

Great Verses of the Bible
Your Measuring Stick
Matthew 7:1-2
August 6, 2023
Pastor John Mars

Thank you, Jesus, for rain in the desert! It takes the smoke out of the air, settles the dust, refreshes the earth. So, thank You, God, for rain in the desert! Good morning, Church!

I'm going to read a passage of scripture today, taken from the 7th chapter of Matthew. It is a section of scripture known as the Sermon on the Mount. Hear Jesus' words to us. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." May God bless the reading of His Word.

Now, this is kind of part of the sermon, but kind of not. I have an announcement to make to the congregation. Company's coming! June 13th through the 16th, Central United Protestant Church has the privilege of hosting the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church. At Conference this year, it was announced that our District would be hosting the Conference. They were already in negotiation with me. I had not said "Yes" yet, because they hadn't answered some of my questions. But I spent two and a half hours with two representatives of our conference. And not only did I get all of my questions answered, when we got done I was excited about the possibility of Central United Protestant Church once again hosting the Annual Conference. Some of you will remember that you hosted the Annual Conference about 10 years ago. Others of you will remember that the Tri-Cities has hosted many Conferences in the past and Central was the site of many of the worship services. That will once again be the case. I have also been told that the Conference doesn't get serious about planning the Annual Conference until about January. So, stay tuned. I will keep you posted. If you have any questions, make sure you email them to me. So, next year has the potential of being a memorable year in the life of our church. Hopefully, it is memorable in a good way!

As I look back over my life, there have been years that were more memorable than others: some because of good things that happened, some because of bad things that happened, some of them because of transitions that happened or accomplishments. But the first major memorable year in my life was the year I was in the third grade. I'm serious! Third grade. It was my last year with my mother. She died just as I was beginning the fourth grade. She was battling cancer throughout that time. And so it was a memorable year in that way. It was also memorable in as much as we moved from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to South Central Mississippi. We moved from a Navy base, and I had never lived anywhere except on a Navy base, to my dad's ancestral home just south of Meridian, Mississippi: Quitman, Mississippi. I moved from a place where my best friends were a red-haired Irish kid, an African American kid, and a Filipino kid. We were the four amigos. We stayed at each other's houses, but mostly at my house, because I had a mangrove jungle right behind my house. And trust me when I tell you: There is nothing better for eight-year-old and nine-year-old boys than a mangrove jungle.

We moved to South Central Mississippi, where they had resisted integration for years. They were forced to integrate just before I got there. So, I finished through December on the Navy base, and in the first of January started in Mississippi. Now, if you are a military brat, you are taught to make friends quickly, because you may not have them very long. And so, first day of school, I go out for recess. I go to the first group of boys, and I promptly get beat up collectively by the bunch and run off. So, I went to the next group of boys. And I promptly got beat up collectively by them and run off. Now, why? Was it because I was new? Well, kinda. But you see, in January of 1971, little black boys did not play with little white boys. And so the first group beat me up. And then I went over to the group of white boys. And I got beat up by them because little white boys don't associate with little white boys who associate with little black boys. And that was my first day of school in Mississippi, kind of memorable.

Later that year, I got my first and only paddling in school. And yes, I went to school back when dinosaurs roamed the earth, and they still paddled kids in school. And the paddle that they used was designed to invoke fear. Quite literally, it was a wooden baseball bat that they had shaved the barrel down to where it was only a half an inch thick. They had drilled holes in it to reduce the air drag for maximum speed, and it hung prominently on the principal's wall. So, when you walked in, that was the first thing you saw. Here's what happened: I was on the playground again. I was using some of my dad's sailor language. My third-grade teacher heard me, and she jerked me up, got right in my face, and she said, "Young man, do you know Jesus?" And I said, "Jesus who?" Now, this is South Central Mississippi. Where I lived was called "the buckle of the Bible Belt." She could not conceive that I did not know who Jesus was. So, she marched me off to the principal's office. The principal could not conceive that I did not know Jesus, and I got a beating, and a bad one. What they did not know was that at that point in my life, I had never set foot in a church, not once. To my knowledge, I had never heard a hymn or a Christian song. There was nobody in my sphere of influence who was a Christian at all. Did I know that there was a God? Yes, I did. Did I have any concept of Christian or Jesus? I had no idea. But because of their preconceived ideas, I got a beating. Now you know a little bit more about me, don't you? Do you know enough to judge me? Well, probably not, but you say, "Well, that does explain some things!"

In our passage, Jesus condemns judging. Now, to His Jewish audience, this would have been very familiar. They believed that there were six works that got you credit here on earth and profit in heaven. Those works were: studying the Torah, visiting the sick, practicing hospitality, devotion in prayer, educating children in the law, and last but not least, thinking the best of people. Thinking the best of people. Have you ever been guilty of not thinking the best of people? Do you find yourself from time to time struggling to think the best of people? We've all had those difficulties. There are many of us who have a very dark worldview. Let's be honest. We have a dark worldview, maybe because of what we think we know, maybe because of what we have experienced, maybe because of what we fill our minds with. But we have a dark worldview. And it's hard to think the best of people when you have a dark worldview. We live in a polarized society, do we not? We live in a polarized society. At every turn, we are taught not to trust, to be suspicious, to judge. I mean, there are people out there who are Republicans. Now, you see, I said that for that reaction. I know where I'm at. I know where I'm at. Christians would not be guilty of judging people solely based on their political affiliation, would they? Hmm. Maybe we should think about this a little bit more: that judging thing. There is a Spanish proverb that says: To know all is to forgive all; and to forgive all is to love all. To know all is to forgive all; and to forgive all is to love all.

There are four reasons I want to touch on today of why we should not judge. The first one is the easiest one: Jesus said so. And if you're a follower of Jesus, that's all you need. Jesus said so. But there are other reasons as well. You never know all the facts or the whole person. That's the reason I got my first beating in school, and only one, because my teachers and my principal didn't know all the facts. They did not know me, and because of their prejudice, they refused to know me. We do not know other people's perspectives. You see, everything that a person sees, everything that they hear, everything that they experience in life, goes to produce their own filters, through which they filter their world. Everything that they experience contributes to how they filter their world, and everybody's filter is unique to them. Even if you grow up in the same household, even if you have similar experiences, your filters are different. All of us see the world unique to ourselves. We don't know other people's temptations or temperaments. This is a bad example. I acknowledge it. But are you more tempted by an all-you-can-eat dessert buffet, or an all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet, or an all-you-can-eat chitlin buffet? (Many of you don't even know what a chitlin is, do you? A chitlin is fried hog intestines. It's a Southern delicacy.) Which would be more tempting? Where would you perhaps be more tempted to be a glutton? You don't know one another's temptations, right? You don't know another person's temperament, either. There are some people who go through life serene, and it's very hard to get them upset. And there are some people who are hot-blooded, who have a hair-trigger, who live in the key of gee-whiz all the time, and they have a different temptation than the other person. We don't know how people have been brought up, whether they have been brought up in great wealth or abject poverty. That colors how you see the world and experience the world. We don't know if they were brought up military or normal. (I wrote that down, and I almost took it out, and I said, "Nah, I'm gonna leave that!") Military or normal. We don't know that. We don't know if they were brought up in a godly home or a home where abuse was the norm.

I had a conversation with a lady. When I say years ago, I was in my early 20s. She was in her late 40s. I thought she was ancient. I had preached a sermon on forgiveness. She wanted to talk to me about it. And I found out this beautiful lady grew up in a home where sexual abuse was the norm and not the exception. She had watched her two older sisters be sexually abused by their father. And so, when he started abusing her at six, she just thought it was her turn. She said she was fourteen years old before she found out that all little girls didn't grow up that way. When you find out what some people have been through, you begin to wonder how they are as good as they are. You never know. One person in one situation may be unremarkable at worst. But that same person in another situation may shine and excel. It is our job not to judge but to look for the underlying beauty, to try to see what God sees, to go back to what our Jewish brothers and sisters believe, to think the best of people. And I know that's difficult. So, it is impossible for us to know the whole person and everything that they have been through.

It is also impossible for any of us to be completely impartial. We've all had our own experiences that color how we view the world. Example: my father was one of the few men that I have ever known that saw active duty and saw combat in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. In World War II, he was on a troop transport, and he ran a landing craft. During Korea, he was on a heavy cruiser providing support for ground troops. And during Vietnam, he was on an ammo ship. All three were high priority targets. And people tried to kill him in all three wars. Now, if you are fighting in the South Pacific in

World War II, and in Korea, and in Vietnam, what group of people are trying to kill you? Asian peoples. My dad had trouble with Asian people for a long time because of what he experienced. He did get over it; he had to. My uncle married a Filipino woman and they lived happily ever after. They built a bar outside of Manila, and Aunt Mimi was one of my favorite aunts.

It's impossible for us to be completely impartial. The Greeks used to hold important trials in the dark. You know why? Because you're influenced by the way people look. And they didn't want people to be influenced by the defendant or by the witnesses. To encourage impartiality, there was a judge that was discovered taking bribes. The king had him executed and then skinned. His skin was tanned, and they used it to upholster the judgment seat, so that the next judge would be encouraged not to be partial or take bribes. It's very difficult for us to be impartial. And there are cultural biases that creep into our lives unaware. And you will forgive me if my dander gets up just a little bit here, because when people think of prejudice in the United States, they think of my people. They think of the South. Do we have our problems in the South? Did you hear my first illustration? Yes, we do. But let me tell you Westerners what I have found since I've been out here, going on 32 years. There's as much prejudice here as there has ever been in the South. Y'all hear me? And what I have found is it may be more insidious here than it is in the South, because in the South, we know we got a problem, and we are addressing it. And trust me when I tell you, it's a lot better than it was in 1971. But here in the West, people deny that there's any such thing as prejudice, and you cannot fix a problem until you acknowledge it exists. And trust me, it's here. There are cultural prejudices and biases.

Last, but certainly not least, none of us are good enough to judge any of the rest of us. If you'll keep reading that passage of scripture that I just read, Jesus has a very humorous illustration. The illustration is of one man trying to get a speck of dust out of his brother's eye, while he has a log hanging out of his eye. None of us has the right to judge, but the world is full of people who are extremely vocal in their criticism and devoid of action. I get this all the time: "Y'all should do this," or "Y'all should do that," without offering to lift a finger to help. We have enough work to do on ourselves without judging others. Concentrate on your own faults and leave the faults of others to God. Jesus said so. Jesus went so far as to say: "With the measure you use to measure others, with that measure you will be measured. I don't know about you, but I want my measure to be characterized by grace and tolerance. And if I want my measure to be characterized by grace and tolerance, then I must offer that to others. I don't have a choice. If that's what I want, then that's what I have to give. I didn't say that; Jesus said that. Now, what measure do you use to measure others? Would you like to be measured by that measure? Now, I am a realist. I understand to get to "Do not judge," most of us have a lot of deep, dark doo-doo to dig through. And it's difficult. I understand that. But there's no excuse not to try. I'm reminded of another one of those bad illustrations that came across my desk years ago. The picture was of a little girl with a little shovel, and there was a huge pile of manure, and she was frantically shoveling that manure. And when asked why, she said, "Well, with this much manure, there's got to be a pony under here somewhere!"

Do you want to be judged by the way you judge others? If not, today's the day to change that. Better stated: Today is the day to begin addressing that. Let us pray.

So, it's time to be very honest. Do you want God judging you the way you judge others? It's really just that simple. And if the answer is "No," then ask God for help and begin digging. Let's pray.

Gracious God, forgive us, Lord, when we seek a different standard than the standard we offer others. Lord, help us not to judge but help us to see others as You see them. And remind us always, Lord, that we do not see the whole picture, but You do. In Christ's name, amen.