

## John 7:1-24

### Judge Righteous Judgment

*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.– v. 24.*

I listened to a couple of sermons and also read a couple of sermons on John 7 as I was preparing for the message this week. One of the things that startled me was the candid admission by one well known preacher that even though he had been taught that when a preacher preaches from a text or from a narrative portion of Scripture, the preacher ought to as best he can, show the drama of the narrative. And even though he thought that this was good advice he admitted that he found it challenging to be able to do that with this narrative.

Now when I read that honest admission from this preacher I said to myself – *are you kidding me? – no drama in this narrative of John 7?* Look at the very first verse - *After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.* This doesn't mark the first time we read this kind of statement about the Jews seeking to kill Jesus. Back in chp. 5 we find a statement that tells us that the Jews sought to slay Him (slay=kill) – that's in 5:16. Two verses later we read how the Jews sought the more to kill him.

So this statement now in 7:1 is not the first time we read of the desire of the Jews to kill Jesus but in this 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel you find references made more than in any other chapter about the Jews trying to kill Jesus. In fact we find Jesus calling them out on their desire to kill Him.

*7:1 After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.*

*7:19 Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?*

*7:20 The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?*

*7:25 (This verse shows how their desire had spread among the people in Jerusalem: Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?)*

You would think that their animosity would have cooled down a little bit especially since so many of His followers had left Him, as we noted in the last chapter. But no – their hostility is as strong if not stronger than ever. Christ Himself explains the reason for their hostility in v. 7 where, speaking to His siblings He says: *The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.* The kind of ministry that calls out sin especially as sin is found in the lives of those people that consider themselves to be the chosen ones of God certainly doesn't make for popular acclaim. And so all these factors contribute to the drama or the suspense of the chapter.

Add to this ongoing hostility the strife that is found between Christ and His siblings on account of their unbelief and I think you find this chapter to be a very dramatic chapter.

They have some definite ideas about what Christ ought to do in order to promote His ministry and so their advice is that He go to this feast very openly and publicly and work miracles and put on a show. Christ, we know, won't have it but He does go up privately or secretly and when He arrives He certainly would have picked up on all the discussions that were taking place about Him and how these discussions had to be conducted practically in whispers because of the fear of the Jewish authorities. This adds to the drama and suspense of the chapter.

And if you know what actually took place at the feast of tabernacles and are able to make the connection between the ritual that took place on that last great day of the feast and words of Christ precisely at the given moment in that feast when He cries out *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink* – I think you'll be able to recognize that those words being loudly cried out by Christ at that precise moment make for an exciting climax to this chapter of John's gospel. But we'll get to that in due course.

In our study today, I'm interested in what amounts to the very first exhortation or command you could say that Christ gives in this discourse. This command is found following His teaching in the temple. A number of the Jews wanted to know *How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?* They were interested in His credentials. It's as if they were asking – *where did this man go to school? And what seminary did He attend?* And so we find another heated discussion taking place between Christ and the Jews in which Christ references the miracle He had performed back in chp. 5 where He healed the paralytic from His disease on the Sabbath day.

You remember when we studied that chapter? We noted how unmoved the Jews were by the fact that a man who had been paralyzed for many, many years and had no one to help him into the pool when the water was stirred was now miraculously healed by Christ. Rather than rejoicing with the man over the miracle he had received they instead are angry with Christ because He performed that work on the Sabbath day.

It's in connection with that miracle and their pious, self-righteous and hypocritical response to it that Christ issues the first command found in this chapter in v. 24 where Christ says: *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.* Both times that the word *judge* appears in this verse, it appears as an imperative which means simply that it is a command.

Here is a word, then, that was not only needed by those Jews that Christ addressed at that time, but this a word that comes down through the corridors of church history and comes to us here and now as a word we do well to hear and heed. *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.* I want to focus on this command by Christ this morning that we may know exactly what we should practice and what we should avoid. You'll notice that there's a negative and positive element to the command. There's a way in which we're not supposed to judge, and there's a way that we are.

Judging, therefore is our theme this morning:

## We Must Judge Rightly

Let's begin this study with a necessary prerequisite to the topic of judging. If we're going to judge rightly, this presupposes:

### I. We Must Face the Simple Fact of Judgment

When I say the simple fact of judgment, I'm not now referring to the judgment to come. We certainly should live in the light of that, but the judgment I have in mind just now is the judgment that the Christian (or the non-Christian for that matter) is called upon to exercise. *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment* Christ commands in our text – and the first thought that comes to mind is another word that Christ gives in the sermon on the mount. Mt. 7:1 *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

In both cases the word *judge* is the same. So how do these verses align with each other? We know, of course, that Christ wouldn't contradict Himself just as we know that there are no contradictions in the Bible. So what does Christ mean in Mt. 7:1 when He says not to judge? A closer look at what Christ says in Mt. 7:1 especially when viewed in its context will show that the two statements, i.e. Mt. 7:1 and Jn. 7:24 are stressing the same thing.

You're aware I'm sure that just as John 3:16 is a favorite verse among believing Christians, Mt. 7:1 could be labeled a favorite verse for the unbelieving world. *Judge not, that ye be not judged* the verse reads and the unbelieving world mistakenly thinks that it can take this statement of Christ and place it in the category of their creed. Whatever else they don't believe about Christ – however offended they may be by other statements made by Christ or by the blood atonement of Christ – they nevertheless think that at least here, in this verse, they can find something in the moral teachings of Christ that they can agree with.

*Judge not, that ye be not judged.* Don't you see how Christ condemns any form of harsh judgment that may be harbored toward any man for any reason? – the world argues. Here is a call for tolerance. It makes no difference what kind of character you're scrutinizing. It doesn't matter how offensive and perverted his sin might be. According to the world's view of this statement Christ is calling for the kind of political correctness that has come to dominate our culture which, by the way, is leading to the ruin of our nation.

A closer look at the verse in its context reveals to us that Christ couldn't possibly be teaching what the world would like to believe He is teaching. Would you notice in v. 6 that He says *Give not that which is holy to the dogs neither cast your pearls before swine.* Christ isn't talking about dogs and pigs here – He's using harsh terms to depict a certain kind of character. A dog was not referred to as a domesticated pet in Christ's day. It was used to describe someone who was uncivilized and wild. And a pig was a general term used by the Jews to describe anything that was unclean. And so we find Christ calling on His followers to use the necessary discernment for recognizing such character traits in men and then refraining from a course of action based on that discernment.

By today's standards Christ would be viewed as harsh and cruel toward certain kinds of sinners with the use of such derogatory terms. Who knows? – He might even be guilty of a hate crime. I think verses 5 & 6 indicate to us very plainly that Christ is not prohibiting judgment – He is, in fact, calling for judgment – but He's calling for the right kind of judgment and He's calling for the right manner for judgment to be exercised. This is why I say that this verse in Matthew's gospel is teaching the same thing that Christ teaches in Jn. 7:24. Christ is teaching us in both cases that there's a right kind and a wrong kind of judgment. And the right kind of judgment needs to be practiced while the wrong kind needs to be avoided.

Lloyd-Jones argues in his analysis of Mt. 7 that God's judgment is the primary subject of the final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. Not the judgment that we exercise – or to be more precise, the discernment that we're to use – but the theme of Matthew 7 is the final judgment. Christ would have His followers aware of that final day of judgment and He would have His followers live their lives and exercise discernment in their awareness of that judgment day.

That day does stand out in these opening verses and the day of judgment does come up again in v. 21. I believe that it's with that day in view that Christ is saying *judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.* Some commentators hold the view that Christ is referring only to the things that happen in this world. In other words if you are hyper-critical of others you will at some point along the way find others being hyper-critical of you. And while such a thing may be true, I don't believe that it accounts for the complete meaning of Christ's words. We are to practice judgment, or discernment, with a view that takes into account that coming day in which each one will give an account of himself to God.

How much will you find yourself in need of grace on that coming day? If you're honest with yourself before God then you'll have to answer that you'll be in great need of grace on that day. And what that means is not that you should excuse yourself from exercising discernment but when you in the course of exercising that discernment come to certain conclusions about others and you may have to deal with others on the basis of what you discern, you need to do so with deep humility.

That humility is emphasized in vv. 3,4 of Mt. 7 where you go on to read: *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? 5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

Our natural propensity is to do the very opposite of what Christ here calls for. Our natural propensity is to see the beam in the eyes of others and then condescendingly admit that there's but a mere speck in our own eye. If conflicts are to be resolved say between

spouses that are at serious odds with each other or between children and parents or between church members with their session, then the mindset that Christ calls for has to be practiced. Paul conveys this truth in Gal 6:1 where he writes: *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.* And in 1Cor. 10:12 *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

So this mindset with its corresponding humility becomes the prerequisite to exercising the judgment that Christ calls for in our text. So we see that in order to exercise judgment rightly we must face the truth that we are indeed to exercise judgment, or discernment. I find it interesting to note that in a number of cases when you find the word *discern* used in the New Testament you find the root word from our text in Jn. 7:24 in that word *discern*.

But let's zoom in now on the elements of the text itself by seeing the negative aspect of our text by considering how:

## II. We Must Know What to Avoid in Judging Rightly

Our Lord tells us when it comes to judging that *we're not to judge according to the appearance*. Now on the surface of this statement it might become easy to conclude that we're disqualified from making any kind of judgments. Isn't it true that we can only judge by what we see?

I'm reminded of a scene in the Old Testament where Samuel is sent to the house of Jesse in order to anoint the next king of Israel. This is found in 1Sam. 16. And when Samuel arrives at the house of Jesse and the sons of Jesse are paraded before him, Samuel concludes that Eliab, the oldest son of Jesse is the one that God had chosen. And so we read in 1Sam. 16:6,7: *And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed is before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*

Now Samuel was doing the very thing that the Lord Jesus tells us not to do. He was looking at the physical appearance of Eliab. But then the Lord says to Samuel that Eliab was not His choice. But then the Lord says something further and this is what presents the challenge to us when it comes to our judging. Notice how in v. 7 the Lord says as a general principle that the Lord doesn't see as men see, for men look on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart.

You and I cannot see the heart. All we can see is the outward appearance. And if that's the case how can we possibly avoid making judgments based on the outward appearance of things? Have we now in this New Testament dispensation gained an ability that men in the Old Testament era didn't have? I don't believe that's the case.

I think what our Lord has in mind has not so much to do with our limitations when it comes to discernment so much as it has to do with perspective. And the best way to

illustrate the perspective that's to be avoided is to look at Christ's siblings. I have to admit now that I've found myself having to rethink my view of Christ's siblings after reading a few commentaries about them. Notice what they say to Christ in vv. 3,4: *His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. 4 For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.* And right after they give Christ this advice, John makes a very telling statement about them in the very next verse. This is v. 5 now: *For neither did his brethren believe in him.*

I've always looked at that statement in v. 5 and then gone back to the previous verses and viewed them as being more or less sarcastic. In other words his brethren, in their unbelief, are mocking and deriding Him the same way the Jews would when Christ was nailed to a cross and the Jews would tauntingly challenge Him to come down from the cross and then they would believe in Him.

I could not, however, find a single commentator to agree with me on that interpretation and the more I thought about it the more it occurred to me that these commentators were right in their view that Christ's brethren were giving their advice sincerely. Basically they were suggesting to Jesus that he employ the best marketing strategy so to speak in the matter of promoting Himself.

Do what you did, when you raised that lame man from his sick bed, they're suggesting to Christ. Or do something along the lines of what you did when you most recently fed 5,000 people. His brothers may have been a part of that 5,000 when that miracle took place. Put on a show. That's what they were suggesting. Do something spectacular like what you've already done. It would make perfect sense for his brethren to make such suggestions especially if they had seen any of the miracles that Christ had performed.

The problem being, that even though they may have seen those miracles or heard of those miracles and believed the reports they heard about those miracles they couldn't get beyond the surface of those miracles because they were still at the end of the day unbelievers. They fit into the same category as those who in the previous chapter would have taken Christ and made Him a king. They were, in other words, judging things by how they appeared on the surface but had no idea of the real nature of Christ or His purpose in coming into this world to establish His kingdom. They were judging things from a wrong perspective.

How prone the followers of Christ are to do that very thing up to this current day. I have a book on my shelves in my study that tells the story of one of the fastest growing churches in the Chicago area. This church was born out of a dream that was a very legitimate dream. It was the dream to be like the church in the book of Acts. The people on the ground floor of this church could see the need for something different, for something that would show greater spiritual vitality and would grow fast and become large just like the church in the book of Acts.

I was really struck by a chapter later in the book that described how this church had hired an outside secular marketing firm to come in to their church and address the leaders of the church and help them analyze the next generation and what would be needed to reach that generation. I think of that today and then I read the advice that Christ's brethren gave Him about how to build (or in this case re-build) His ministry and it occurs to me that in both cases the situation is being governed by surface appearances or – and I think this is what Christ had in mind – a worldly perspective. A worldly perspective, you see, approaches ministry by surface appearances.

Before I leave this point I must point out one other element that amounts to surface appearances and that's the letter of the law. Those that are governed by the letter of the law, who never get to the spirit of the law will be governed by mere outward appearances. This is what led to the Jews criticizing Christ for healing a man on the Sabbath. By a strict adherence to the letter of the law, I suppose they could make their case that what Christ did was wrong.

But how they missed the heart of the matter. And Christ exposes their surface appearance thinking by calling their attention to circumcisions that were performed on the Sabbath. *If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, Christ says in v. 23 that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? And with that specific thing in mind Christ goes on to say Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*

Righteous judgment sees more than the letter of the law. Righteous judgment knows full well what Paul means when he writes in 2Cor. 3:6 *for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*

What must we do, then, to judge rightly? We must face the truth that judgments are legitimate and necessary and we must meet the necessary prerequisite for our judgments which is the prerequisite of humility. And we must know what to avoid. We must avoid surface appearances which means we must avoid a worldly perspective or you might call it a humanistic world-view. Let's think finally on how:

### III. We Must Know the Truth of Christ to Judge Rightly

When you look at our text and see it in the broader context of the gospel of John as well as the entire New Testament then I think it's true and proper to say that when Christ says *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment*, He's making that statement primarily with regard to His own person and work.

When Jesus eventually went up to the feast in Jerusalem, He did so secretly, not openly. And when He was at last revealed, it was through His teaching in the temple, not through a supernatural display of power through miracles. He was, of course, challenged by the crowd at least in their murmurings between themselves. They questioned Christ's credentials. They wondered where He had received His training.

And in His response to them He stated that He was not simply setting forth His own ideas but that His teaching was that of His Father. Verse 16 *Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.* When you add v. 18 to this, I think you begin to get the true picture of the heart of Christ: *He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.*

Christ, you see, sought to serve His Father. He didn't seek to promote Himself. Had that been His aim then the advice He received from His brethren would have made sense. Here is a very important key, then, when it comes to truly believing in Christ. You see Him not as some sort of egotistical self-promoter but you see Him as the servant of His Father and you see Him engaged with His Father in a cause that gets to the heart of what His mission was about.

His mission, you see, was about salvation. His mission was about reversing the curse that had been applied to man because of man's sin. His miracles were never meant to be simply raw displays of supernatural power. I love the way one prominent preacher put it when he described the heart or the soul of Christ's miracles. Those that were able to perceive the soul of His miracles were able to see something that went way beyond the surface appearance of supernatural power. They saw, rather, the Messiah sent from heaven not to serve Himself or promote Himself. They didn't see in Christ the kind of person that was self-absorbed at all but whose sole concern was the glory of His Father.

And as that this preacher points out, the kind of faith that amounts to true faith is that faith that resembles Christ. In other words, when a soul gains a true saving interest in Christ, his sole concern is for the glory of God and the glory of Christ. He's saved not only from sin, but he's saved from self as well.

And your outlook on everything in life becomes governed by the chief end of man. What is man's chief end? – our shorter catechism asks. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. And if you're going to avoid surface appearance judgment and judge rightly then that perspective of glorifying and enjoying God must govern how you see and respond to everything.

So tell me this morning as we bring this study to a close – are you judging rightly? Do you see the heart of Christ in His teaching and His miracles? And do you, like Him, seek something outside yourself – even the glory of God? May God help us all to avoid the wrong kind of judgment and to exercise righteous judgment to the honor and glory of His name.