

One of the things that we normally do is to judge other people very quickly by very high standards and we excuse ourselves while we keep doing the same thing. Our theme for this morning is, "Judge not and you will not be judged." Jesus is teaching his disciples and gives them four exhortations on judgment.

How do we understand Jesus's teaching about not judging others? There are many times when we use this for our convenience. For.e.g, if a student gets drunk in a campus and has to be disciplined then his friends rally around him saying, "Judge not that you will be judged." Or can we say that if a thief is caught and brought before a judge that he should not judge the same. The crux of understanding this phrase comes from Jesus's teaching saying, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

The righteousness of a Pharisee was for public display. They wanted everybody else to know how good they were and how terrible others were. Jesus talks about two extremes. The first extreme is a harsh critical spirit and the other is permissiveness. As Jesus looked at the religious situation of his day he saw that judging others had become a greater religious problem. The judgment here is not about making an ethical judgment. The idea is that of a judgemental and censorious attitude towards others which holds them down in guilt but never seeks to encourage them to God. The Pharisees were arrogant and they reacted with hostility to the people of the world and those who were morally lax as though they were beyond God's saving grace. In Luke 18 we see an example of this where a Pharisee prays and thanks God saying that he is grateful to God for not being like the other men- the robbers, evil doers. Adulterers or even like the tax collector who was present in the synagogue. The tax collector on the other side beat his breast and cried out to God saying, "God have mercy on me, a sinner." The Pharisee was arrogant and the tax collector was humble. And so the challenge for us is not to be critical of other people and judging others always, while we are secretly patting ourselves on the back thinking we are better than them.

Jesus also tells us not to condemn others so that we will not be condemned and to forgive others so we will also be forgiven. Due to our prejudices we can never see anything good in the people we do not like. We see them through coloured lenses and we condemn them saying that they do not have any hope of redemption. This tendency of pride and superiority leads to spiritual arrogance. Jesus is warning us about this arrogant attitude. When it comes to forgiveness Jesus commands us to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us. Again the point that is made is not about the law courts where the wicked are to be forgiven and set free. What is warned against is evaluating others with such harshness and treating ourselves with leniency that the result is an unforgiving attitude which seems to suggest that someone is beyond God's reach. However, the cross is the ultimate example for us. Just as Jesus forgave others and us, we too are called to forgive others freely.

Jesus talks about giving freely. When we give our time, talents and money to God then we will be blessed. Our cup will always be overflowing and there will be no shortage. We are to give a good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over to others while we do this God will also bless us. This generosity need not be equated with prosperity since it is God's forgiveness and absence of condemnation that are in view.

Jesus uses a parable saying, "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" The caution is about whom we follow as our role model and idol. All of us are human beings and therefore have short comings and are not perfect. Therefore the only person we can follow is Jesus himself. When we come to a relationship with Jesus then our blinded spiritual eyes are open. So if a person does not know Jesus and leads or preaches or teaches, then they are like the blind leading the blind. Jesus also reminds us that a student is not above his teacher, likewise a disciple is not to be overconfident but they ought to follow Jesus. Finally Jesus says that we should not pay attention to the speck of sawdust in our brothers' eyes while we fail to see the plank in our own eyes. The image is very vivid and comical. Imagine a log sticking out of our eye while we are trying to remove a speck from another person's eye. Jesus wants us to remove our own hypocrisy before we judge others. Judge not so that we may not be judged.