

The Life of Jesus

Sermon 12- Teaching on the mountain:

Good and bad judgment

Today, we're going to talk about good and bad judgment.

So, let me start the sermon by showing you a video clip of a rally car driver.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8I7Rs6-jYfQ>)

Obviously, the secret to good driving is good judgment. Good judgment starts with good eyesight. **But before I go any further with that idea**, let me quickly do a bit of review of where we are in Matthew's Gospel.

Jesus has gathered a crowd of new recruits on a mountainside near the fishing village of Capernaum. It is a motley crew of men and women from different walks of life... a group of people with only one shared interest—**they all want change!** They are tired of Roman occupation and subjugation, and so they've come to Jesus hoping that He will lead them in a revolution!

And, surprisingly, Jesus takes up the call! But it's not the revolution they were expecting. Instead of a *political revolution* of coup d'états or a *violent revolution* of forceful overthrows, the revolution that Jesus leads into is nothing less than **a revolution of their eyes! That is, He is going to change the way they see the world!**

To accomplish this, the first thing Jesus does is to instil in them is the idea that the invisible "**Kingdom of Heaven**" is all around them...pressing in on them. "**Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near**", he says back in Matthew 4! God, our heavenly Father, is truly with us!

Secondly, Jesus points out the sorts of people who are best equipped to see this invisible Kingdom—the poor, the outcast, the lonely, the grieving, those who are compassionate, those who seek justice, those who are persecuted for righteousness, etc. According to Jesus, these are the ones who are '*blessed*'—*blessed* because they are not satisfied with the things this world offers; *blessed* because they have already begun to allow God to open their eyes to the invisible reality of God's Heavenly Kingdom!

But there's more! The third aspect of Jesus' *revolution of the eyes* is the way that He will now lead *these people* (who have just begun to see the invisible Kingdom) to become 'God's agents of change' in the world around them. They are "*the salt of the earth*"! They are "*the light of the world*"! They are "*a city on a hill*"...the new Jerusalem. They are a new people who, by their ability to see the Kingdom of Heaven, will cause the nations to draw near and take notice!

Central to this revolutionary idea were the verses we read two weeks ago: "***If your eyes are good your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.***"

As I've been saying, this is **the real revolution** that Jesus came to initiate on earth-- a **revolution of the eyes**—a **revolution** in which this motley crew of people who were gathered around Jesus on that Capernaum mountainside would be used by God to spread His Kingdom of love and peace throughout the world.

With that context in mind, let's turn to today's passage from **Matthew 7!**

Now, it shouldn't surprise us that, once more, Jesus is talking about eyesight! This time, however, Jesus is not talking so much about **seeing** the invisible Kingdom of Heaven. This time, **He's talking about the way we see each other.** (This is obviously a product of seeing the Kingdom of Heaven.)

"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. 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."

How do you see other people? Do you see them with *good eyes* or *bad eyes*? For the fact is that, before I can correctly evaluate the full reality about another person, I need to have *good eyes*; I need *healthy eyes*; I need eyes that can accurately *discern* between truth and falsehood; eyes that can separate rumour from reality. I need **good eyes** to make **good judgments!**

This is a simple fact of life.

- We saw this with the rally car driver in that YouTube clip. Good eyes meant good judgment—he kept the car on the road!
- Here’s another example-- Kim loves to do needlepoint. But even before she attempts to thread a needle, she has to put on her glasses. She needs *good eyes* in order to make the *good judgment* necessary to thread that needle. She needs good eyes in order to judge where to poke that needle through the canvas! Good eyes mean she can make good judgments.
- Here’s another example: Have you ever had **surgery**? Surgeons requires good eyes—eyes that can see with such clarity as to guide their hands to perform very delicate and precise operations. (I listened to a radio program on Friday about a brain surgeon! They insert a probe...!) Only with *good eyes* can the surgeon can make *good judgments* about where (and where not) to cut!

If you understand this connection between *good eyes* and *good judgment* in daily life, you’ll quickly realise that, what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 7 is **not whether we judge others**, but **how we judge others**! For the fact is that all of us are constantly judging others! That’s the way that God has made us. (If someone comes at me with a knife, I make a judgment that says, “Run!” But, if someone comes at me with a piece of chocolate cake, I make a judgment that says, “Smile...and salivate!”) Yes, we automatically make judgments about others, but the real issue is, **“Do we judge them with *good* or *bad* eyes?”**

Sadly, our eyesight isn’t always very good!

Imagine that I see you coming to church on Sunday. *What might be some factors that could cause me to have bad eyesight towards you* and, therefore, judge you in a bad way?

- You might be someone who has hurt me in the past. My desire for revenge stops me from seeing you clearly, as you are today.
- You might remind me of someone who once hurt me. I can’t really see you clearly because of my old wounds.
- My eyesight of you may be blurred by rumours or hearsay about you. Because I don’t have all the facts, I easily misjudge you.
- I may be jealous of you and that stops me from seeing you clearly.
- I may have a certain prejudices towards “people like you” (you’re wealthy, poor, obese, Asian, etc.) which obscures my eyesight.

These are the “logs” in my eye; the issues that obscure my vision of others. These are the things I must deal with. Why? Because, when I judge with **bad eyes**, I tend to *write-off the other person, without ever taking the time to get to know or understand them*. When I judge with **bad eyes**, I can easily end up treating other human beings as sub-human—as if they were an **‘it’**, and not a **‘Thou’**.

You might be aware that **Fred Phelps** died this past week. Phelps was the founder of *Westboro Baptist Church* in Topeka, Kansas. Most famously, he was the “*God hates*” guy... as in “*God Hates China*” (its divorce rates are too high), “*God Hates Islam*” (for being a false religion), “*God Hates Qatar*” (for being rich) “*God Hates The Media*” (for saying mean things about Westboro), and “*God Hates Tuvalu*” (for having too many holidays). To spread this message of hate across America, Phelps and his followers took up placards, marched in front of churches who opposed him, and paid for huge billboards all across the USA. Most notoriously, in Phelps’ “*God Hates America*” campaign, he and his followers applauded the deaths of American soldiers and picketed their funerals, boldly proclaiming that their deaths on foreign soil represented God's judgment on the tolerant attitudes of Americans towards homosexuality.

Indeed, this is exactly the type of judgment that Jesus so often found amongst the Pharisees. They had bad eyes; eyes that were motivated by greed, religious pride and power. Their eyes were further weakened by their lack of compassion and an unwillingness to enter into (or take any account of) another person’s unique and particular life circumstances. Hence, they regularly made bad judgments of people. The *woman caught in adultery* (John 8) is a case in point—she was a sinner, it’s true, but the fact is, **Jesus didn’t condemn her!** Why not? Because Jesus carried no baggage—that is, He took no account of the rumours; He held no prejudice against her; and she didn’t remind Him of some evil person in the past! Jesus’ eyes were clear, and that meant that **He could see the woman for who she was! Moreover**, He was free to take into account all the factors that may have pushed her into prostitution. That’s why, at the end, the only thing He says to her is, “**Woman, go and sin no more.**” Jesus judged her with *good eyes*!

Fred Phelps is now dead, and it makes me wonder: As he now stands before His Maker, what is Jesus saying to him? I mean, did Phelps really believe Jesus’ words in Matthew 7 didn’t apply to him?

“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 far in this sermon, I've talked a lot about **bad eyes**. What do **good eyes** look like?

Back in 1923, the great Jewish theologian, Martin Buber, wrote a brilliant book called, *'I and Thou'*. The title comes from Buber's central idea, that the most mature relationship possible between humans beings is the **"I-Thou"** relationship. According to Buber, the **"I-Thou"** relationship begins when I acknowledge that you, like me, bear God's image! When I look at you, the first thing I must recognise is that you are a fellow traveller in this world, and that you have a unique and separate existence to mine... an existence *given from God*. This is the reason why I give you the respect, honour and appreciation that you deserve. This is why I listen to you and encourage you to express your own opinion. This is why I value your point of view and appreciate your experiences. **"I-Thou"!**

This is what **healthy eyes** do. *Healthy eyes* not only enable us to see the invisible *Kingdom of Heaven*, but they allow us to see *other people* as worthy of respect, compassion and love. When Christ's disciples *see* through the lens of genuine **'I-Thou'** relationships, only then will we be agents of God's love, engaged in the expansion of God's Kingdom on earth.

That's why I say that **the problem isn't purely about judging others**. The problem is whether or not we have the good eyes needed to make **good judgments**.

Indeed, **what we must not forget** is that when Jesus talks about having *good eyes* and making *good judgments*, He doesn't always mean *being nice* and welcoming to everyone! In the final two verses of today's passage, Jesus talks about pigs and dogs. In Jesus' day, pigs and dogs were unclean animals. Not only were they unfit for human consumption, they were unworthy of being treated as pets and brought into your house! Jesus' point is simple: In the same way that you judge these animals correctly and keep them outside, so there will be times when *good eyes* will need to make *judgments* that go against certain people! *With good eyes*, we may have to strongly oppose that which is impure and which can defile us.

Once you understand this, you can make sense of the second passage we read today, from **1 Corinthians 5**. In this passage, Paul speaks about an immoral man in the church there who was having sexual relations with his own mother (or perhaps it was his mother-in-law.) What Paul tells his readers is instructive. Verse 5-- **"Even though I am not physically present...I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present."** Does this mean that Paul has contradicted Jesus'

command not to judge? Not at all! Paul has first checked to make his own eyes are healthy. Then, like a skilled surgeon, he has decided to cut off this man who, by his foul practices, was contaminating the rest of the body of Christ. Paul's healthy eyes enabled him to make a healthy judgment...a judgment that brought health to a sick church.

That's why it's so imperative that our eyes are healed-- so that, with *good eyes*, we can make *good judgments*! Just imagine a world where people *see clearly enough* to help those who cannot yet see clearly! Imagine those with *good eyes* helping to heal those with *bad eyes*, leading them into making *good judgments*! What a wonderful world this would be! This is the picture that Jesus is ultimately painting here:

⁵ **... first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**"

Only those with *good eyes (healthy eyes)* can make *good (healthy)* judgments. **If, as Christians, you and I become known for making *good judgments in life***, there is every good reason that others will be attracted to the way we see the world and will want us to help them to see better! They will ask us to judge the speck that is in their eye and skilfully remove it! If we have healthy eyes, we will be a beacon to those with bad eyes *who want healing*, not only for themselves, but healing for the whole world!

Do you have healthy eyes? Can you trust yourself to see clearly enough to make healthy judgments? If not, then let Jesus' words be a warning to you to **keep quiet**...and ask others to come around you and help pull the log from your eye.

Isn't this the revolution that Jesus initiated 2000 years ago? Isn't this the revolution for which, ironically, Jesus was crucified! Bad eyes led to bad judgments about Him... and that's why we nailed Him to a cross!

How desperately this world needs His revolution of the eyes!

Let's pray.