



November 22, 2016

feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dear Church Family,

Judge not, that you be not judged. Last time we looked at this verse in Luke 6, but on Sunday we looked at it in Matthew 7. There it is linked with some of the same teaching as in Luke 6, verses 1-5, but it is also linked in Matthew with verses 6-11. I have been familiar with the teachings of these verses, "pearls before pigs" and "ask and it will be given to you", but more as stand-alone teachings than arising from their immediate context. Yet verse 12 ("*So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*") is a concluding statement, indicating that the previous material in 1-11 could be viewed as a unit.

The most common understanding of 7:6 ("*Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.*") is that this is about not wasting what is precious on those who will not appreciate it. If it is related to verses 1-5, it is viewed as a counterpoint to do not judge. That there are some situations where you are to judge people as hostile and dangerous and to avoid them. There have been objections to this interpretation and it is often accompanied by warnings about using it wrongly and judging someone unworthy of what is holy or pearls (especially if pearls are understood as the gospel).

What if it is a continuation of what Jesus is teaching about judgment and not a counterpoint? The holy things and pearls are not the gospel but are the judgments of believers or disciples. They are precious, if accurate, because they keep someone on the narrow path which leads to life. And a life built upon them, since they will be based on the teachings of Jesus, is built on a rock and not the sand. They have great value. But they may not have great value to the people you are attempting to share them with. Just like dogs have no use for the holy and pigs have no use for pearls, no matter how precious and valuable they are. The traditional understanding of this verse emphasizes the lesson of not wasting precious things on those who will not appreciate them. But that is not actually the lesson that Jesus emphasizes. The motive for not sharing the holy things and pearls is not about wasting them, it is about not being attacked because of sharing them. Thinking of that, this fits well with sharing judgment, particularly moral judgment, with many in our day. With this view of this verse, the teaching is to be discerning of how others are going to receive your judgments. It is not enough to have your own assessment of their value. We must also be aware of how others will view them.

Jesus use of "dogs" and "pigs" can be disturbing. Later in Matthew 15 Jesus responds to the Canaanite woman seeking deliverance for her daughter, "*It is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs.*" Jesus does heal the woman's daughter, but for our purposes this reference points to "dogs" and "pigs" in 7:6 as unbelievers, while verses 1-5 is about judging believers. And rather than teaching that people who are dogs and pigs do not deserve these good things, Jesus appears to be teaching that it those who are sharing judgment who are foolish and deserve to be attacked because of how inappropriate it is for them to be sharing these judgments. We do not blame the pigs for trampling pearls under their feet and becoming angry if they expected food. We blame the person who gave them the pearls.

So, we looked at how many in our day view judgments of right and wrong, seeking to understand from their perspective, their values and concerns, what we are giving them if we share our moral judgments about their conduct or perspectives. The idea that there is right and wrong is often viewed as a restriction on a person's freedom to pursue their own happiness. We, as biblical Christians, have a very different view of who humans are by nature and therefore what is best than many in the world. Are

we autonomous individuals who flourish when we are given maximum opportunity to seek our own good? Or are we created to be in relationship with God and we will only flourish when we align ourselves with His good? Christian morality is often counter-intuitive to the way that people naturally think about their desires and their lives. Jesus pointed this out with sayings like Lk 7:23 *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."* People are looking to maximize their lives, not deny themselves in ways that appear to be losing their lives. They have as much use for Christian morality as hungry pigs have for pearls. So, our judgments based in Christian truth will be received by people as restrictive of their freedom to pursue their own happiness in their lives. If that is how they see the judgments, how do you expect them to react to them?

This pursuit of self-fulfillment can be characterized as self-centered and self-indulgent, but we also need to be aware of the profound identity issues involved. More and more, people are trying to construct their identity not in their relationship to others but in relationship to themselves. There is a radical individuality where self-esteem, viewing myself and what I find within myself as valuable and commendable, becomes hugely important. This identity based upon me as an individual contributes to our society's aversion to judgment and sin. The very idea is perceived as not just old fashioned but psychologically unhealthy. Judgment attacks my perception of myself as praiseworthy and commendable. My self-esteem cannot handle the idea that something about me is not okay.

We were not created to find our sense of identity in ourselves, we were created to find it in a relationship with God. All who are attempting to do this have a very shaky sense of identity. It is not enough for them to esteem or affirm themselves, they need others to do that as well. We see this being played out in politics. Dale Kuehne, author of Sex and the iWorld writes in 2009, "if it is true that we need others to help us get a sense of who we are, then in a very real sense our well-being is dependent on the affirmation of others. Consequently, the iWorld asks the government to go to every length possible to make sure that we are affirmed in the manner we wish to be and to restrict those who might deny us this reassurance...It has become a political imperative that everyone receive as much social affirmation as possible in their quest to have their perceived identity authenticated. This has provided the impetus for governments to expand and enforce nondiscrimination laws, and to see to it that the lifestyles and identities of its citizens are affirmed to the greatest degree possible." People are craving affirmation to have a solid sense of self, in order to escape a place of shame and self-condemnation. How is such a person going to receive judgment that says they are wrong? They will reject it in order to not reject themselves.

Where does that leave us as a people of judgment and how we relate to unbelievers in our lives? We are in 7:6, unable to effectively share what is holy and precious because it will be received as threatening. The only response we will get from many is an attack because they feel as if they are being attacked. What do we do with our concern for them and the wide path they are on or that they are building their lives on sand? This is where v. 7-11 fits with its focus on prayer. For me, this passage would fit better at the end of chapter 6 as a response to not being anxious about what we need to live on. Yet it appears here amid talking about judgment and our inability to share life giving judgment with unbelievers. We pray because we need people to be able to face the truth about sin and judgment, remembering what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit in John 16:7-8 *Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.*

As a people of judgment, we are to pray for what we often find ourselves unable to give to people. We are also to be light and show unbelievers that a life under God's judgment can flourish in Christ. More on that next time.

Thankful for God's Word,
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