



Luke 6:37

37 ‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Reflection

Today’s passage comes from Jesus’ ‘Sermon on the Level Place’ in chapter 6 of Luke’s gospel. We’ve been enjoying this sermon over the past couple of weeks in which one commentator has said Jesus

‘levels’ with his disciples about the true cost of following him. The teaching is rich and hard. Jesus’ words are radically countercultural. He’s describing the nature of the kingdom of God which sits in stark contrast to the kingdom of this world, to the narratives of the culture that surrounds us and that we so often subconsciously buy into. And so it has been heavy going, but also deeply rewarding, as Jesus describes what membership in the kingdom of God entails.

Just one verse again today, just a few words from Jesus that would turn our world upside down if only we would follow him in them. Let me read those words to you, from Luke 6:37, where Jesus says to his followers,

37 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

I absolutely love it when Scripture explains Scripture. And this means that today you're going to hear less of me and more of Jesus. Because, I think, no-one explains this passage better than Jesus in his Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18. So again, here are Jesus' words in Luke 6:37,

37 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

And here is Jesus' explaining judgment,

condemnation and forgiveness from Matthew 18:21–35,

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’ 22 Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23 ‘Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26 ‘At this the servant fell on his knees before him.

“Be patient with me,” he begged, “and I will pay back everything.” 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. 28 ‘But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. “Pay back what you owe me!” he demanded. 29 ‘His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, “Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.” 30 ‘But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32

‘Then the master called the servant in. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 ‘This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’

They say that pictures paint a thousand words but when Jesus paints pictures with his words it is a sight to behold. Today’s passage in Luke wraps together themes of judgment, condemnation and forgiveness and what Jesus has just described

for us in Matthew 18, for mine, perfectly treats these three in kind.

‘Do not judge,’ Jesus begins, ‘and you will not be judged.’ But oh how we want to judge the unmerciful servant in his parable! But the problem is that the measure we use will be used against us. What a fool he is, how shallow not to pass on the generosity he’s received, how irresponsible to wrack up such impossible debts, how disrespectful to his master, how corrupt! But with his shocking twist Jesus turns the measure we use back against us. Aren’t we just like this unmerciful servant? What a fool we are to look down at others considering our standing with respect to our own merits before our holy God? How shallow are we, given the blessings that we have received from him, not to

be constantly pouring ourselves out for others? When we consider our own moral bankruptcy before God, the debt that this servant ran up with his master pales into insignificance; his corruption nothing compared to our former way of lives.

Jesus continues,

Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.

Condemnation is a close cousin to judgment, perhaps simply the next step. If judging someone is looking down up them and speaking harshly about their shortcomings then perhaps condemnation is writing them off entirely. But again, the sheer hypocrisy of those who were utterly unable to save themselves and who were

redeemed, saved, brought back from the brink through nothing that we've done or ever could have done, but only through the free and unmerited kindness of God ... the sheer hypocrisy to then condemn someone else, to write them off, just begs for the same fate of the unmerciful servant.

Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.

And yet this last one, the third part of this verse, holds the sting in its tale. Jesus has been warning us with his double-negatives.

‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.

But now the gloves really come off, as they did in the end for the unmerciful servant.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

The sub-text being, ‘But if you don’t forgive, if you keep judging and condemning others and refusing to forgive then the full wrath of our heavenly Master will come down upon you – judged, condemned and unforgiven for all eternity.’

Jesus’ teaching is intentionally shocking here. We might be tempted to ask, ‘Where is grace in all of this?’. We’re saved by grace (the unmerited kindness of God) and not by good works, so how can Jesus say that if we don’t stop judging people and condemning people and refusing to forgive

people then we will suffer the same fate into eternity?

The Bible is clear that we're saved by faith alone, there's nothing we can do to earn forgiveness, to pay back our enormous debt to God. Our only hope is grace; and this grace comes through faith alone; but equally, and to Jesus' point, faith is never alone. It's always followed by change. Otherwise it's not genuine faith at all. Jesus is teaching us here that if we've truly understood our standing before God and have truly been forgiven, if we're truly members of the kingdom of God, then we'll stop judging and condemning people and we'll also begin to forgive. You see grace transforms your heart. And a transformed heart leads to a transformed life.

Think & Pray

We've been saved by faith alone; but faith is never alone. Are you like the servant who's been forgiven a fortune and yet goes on living as if nothing has happened? Because if so, nothing has happened; you remain under the wrath of God. Genuine saving faith in Jesus changes lives. Rarely overnight, but gradually, inexorably, little by little until one day you realise that you are almost unrecognisable compared to who you once were. How is your transformation going? Do you look down on people? Are you prone to condemn people, to write them off? Do you find it very hard to forgive? If so then spend some time today thinking carefully over the positions you are taking with others while considering the grace Jesus has extended you.

Then pray today that the Holy Spirit would transform your wayward heart and mine so that we would lift up instead of tear down, that we would forgive instead of harbouring resentment, and that we would extend the grace towards others that we have so eagerly received from our Lord.