

A Warning from Christ's 'Sermon on the Mount' Against Political Hypocrisy

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Bible Text: Matthew 7:3-5; Romans 2:1-3

Preached on: Sunday, November 2, 2008

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In Matthew's gospel in the seventh chapter, in the midst of that great Sermon on the Mount, we read these words by the Lord Jesus.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 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? 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.¹

I am sure this Lord's Day that a lot of people will be preaching election sermons. I thought this was an appropriate text to take up in the midst of all the partisan bickering and screaming and hollering.

I came across a text in the book of Daniel that I was reading this week that I thought was rather humorous and wondered if anyone had ever noticed it.

In Daniel 11 at verse 20, "Then shall stand up in his estate a raiser of taxes in the glory of the kingdom: but within few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle."² And I thought, "That must be referring to George Herbert Walker Bush. He was a raiser of taxes. You remember, that is probably what cost him the election in 1992, when he promised, "Over my dead body," and then he raised taxes anyway.

And then I come to the next verse, "And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries."³ And I thought, "Well, that's Bill Clinton. There you have it!

But hopefully what we have to say today will not be pretextual as that would have been!

¹ Matthew 7:3-5

² Daniel 11:20

³ Daniel 11:21

No doubt in conservative churches there will be a lot of talk about abortion and the sanctity of life and respect for private property and a lot of hinting at who that means the people ought to vote for, without coming out and actually saying it.

While in liberal churches, there will be a lot of preaching about social and economic justice, about compassion, about giving money to the less fortunate, about the beauties and glories of the progressive income tax, again without saying who you ought to vote for, but making a wide nod toward the direction of the particular candidate.

But it seems to me that in analyzing partisan politics, if we look at it through the lens of what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount about the mote and the beam, we can obtain a clearer view of the competing arguments made by the different parties that are contending for our votes.

Note from the text these observations.

First of all, people see flaws in other people that they don't see in themselves. Here is a man who sees a speck in a person's eye, and he doesn't know that he has got something in his own eye, does he? He sees very clearly what is in his fellow's eye, but he is blind, he is oblivious to what is in his own eye; and how obvious the application of this is in our lives and in our political contests -- that we are very quick to point out the problems in the other guy; much less so to see the problems on our own side or in ourselves.

And then there is something else that is sort of implied in the text. People see their own flaws in other people. The psychologists call this "projection." In other words, it is possible after you took the beam out of your eye, that you would exclaim, "Oh, he didn't have anything in his eye after all! That was just something in *my* eye I kept seeing that I thought was in *his* eye."

We take our inward crimes, if you will, and we project them on other people and we proclaim, most loudly, that they are guilty of them. And part of the reason that is, is because we know that we are guilty of them. And certainly, if we were in their shoes, we would exercise that crime because we have it in our own heart. So we assume they have it. And it may not be their motive or their thought at all. We have just imposed it on them. We have assumed that they have this particular problem when really we have the problem.

And then, thirdly, people resent being corrected by other people who have the same sin. That is one good way to get people angry -- to go and correct them for something that they see in you -- because it reeks of hypocrisy. And Jesus said that. Jesus said that it is hypocrisy to attempt to correct another person for your own flaw, even if it is in them as well, because we all like to believe that the people we are correcting are certainly no better than we are. We suppose that we are probably better than they are.

And so it is an insult to come up to someone and tell them that they have a certain flaw or

a certain sin in their life, when it is obvious to everyone that you have got the same one, or maybe even a worse one.

So people resent being corrected by others who have the same sin.

Fourthly, one who has a certain type of flaw probably has no business correcting another with the same type of flaw. Now it is certainly true that we are none of us perfect, and if we told people that they could never correct anybody else if they were not perfect themselves, then there would be no correction, would there? If there were no correction, then things would really go astray fast. There has to be correction. There has to be judgment made. And it is not required that the judge be perfect.

But it is useful and proper to say that you shouldn't be calling down people for the same kind of problems that you have, unless you are first willing to fix them, to set your own life in order.

And, fifthly, people who are all set to correct other people get angry when it is pointed out to them that they ought to hold up and get their own house in order first. Notice how eager in this parable this man is to correct his brother, to help him take this mote out of his eye. And you can be sure that if somebody told him, "No, no, no, no, no. You just stop. Hold off on that. You have got a problem of your own," that person will react in anger because he has that zeal to fix other people's problems, but now he's been snatched up and cut short by your observation that, "Well, you have a similar problem yourself."

And, finally, the third party is often best suited to catalog the flaws of two people set upon each other. You see, the Lord Jesus being perfect, he could see all the flaws in everybody, couldn't he? He could see the beam in one person's eye and the mote in another. It is often the case that a person who has some detachment from the dispute is able to recognize the hypocrisy and to recognize the faultiness of the analysis that one party is making against another, to recognize that they both have the same problem that needs to be addressed, and that it is hypocrisy for the one party to castigate the other when both have similar flaws.

We could think of many common, everyday applications of Jesus' teaching here. Sometimes it is better to keep quiet than to always go about correcting others. You know, we all have little crotchets, little quirks of our personality that grate on other people, and a lot of times people try to instruct other people and correct them, and they don't realize they have their own little quirks that antagonize everybody as well. How much better it would be, in many of these cases, if we all just learned to accept those quirks as part of their personality and go on with life.

I think of that text in which the apostle says that love covers a multitude of transgressions.⁴ We can't make everybody perfect, and everybody will have some characteristic that annoys others. But if we are quick to point out what annoys us in

⁴ See 1 Peter 4:8

another person, they will no doubt be quick to provide lists of annoyances of which we are guilty.

And then, secondly, it would be useful to step back when we see a defect in others to use it, first of all, before we open our mouths, to consider whether that defect is something we ought to be concerned about in ourselves. In other words, if we see a mote in our brother's eye, it ought to prompt us to remember Jesus' teaching and to search our own eyes to see if there would be any beams in our eyes before we step off into that dispute. And then, perhaps, we will be able to set our own selves in order, and then we will be more useful, won't we, in the service and help of our neighbor who needs to have some correction.

It might be better to fix your own problems first or else keep quiet. Otherwise you might be exposed as a hypocrite and you will be known as a hypocrite.

Well, it is true that politics gives us a special view of Christ's teaching. If we step back and look at it objectively and lay aside partisan lenses, how often it is that the criticisms of one side in a political dispute of the other side are acts of hypocrisy and it is all the more so because almost nobody recognizes this fact in politics.

It is amazing to me that it is seldom commented on, that the two major parties have major disputes with one another, but often times their positions in this disputes are compromised by the fact that they themselves have the same flaw or the same defect as the people that they are criticizing. And often times, this will either result in a blaze of hypocrisy or else it will—even more dangerously—it will mute discussion of the dispute because no one has clean hands. They can't point it out with any clarity.

And so the chief problem in the dispute is not articulated because neither of the two antagonists in the dispute have clean hands, and neither is in a position to articulate what the real problem is without exposing their own complicity in it or hypocrisy in making the charge.

And so it is our failure to consider Jesus' teaching on this matter in the public square that, in a sense, perpetuates the problem.

And as is the case in common application of this teaching, often the partisans are completely oblivious to their own guiltiness of the very thing they have accused their opponents of; and they will react most negatively when someone points it out to them. But that is the way of men, fallen men in this world, and it is what the Lord Jesus knew it would be like.

Sometimes we see in politics a sort of a projection, like I mentioned earlier, of people who have beams in their eyes, and they imagine they see the same fault in their opponents. I think these are really the best examples I could think of, two of them.

One is the Democrats' claim that the Republicans are trying to steal the election.

Now as a person who has a lot of experience in voter fraud investigations, I can say if ever there were a canard, this is the case, because as a matter of fact, most election fraud is committed by Democrats. Let's just face it -- that's the truth.

Democrats don't really believe that you ought to have to live where you vote for example. They really don't believe that. They just don't think that's a good law, but they don't have the courage to come out and have it repealed. They don't articulate that. So this idea that you should be able to vote regardless of whether you live in the district or not is an unstated premise that Democrats embrace. And you can tell they embrace it because they object most strenuously to any attempt to enforce that law. In other words, if you were to come to the polling place and say, "I know that this person doesn't live in the district," the Democrats get all upset because you are "trying to steal that person's vote." You are trying to suppress his vote.

In fact, they just don't like the law that says you have to live in the district that you vote in; or they don't like the law that says that you have to be a citizen in order to vote; or that you actually have to be the actual person who you claim is the person that is voting.

They think that the more votes that are cast the better. And, of course, they have a reason for that -- because they are planning on getting those people to vote for their guy.

And so I think there is a lot of projection going on in the Democrats' accusation of stealing elections, that it is to cover up the fact that they are not the advocates of clean elections.

Another example of this, perhaps even clearer, is those people who support Mr. Obama and who accuse everyone who doesn't of being a racist.

Now, it is true there are racists in the country who won't vote for Obama because he is black -- just like there are some racists in the country who won't vote for a white person because he is white.

But the fact is that, if you take the position that every person who votes against your candidate does so because he is a racist, then what you have implicitly said is that you are a racist, because there is no other criteria on which your vote should be based other than the color of the skin of the candidate. The charge cuts both ways, in other words.

So whereas the accusation is being made against people who are completely innocent of the charge -- they are voting against Mr. Obama because they don't like his policies -- yet the partisan who claims that it is because they are racist has really told everybody what the beam in his eye is: that *he* is a racist and *he* is making his decision based on skin color. Because he is a racist, he assumes everybody else that disagrees with him must be a racist, and that they must be making their decisions based on color of skin just like he is.

There are, of course, several examples of this teaching of Christ that cut in the other direction. And here is where the Republicans and so called “conservatives” will get their comeuppance, won’t they?

Mr. Obama has been caught making the statement that he wants to redistribute people’s wealth, and oh, the rage and the horror of it from the Republican partisans in the race. And yet we just redistributed one trillion dollars to the bankers and the fat cat financial barons, didn’t we? Where were they screaming about redistribution then?

People who talk about the evil of redistribution on the one hand the next day, like Mrs. Palin, will go out and talk about how they are planning on, when they get elected, making sure there’s lots of federal money to help pay for the care and nurture of needy children and special needs children.

Nobody screamed redistribution then, did they? Yet that is what it is.

You know, almost all of the federal budget is one big huge redistribution of wealth. We redistribute, you know, trillions of dollars a year in people’s money. We take the money from the tax payers and we give it to the people who don’t have the money, whether they be people on welfare, or people on Medicare, or people on social security, people receiving special disability checks, food stamps, people who provide a myriad of services to the government for illegitimate purposes, all sorts of construction projects, and building projects, and subsidies to farmers, and pretty much everything the government spends money on, is money that is stolen from people and paid out to other people. The redistribution of wealth is the name of the game in politics, as it is practiced by the two major parties in this country.

I believe it was Karl Marx who said, “Politics is about who does what to whom.” And the trick is to be the “who” and not the “whom.” We want to be the people that are deciding what is going to be done to the other people, not the people that are going to be the subjects of what is going to be done to them!

If you were to really take a principled stand against redistributionism, why you would get as many votes as Ron Paul did, because that was his position. And the people don’t like that. The people like redistribution of wealth. They just want to bicker every four years over who is going to get the stuff, who is going to get the biggest piece of the pie and who is going to be cut out, who is going to be disenfranchised from the gravy train.

As one of my friends used to say, “They all want to be the tall hog at the trough.”

Now if we were to look at the political debate from the point of view of what Jesus taught, we would say, “A curse on both your houses, all you Republicans and Democrats out there complaining about redistribution.”

What you can say about Mr. Obama is, at least he is honest. At least he comes out and says he is for taking my money and giving it to those people over there. But honesty

doesn't count for much in politics, does it? So there is a lot of hypocrisy in this accusation of redistributionism.

Another example of hypocrisy that cuts against the Republicans is all the concern they have about the fairness doctrine and the freedom of the press. Boy, they are big on freedom of the press now. But back when the *New York Times* published its stories about the president being caught violating the wiretapping statutes, some of these same people, like Limbaugh and Hannity and others, they were out calling on the government to arrest the *New York Times* people and prosecute them for treason! They are all for freedom of the press, as long as the press is going their way. But when the press starts reporting news that makes them look bad, then they are for tightening down on controls.

People don't realize back during World War II that Roosevelt actually tried to get the attorney general to prosecute the publisher of the *Chicago Tribune* for treason. The owner and the publisher of the *Tribune* published some information that Roosevelt didn't want out, made him look bad, so he tried to get—I think it must have been Mr. Biddle, the Attorney General—to prosecute the publisher, but Mr. Biddle had a cooler head than Franklin Roosevelt and prevailed upon him not to go forward with that.

I was surprised a few days ago when someone who should have known better, someone who I thought knew that this was not the case, blurted out that *Al Jazeera* was the enemy. And it reminded me how frail, how fragile the commitment to a free press is amongst people in the government, including Republicans, when it doesn't go their way.

You know, *Al Jazeera* was hailed as a great advance of democracy and opening up of public accountability by our government as late as the middle of 2001. It was established by former BBC employees. If you look at their product, it is extremely professional. It is much more even-handed than your MSNBC or Fox News or the like. They have an English version of their production now. And basically they are an independent news organization in the Middle East. The Saudi Arabian government despised them because they were going around the government controlled television network over there and telling people what was really going on in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt. They won a lot of awards for exposing corruption in those autocratic regimes, exposing torture and misconduct and so forth.

And then, of course, when it came to the war in Iraq, they published what was actually happening and all of a sudden they are the enemy. Lies were spread about them. For example, one thing most people believe about *Al Jazeera* that is not true is that they showed tapes of people being beheaded. They never did. They never showed those tapes.

And yet somehow, our administration spread the lie that they did and everybody picked up on it and said, "Oh, these people are just propaganda movers for Al Qaeda." Nothing could be further from the truth.

To show you the commitment to the free press that we have in this country, it was recently revealed that Bush actually plotted bombing the *Al Jazeera* headquarters and

killing all the people to shut them up, to keep them from telling what was really going on in Iraq and in Pakistan. And, indeed, they have been attacked deliberately several times, and several of their people have been murdered by US forces while destroying their facilities, to try to keep them off the air.

It is a very sad thing when people go out and talk about fairness and about freedom of the press, when they have used bloody means to suppress the free press when it went against their interests.

But then finally, and most controversially, there is the dispute over abortion or over Mr. Obama's support for the most horrible means of abortion known to man, the partial birth abortion. It is unspeakably barbaric and cruel. And people on the other side will talk about how they really respect innocent life and they just can't support a man like Mr. Obama. But do they really respect innocent life?

You know, in our country we have slowly adopted a view toward life that is a lot more casual than it ought to be. The Scriptures tell us that we are to be careful against the shedding of innocent blood, that we are to judge and punish those who shed innocent blood. And yet the people who do commit abortions and who do advocate abortions, they are allowed to run free, aren't they? They are treated with respect. The judges that ordained these abortions are invited to the best dinners. They are invited to state dinners. The president sits down with them and chats and laughs and jokes. The candidates that are running for president vote for those justices and confirmed them.

So really all the talk about the preciousness of innocent life is a lot of talk, but it doesn't work itself out into action, does it? It just becomes a debating point that we can raise against the other side.

And it is to the shame of our country and, I believe, to the shame of our churches, that we have seen arise this horrible increase in false convictions of people for murder and even people being put on death row who are innocent and who are ultimately exonerated. And we haven't adequately addressed why this is happening.

Have you seen any conservative people who are big advocates of the sanctity of human life, or have you seen any churches who are supposed to be conservative, have you seen any of them anguished over why it is that so many innocent people are being convicted and sentenced to death in this country? What is the problem? What is the solution? Has anybody worked on it?

You know, it is interesting, isn't it, that a bunch of pinko liberals in The Innocence Project are the ones that are bringing this whole thing out and exposing it, aren't they?

You know, it is true that even as the Lord condemns hypocrisy in the casting out of motes and beams, doesn't he often times use terribly flawed people with the same crimes to correct the people he is judging and exposing?

You remember, the Babylonians came to judge Israel because Israel was idolatrous and bloody. Well, the Babylonians were more idolatrous and more bloody. And I am sure that the Jewish people raged against the Babylonians for having beams in their eyes, trying to pick out the motes from the eyes of God's people. And they raged against God, "How could you use these ungodly people to judge your people? We haven't done anything nearly as bad as they have!"

And yet that is often the way it is, isn't it? And it is a real shame -- it is to the shame of good people in this country, that it is flawed people like those of The Innocence Project that are exposing these deep, serious flaws in our justice system that condemns innocent people to death.

But the issue of innocent blood goes further. We have adopted this casual idea that it is ok to take innocent lives if it is necessary to get what we want. Isn't that really what is behind abortion? We don't really care about the innocent life as much as we care about what we want. In the case of the abortion, the woman wants sexual liberation or she wants not to have to raise or be burdened with a child that she conceived by accident perhaps. And so she is casual in her care for the innocent life involved. She minimizes that.

And we have done the same thing. We have done the same thing in our foreign policy and in the conduct of our wars. We really don't care about the innocent people that are killed.

How often on TV do you see pictures of the innocent people killed? Why don't we see them? Why aren't the conservative media out there talking about it? There are plenty of pictures.

We have adopted methods of warfare that maximize innocent casualties and maximize the safety of our own troops. So they will bomb a house and kill 30 people, and maybe only one person there was who they were looking for, or maybe he wasn't there at all. And nobody cares that all the innocent people were killed.

There is a lot of explaining to do in the conduct of our nation in its recent wars. And there has been very little care taken to determine whether the price in innocent life is worth what will be gained.

We ought to understand that life ought only to be taken when there is no alternative, when it is necessary for defense, and not just to satisfy some claim of honor.

You think about all the civil wars that take place. And they are almost always because one group of people wants to impose their will and their government on some other group of people, and they don't want it. And why don't they just let each other be and separate in peace, let each other go their respective ways?

Think about the Georgian and the South Ossetian dispute. There is no basis for it. There is no cause for it. They ought to let each other go in peace, like Abraham and Lot went in peace, or Laban and Jacob. They ought to separate in peace.

But, no, you see, we -- because we don't value innocent life as much as we ought to -- we think it is ok to sacrifice it to get our way on some point, and not necessarily because it is the only option we have to avoid death and destruction ourselves.

So we have such a low threshold for the waging of war now. It is no longer the last alternative. Instead, we look for ways to justify going to war.

I thought of those texts, how often the Scriptures repudiate and judge people who were swift to shed innocent blood, and the way of peace they know not. In Isaiah 59, which is the touchstone of scriptural descriptions of societies that have gone down the road of injustice and oppression and wickedness, at verse seven, we read:

Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.⁵

You have to ask yourself, not with a smirk on your face and not tongue in cheek: are either of the main candidates for President men who really seek peace, who really care for the cause of innocent blood, or are they people who are careless about the shedding of innocent blood?

I think of one candidate who sings about the next nation he is going to bomb. He thinks it is funny. He thinks it is a joke.

I submit to you that there is very little latitude for the ruling elites of this country and the establishment in the two major parties, to point fingers at the other side about who respects innocent life, and who is going to uphold it, and who is going to protect it. It is the last thing on any of their agendas on either side. They are just using it to make political points, I fear.

If the Lord Jesus' warnings were heeded, if we applied this text about motes and beams, and if we took the Lord Jesus' teaching seriously, politics in America would be very quiet. There wouldn't be very much talking going on, would there? There wouldn't be all this mudslinging and finger pointing, because everyone's mouth would be stopped by the fear that their hypocrisy might be exposed. The criticisms would be muted, the accusations hushed, if hypocrisy and self righteousness were prohibited in our political system.

⁵ Isaiah 59:7-8

I suppose all that would be left would be for candidates to just tell the public what they intended to do, and that would be horrible wouldn't it? It would be just horrible. It would be a shame if the candidates actually campaigned on what they intended to do and how they thought they could make things better, if the teachings of Christ against public hypocrisy and finger pointing were followed and addressed in our political system.

But, you know, ultimately this passage in Matthew 7 is about self righteousness. The whole Sermon on the Mount's purpose -- so many people read the sermon and they think it is such a nice lovey piece of preaching, don't they? If you really get into it you realize that the whole thing is an exposure of self righteousness. It is a condemnation of self righteousness in so many ways. In so many different directions the Lord Jesus is picking the scab off of this issue of who is better than the other people.

"I am better than you. You are better than me. See my righteousness. Watch me prance through the streets and tell everybody how great I am." And Jesus exposes this self righteousness. He shows that all men are guilty before a righteous God.

You see, if you look at these texts you see that they are preached from the point of view of God's view who knows all things, who sees the hypocrisy of all people, who knows the hidden thoughts of the people who are so high and proud, and who cast down and criticize others for their very same faults. God sees into the heart, not just the public actions that we can judge and we can view.

This text, of course, is really a restatement of the text that falls just before it. "Judge not lest ye be judged for you will be judged with the same standard that you judge other people."⁶ It is a teaching that expresses a fundamental characteristic of God's justice and holiness and righteousness, that the standard will be flat for everybody, that it will be the same, and that under that standard all men will stand condemned. There will be no self righteousness. It will be a judgment that is the great leveler of all men, great and small, that they might be found guilty before a perfect God.

And men are so sure about themselves. They are so convinced of the guiltiness of the other people and not of themselves. And they are so convinced of their own relative righteousness.

"Let me help take that mote out of your eye, brother." They don't see the beam in their own.

In so many ways the Lord Jesus warns us: none of us is as good as we think, and all are full of uncleanness and hypocrisy. Even in our attempts at judging ourselves against one another, whereby we hope to justify ourselves and condemn others, inevitably, the pit we dig for others we will fall into ourselves, won't we? That's just the teaching of Paul in Romans chapter two. "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that

⁶ See Matthew 7:1-2

judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.”⁷

But God cannot be fooled. You see, we can fool each other. We can even fool ourselves. We can get the high hand on some people until our own deeds are exposed. What does he say in the next verse?

But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?⁸

You see, the Lord Jesus, he sees the beam and the mote. He is the third party. He is the objective third party looking at the scene and seeing all the sides and knowing all the hearts.

You know, there was one man who saw clearly without a single flaw in his own eye, no sin to blind him, the best man to remove something from the eye of another. It is interesting that Jesus uses this story of picking a foreign object out of a person’s eye. You know it is almost impossible to remove one of those yourself. You might feel it. You might even see it, but you can’t remove it. You have to have someone else to come and to pick it out for you. It is almost impossible to remove a foreign object from your own eye even as it is almost impossible -- and it is impossible eternally -- to remove a sin from your own person.

It takes a person with a clear vision to pick it out, doesn’t it? And we are all blinded by sin in one way or another.

The Lord Jesus is able to help when none other could, to help to see sin, to judge sin, to remove sin, to take it away. And yet he was rejected by men with beams in their eyes, wasn’t he?

You see, one of the things about sin is, not only can you not remove it from your own eye, but it causes you not to be able to see clearly and to seek the help of one who has clear vision and who can remove it. And so men wander around with their eyes obscured, and they embrace all sorts of false religions and crazy preachers and people with their own special brand of “righteousness,” and all they are really doing is stumbling around to people that have beams in their eyes, hoping that they will be able to help them to see clearly.

But the Lord Jesus saw clearly and yet the people didn’t believe him and didn’t see, couldn’t see because of their sin.

In John eight verse 45:

⁷ Romans 2:1

⁸ Romans 2:2-3

And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.

Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?

He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.⁹

It is the blindness to the sin that is caused by the sin that keeps men from receiving Christ's gospel, permitting the Savior to take away their sin. They will not because their eyes are blinded.

Hebrews speaks of the perfection of the Lord Jesus and how it enables him to save his people. In chapter seven at verse 26, "For such an high priest," that is the Lord Jesus, "became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins."¹⁰

We have a priest in the Lord Jesus who never had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins. When it comes to our redemption we dare not trust in ourselves, for we are broken and decrepit and blind; and vain is the help of any other man, but that perfect and obedient one who never had to offer a sacrifice for himself. He only had to offer one perfect one for those whom he would redeem. He was the only proper sacrifice for sinners.

Isn't it interesting that the one who had no sin, the one who had no beam in his eye, was the only one who was fit to take away the sin of lost humanity?

The Lord has a way of opening our eyes, and when he does he shows us our guiltiness and his righteousness, causes us to call upon him and to cry out to him. The most beautiful example of this to be found in Scripture is as the Lord Jesus hung upon the cross, when he was crucified between two thieves. And you remember some of the gospels say that they both railed at him. They both cried out to him to save himself and themselves, if he be the Son of God.

But then Luke's gospel, the 23rd chapter says this, "But one of the malefactors answered," finally, "rebuking him and saying, 'Dost not thou fear God seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we, indeed, justly for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing amiss.' And he said unto Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.'"¹¹

⁹ John 8:45-47

¹⁰ Hebrews 7:26-27

¹¹ See Luke 23:39-42

The Lord Jesus has a way of opening the eyes of the blind to see their blindness and their sin and to see his perfection and glory, and to cause them to approach unto the one who has the clarity and the righteousness to take away their sin forever.

But there is a warning in this text that has spoken to my heart. This is a text primarily, as we said before, that condemns self righteousness, that exposes it, that warns against it. And, you know, amongst Christians, amongst believers—and I confess I have seen this in my own heart at times before the Lord rebuked me of it—there is a rise of self righteousness in the way we view lost sinners, isn't there?

We think that God can never save the drug addicts or the criminals or the worthless fellows or the unwed mothers on welfare, because they are just the lowest of the low, aren't they? There is just no hope for them. There is just not any point in preaching the gospel to them, is it, because they are too far gone.

And we are failing to see and remember our own guiltiness, and we are subconsciously asserting that we are much better than they. And that is why we could be saved and they not.

You see, this is an example, post salvation, of the way self righteousness creeps into our hearts, that we view ourselves as being somehow worthy of salvation or capable of salvation because we haven't sunk to the depths that those poor people have sunk. And so it causes us to look on them with contempt and hopelessness and to spare from preaching the gospel to them. Because we see how lost and hopeless they are and yet we fail to remember how lost and hopeless we were before the light of God's glorious gospel shined into our heart, and our eyes were opened, and we came to the Savior.

We need to be careful of this. This application of Christ's teaching on the mote and the beam, that we not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Oh, that we would take Paul's view that Christ saved the chiefest of sinners! You remember he called himself the chiefest of sinners, and said that he would be found not with his own righteousness, but with only the righteousness that is by Christ,¹² that God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ my Lord.¹³

The two thieves who hung on the cross, one could only falsely accuse the Savior, but one called upon him and was saved. You see, they were both guilty. They were both wretched and hopeless and helpless. But the one who called on Christ, the Lord Jesus saved him.

And if the Lord Jesus left us as individuals like it seems he has left our political scene, we would all die in our sins, each assuring ourselves that we are so much better than the other side, so much better than all the rest, and condemning them for their many faults, and failing to see our own faults and our own wretchedness.

And I quote the words of that song that I have quoted before:

¹² See Philippians 3:9

¹³ See Galatians 6:14

Come ye sinner, lost and hopeless,
Jesus' blood can set you free.
He has saved the worst among us,
When he saved a wretch like me!

And I know, yes I know
Jesus' blood can make
The vilest sinner clean!

This is what we celebrate at the Lord's table: that blood, shed for us that makes the vilest sinner clean; and oh, that we might not look to ourselves and not be prideful of our own perfection or our own righteousness so called, but that we might come to Christ as poor, lost and vile and helpless sinners, and rejoice that he saved wretches like us all to his glory and all to our benefit for eternity!

Let's give thanks for the Lord's table, that reminds us of how great his grace is for us and what a sacrifice he made and how he did it in a time when we had not known him or cared for him. As old Horatius Bonar says, it was unasked for, undeserved, unmerited, unexpected. And yet he gave his Son as a sacrifice for us!

What a blessing we have and what a sacrifice we can rejoice to remember around this table.

I would like to ask my father if he would give thanks for the bread that reminds us of the body broken.

[Prayer]

And the Lord Jesus, after they had eaten, he took the bread and he blessed it and he broke it and he said, "Take and eat, this is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me."¹⁴

Let's give thanks for the cup that symbolizes his blood poured out for us.

Oh God, our Father, we thank you that we can come before you in celebration and praise of your Son the Lord Jesus and what he did for us on the cross. We thank you for this cup. It reminds us of his blood poured out for us. We think of how he went to the cross for us while we were yet in our sin and rebellious against you and all pleased with our self righteousness, condemning others and justifying ourselves. And yet the Scriptures tell us that he went to the cross and died for the ungodly. We thank you that he poured out his blood in atonement for our transgressions, that he forever satisfied your demands for justice, that all our sins were laid on him, that he was made sin for us, he was made a curse for us, him who was perfect, who was well pleasing and beloved by you, yet you

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:24

turned your wrath against him that should have been for us and he stood between us and that wrath and we are safe in Christ. And we pray that you will help us to remember his body and blood, remember that he died for us and that he took our guiltiness; that we might always repudiate all thoughts of our own self righteousness, that we might remember that we were guilty sinners and that we might realize that your gospel is the power unto salvation; and that we might be eager to proclaim it to the lost, not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought, but realizing that all we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. The Lord laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all.

Thank you for this sacrifice. Thank you for the remembrance of it. Help us to remember Christ's teaching about hypocrisy and about unrighteousness and about the need to be honest and the need to look at things from his perspective of perfection, not from our own broken perspectives of self justification. Help us to remember what Christ did for us all through this week and to rejoice in it that we are free. The terror of law and of God can have nothing to do with us, because Christ's obedience and blood hide all our transgressions from view.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

It says in the Scripture that he took the cup after they had supped and he blessed it and he said, "Drink ye all of it. This cup is the New Testament in my blood for the remission of sins. Do it as often as you do it in remembrance of me."

The Scriptures tell us as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup we do preach the Lord's death till he comes.¹⁵

Let's sing number 96 in the black book, *Hallelujah what a Savior*. Let's stand as we sing this and then we will be dismissed.

¹⁵ See 1 Corinthians 11:26