



Matthew 7:6

6 “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Reflection

I have to confess that I've never fully understood this verse. Jesus has just told us not to judge people and then imme-

diately after Matthew records him calling certain people dogs and pigs. And what if any connection is there to the verses that come before? We've just seen Jesus issue a strong warning to the judgmental, and then go on to condemn them as hypocrites if they go around finding fault in others. Yet here Jesus is calling people dogs and pigs and then speaking cryptically about sacred things and pearls which partly seems like he's giving us contradictory advice, and largely seems like it has very little to do with what comes before. Is this then just a random saying of Jesus that Matthew has bolted on here, or is there a connection with the first five verses of the chapter? And can Jesus really be encouraging us to judge certain people as dogs and pigs and have nothing to do with them? Doesn't this run against

what he's just taught us about not judging others but also go against the whole missionary focus of the Christian faith? So, I've always struggled with this verse.

Let's briefly look at each of these problem areas in turn. Firstly Jesus does classify some people in this verse as dogs and pigs. Jesus rarely holds back when he speaks; he always calls a spade a spade. Elsewhere Jesus calls Herod a 'fox,' and he calls the Pharisees and teachers of the law a lot of names like 'brood of vipers' and 'whitewashed tombs.' What does Jesus mean by dogs and pigs? Well, he doesn't mean cute lap-dogs and modern domesticated animals, he means the feral dogs and pigs of his day that were dangerous and extremely unclean – you needed to watch out for them. Some people are like

this Jesus says. Don't be judgemental but categorically some people are dogs and pigs says Jesus. You see Jesus is trying to balance out two extremes. Christians aren't to be overly critical of each other, because being hypercritical and proud shows little to no self-awareness before God and acting on these impulses is destructive to Christian community. But in the same way, Christians aren't to be fools. People betray the true motivations of their hearts in the way they act and Jesus is saying that some people clearly act like dogs and pigs; you can tell what they're like by how they live. So don't be hypercritical of people, humbly remember your own faults; but equally don't be a fool and turn a blind and accepting eye to people's obvious character flaws. I think Jesus has in mind here especially those who are an-

ti-Christianity and demonstrate it clearly by the way they live.

But in some ways this creates a greater problem. 'OK, so out of a humble and self-aware heart we're not to be fools, we can call a spade a spade, and especially so when people's behaviours clearly demonstrate that they aren't Christian or are even hostile to Christianity. But aren't these type of people exactly those who need to hear the gospel? Aren't these the types of people we're trying to get alongside? What does Jesus mean when he says "not to give them what is sacred," that it is dangerous to do so, and in fact he seems to be suggesting not to associate with them at all?'

Well, here I think is where the connection

with yesterday's passage comes in. People who act in the extreme ways that Jesus is suggesting by calling them dogs and pigs clearly aren't Christians. Yesterday Jesus was gently encouraging us to admonish and rebuke our brothers and sisters in Christ, to point out and help them remove the 'specks of dust' in their eyes that were troubling them and help them to be able to see clearly and come to greater maturity in their faith. In today's passage I think Jesus is referring to these gentle rebukes and guidance from mature Christians as a sacred and precious thing, like a pearl. And it's true isn't it? The book of Proverbs celebrates words like these with verses like 'a word in season, how good it is.' A timely word from a mature Christian can save you from all sorts of problems down the track. A word about the dangers of dating

non-Christians, a word about wisely stewarding the money that God has given you , a word about raising your children well or advice on what Jesus wants for your marriage – a timely word of wisdom can save you from all sorts of trouble down the track. ‘A word in season, how good it is’ – even if in the moment it is a gentle rebuke.

However Jesus is warning here that while these gentle words of correction are sacred and precious to Christians, don't direct them towards people who are hostile to Christianity. Not only will they be wasted and trampled under their feet; but your words will incite them and they may turn nastily on you. Jesus isn't saying here don't interact and share the gospel with people outside of the faith; but he is say-

ing that it is foolish and dangerous to try and rebuke unbelievers for their way of life as if they were Christians. Far from creating a gospel opportunity, most likely to do this will cause such animosity that not only will you never get a chance again to share the gospel with them but you also may find yourself in great personal danger. Like Proverbs 9:8 says,

‘Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you.’

So don't be judgemental, don't be hyper-critical, don't be self-righteous and blind to your own shortcomings. But if you are humble, and self-aware, and repentant and mature in your faith then equally don't shy away from helping your brothers and

sisters overcome their sin. However, whatever you do don't berate unbelievers for not living according to Christian principles. They need the gospel, not rules. Share the gospel with them, and once they've received Christ who is the wisdom of God, that's when they'll be open to some gentle correction and guidance in his ways.

Think

Please take some time now to think about today's passage. Think about how you interact with people outside of the faith. Are your conversations always seasoned with salt? Always gracious and interesting and intent on leading people gradually to Christ? Or are you occasionally harsh and judgmental? Do you find yourself looking down on people who aren't Christians,

as if somehow they are supposed to live up to the heights of our faith that we ourselves so often aren't even keeping? The heights that when we do attain have very little to do with our efforts and so much to do with his grace? And also think about the dangers of making stands and ultimatums in hostile environments. What is Jesus teaching us today in terms of the way we relate to people outside of the faith?

Pray

Then close this time today by praying for wisdom in these areas. Pray particularly that your friends and family and work colleagues and neighbours across the fence would come to know Jesus out of the way you live around them and the way you speak his words to them.

And tomorrow Jesus turns back to prayer.
I look forward to seeing you then.