he says,

5 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.

You hypocrite, you don't know the first thing about getting wood out of eyes, look at the huge plank that is stuck in yours. And what's more you're completely blind, how on earth are you going to be able to offer any good advice or do any good at all in helping your brother or sister when you're practically blind yourself? Unless you remove that huge plank from your own eye then you're going to do some

real damage.

It's a stinging rebuke isn't it? Not only has Jesus warned the judgmental and overly critical Christian about their behaviour, but he's now parodying them, demonstrating what happens in a Christian community when they act on their tendencies. He's saying in his illustration that if you are judgmental and highly critical then you should never, ever interact with Christians around you, criticising the faults you see in them, until you've dealt with the hugely glaring problems within your own character. Because if you don't deal with your own faults firstly, then invariably you are going to do a lot of damage. Jesus is saying that acting out of a judgmental and hypercritical disposition is going to be highly destructive for the Christian community.

There's plenty to think over here isn't there? Firstly, I think it's important to note that Jesus is encouraging us to use our Christian maturity and our knowledge of God and his ways to help our brothers and sisters who are caught up in sin. If you've ever tried to do this you'll know how difficult and confronting and risky this can be – and yet here Jesus is encouraging us to do so, and experience tells us that when good advice is well received there is much gratitude and great reward. But, and it's a huge 'but,' before you rush in and help out your brother and sister you need to make doubly and triply sure that you've weighed and sifted your own character, that you've taken a good hard look at yourself, and that you're seeing clearly and humbly enough to be of real aid to

them.

Where does this passage find you? Are there blind spots in your Christian faith? Yesterday Jesus hit a raw nerve in people who are prone to complain and judge and be critical of others. Today he's suggesting that those people, which includes pretty much all of us to one degree or another, are also carrying around in themselves large doses of the faults that they're seeing in others. So as much as it may hurt why not have an honest moment right now and think about the things and people that you are most critical about. It might be a daily domestic failing of your husband or wife that you're carrying around very heavily. Or it might be a slackness you perceive in a ministry or an attitude at church. Jesus would have you stop straining to see



those specks just for a moment, and in a moment of introspection stop and double and triple check that you yourself aren't guilty of similar and even far bigger shortcomings. There's no excuse for your partner's inconsiderate behaviour but what about the more frequent and even more inconsiderate ways you might be treating them on a daily basis? Are the faults you're finding in them writ even larger in your own life, only they are too gracious to take you to task over them? There's no excuse for a lack of passion and organisation in the ministries at your church but if you haven't prayed even one word to God over the last 10 days then there is a far greater problem in your own backyard and in your current state it's pretty unlikely that you're the person God's going to use to reignite your church. Take this time

now. And if you are brutally honest it's going to hurt - but the rewards are great. You see once God has performed this surgery in your heart a whole lot of good is going to flow out of it, not least of which is that you're now going to see clearly and be wise enough and humble enough to be able to help others.

Then finish this time by praying. Chances are you may have uncovered some evidence of a critical spirit in your life. Thank God for revealing this to you. Confess this newfound sin to him and pray for his help in removing it. Pray for the self-restraint to hold back those words of criticism, the discipline and desire to push down those critical thoughts and instead turn your energies to renovating your own character after the likeness of his son.

I'll see you again tomorrow.