



## **Matthew 7:1–2**

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.

### **Reflection**

Jesus begins the last chapter of the Sermon on the Mount with a very famous couple of verses. These verses begin with ‘Do

not judge' – you've probably heard these words many times in your life, whether in Christian circles or from family and friends who aren't believers. The concept of not judging others is prevalent in our society. You see our society is post-Christian, which means it's a society that still holds the semblances of Christian values and yet has forgotten where many of these values came from. So not judging others, letting what's right for them be what's right for them, not imposing your beliefs on other people, has become part of the post-modern cultural air that we breathe. 'Don't judge others' is a part of Christianity that almost all people are willing to subscribe to and has become a charge that is thrown back at Christians who take outspoken views in society. 'Didn't Jesus say not to judge others? And yet here you are judging us.'

Even William Shakespeare was drawn to these verses writing a whole play entitled 'Measure for Measure.' Holidaying in Fiji recently I spied a tattoo on the arm of a lovely Fijian man, no doubt a left-over from a misspent youth which said, 'Only God has the right to judge me.'

Such is the power of the wisdom of Jesus. A few words from Jesus gets everyone talking. These few words from Jesus, even two thousand years on are still shaping our culture, whether people know it or not, even if these words as often as not are being misinterpreted. As we've seen time and time again there's deep wisdom in the words of Jesus, but exactly because of this depth, we need to work hard to make sure we understand him correctly. And so many of his sayings are so easy to

say and remember, but often hard to understand, and even harder to do. Today's passage is no exception.

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.

So firstly, what does this mean? ‘Do not judge.’ What? No law courts, no judicial system, surely not? From a God whose very heart beats for justice and righteousness and equity? Are Christians not to aspire to works of justice in this world as lawyers defending the vulnerable and the good order of society, and as judges using their God given wisdom to bless our nation? Of course this is not what Jesus means.

‘Do not judge.’ What? No critical thinking, no discernment, no sifting and weighing our thoughts and actions against the precepts of Scripture? ‘Do not judge.’ Surely Jesus doesn’t mean to suspend all critical thinking and just kind of gloss over the wrongs that we see committed and the shortcomings that we see in ourselves and our society? ‘Don’t judge.’ Surely Jesus doesn’t mean to just sit idly by, and voicelessly put up with the ravages of sin that ruins the lives of people we love. Again, of course this isn’t what Jesus means.

In these verses Jesus is warning us about being judgmental, being hypercritical, being overly critical of others. He’s warning us about being the type of person who’s always ready to find fault in others, and even makes sport of it. It’s a trap I think

that we can all easily fall into but Jesus is warning us that it makes for a dangerous game. It's dangerous because he goes on to say,

‘with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.’

And this isn't an isolated warning. We've heard echoes of this warning before haven't we? Do you remember in the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:7, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy,' and in the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:12 'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors'. The stamp of our identity as members of the Kingdom of God includes showing mercy, and forgiving others, and in a similar vein today Jesus is saying it also includes not being hypercritical, not

being judgmental.

Paul expresses the foolishness and danger of living like this in Romans 14:4 when he says,

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Elsewhere he further warns us with great wisdom,

It is the Lord who judges ... Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the mo-

tives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

In these verses Paul is saying two things. Firstly, we are in no place to judge. It is the Lord's place to judge, not ours – how dare we? And secondly, again, we are in no place to judge. And by this I mean not only is it the Lord's place, but also we are in no place to judge because we can have no real idea about a person's true situation, the true motivations of their heart.

Ray Smith puts it like this:

‘There are two good reasons why we should not be hypercritical and judgmental. First, we are never fully acquainted with all the facts. If we were fully acquainted with a person's past and present cir-

cumstances we may understand their behaviour better. Rather than condemn them we may be amazed at their progress and more inclined to make allowances. A second reason for not being judgemental is because it is almost impossible for us to be impartial.' We are simply in no position to judge.

## **Think**

It is a rare person who is not brought up short by today's passage. So please take some time now and meditate over Jesus' words. Are you overly critical? Is it your habit to go around pretending that you're God, taking his place, and pronouncing judgement on those around you? To my shame it isn't hard to see shades of myself in these words – how about you? We've

seen Jesus take aim at this type of self-righteousness several times in the Sermon on the Mount to date. Is being hypercritical perhaps an area where you are like the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law? Even secular culture that has so muddled up Jesus' wisdom in these verses has a parable that brings us all down to size in this area, I'm sure you know it, 'those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.' How can you put down the stones today? When are you tempted to reach for the stones? In what situations, in what frame of mind? Is it out of frustration in a work context that you bring out those cutting words, or those belittling thoughts? Has this hypercritical attitude crept into your thinking about ministry at church? What's the real problem here, the root cause? Is it really them or could pride and superior-

ity be creeping into your heart?

## **Pray**

Please take these thoughts to Jesus in prayer. If you're like me you'll begin by asking for his forgiveness and then you'll pray for his ongoing help. Please spending some time praying now and we'll think further on this again tomorrow.