

How Would You Like Your Judgment?

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Well, the Bible plays a diversified role in our lives as Christians if you think about it at all. Sometimes Scripture instructs us in right belief and tells us the truth about God, about sin, about salvation, and we know what to think and what to believe in response to what it has said. Sometimes Scripture corrects us in our sins and in our errors: it shows us the proper standard; it shows us the will of God; it exposes to us that we have strayed from that path and we know to repent and to return to Christ in confession in response to what the word of God says. Sometimes Scripture comforts us in our trials. We are walking through a deep valley, the shadow of the valley of death or the valley of the shadow of death, I suppose is how it actually reads in Psalm 23. We face unexpected sorrows and we turn to God's word for strength, for comfort, for the reminder that our Lord is sovereign over all that comes into our lives and that he has a purpose that he intends to work out according to the counsel of his eternal will that he is working out in us, that he is working all of these things together for good to us, and we draw comfort from that. The Scriptures draw us to worship our Lord as we see him revealed in his majesty in his glorious attributes, and we respond in worship. And so you see that there is just this broad range of impact that Scripture has on our inner man and it shapes us in our heart and in our thinking, and for those that are not even in Christ, it reveals their sin to them and calls them to come to Christ that they might be saved from sin. So Scripture is an amazing book. Scripture is an amazingly powerful book and all of those impacts that it has on us is a reflection of the fact that it is truly inspired by God, that it is truly the word of God, and that's why it has such a multifaceted impact on us as we read it in our Christian lives and as we sit under its teaching.

Now with that said, sometimes like today, Scripture will issue a word of warning to us. It will call us to contemplate what lies ahead, what lies down the road; to reflect on our lives and to realize that a change of course is necessary lest there be an adverse outcome for us in the end. And with that in mind and with that introduction, I invite you to turn to Matthew 7 for a passage that Jesus spoke as part of his Sermon on the Mount, as a passage that addresses us at the most fundamental level of our hearts and at the most fundamental level at the way that God will deal with us in the end. There is no overestimating, there is no overstating the eternal significance of what is going to be laid before you in God's word here this morning in verses 1 through 5 of Matthew 7. I invite you to look at it in your own Bible as I read it for you to set the stage.

Matthew 7:1 says,

1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Now what I want to do here this morning to kind of give you at the start, to give you a sense of where we're going in this, is that Jesus is addressing his disciples and commanding them. He is addressing them to contemplate what they are doing now because it will have an impact on their eternal reward before God, and he is commanding us, those of us that know him, he is commanding us to stop living life with a critical, faultfinding spirit toward others, and he does this in order to help us, to warn us, and to bless us. He is pointing us in this passage to the reality that you and I have a coming judgment of our own and what happens to us in that coming judgment, even as believers as we will see, I'll go into this, he warns us that God is going to judge us in a manner that somehow resembles and reflects the way that we have interacted with others during the course of our lives and the way that we have judged others is the standard that God is going to apply to us when we stand before him to receive our eternal reward. So we come and realize that there is something of massive eternal significance in what we're reading here today, massive eternal significance that has a direct impact on every immediate human relationship that you have here on earth and how you interact with others, how you think about the world around you, how it is that you speak, and all of the assessments that we all make in everyday life.

Let me go back to what I said last week. I like to say this in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. It just seems to come up so often here in this. Jesus is teaching for keeps. What he is saying is of great significance. It is of eternal consequence what we are reading here and, therefore, he is teaching us to take life soberly and to think deeply about what we are doing. You see, you can't read this and think that Jesus wants to be your buddy or that Jesus is simply trying to give you a happy life now. That's not the point. What Jesus is communicating to us in this text is that there is a coming day of reckoning with God even for his disciples, for those that have truly been born again. We have an appointment, we have a destiny with a holy God and we are going to give an account to him for our lives and what we need to know, what you and I need to know is on what basis is God going to evaluate us? What are the consequences of that going to be? This is what Jesus is speaking and so Jesus is speaking a word of warning to us that we would stop and step back and think about our lives, think about what we're doing, think about how we interact with those that are around us, especially those that are closest to us, because that pattern of life is going to have a reverberation and an echo throughout eternity for us. This is not about primarily, in one sense this is not primarily about this life, Jesus is taking your mind and lifting it up above the clouds and saying, "Gaze upon

eternity and think about life in light of what I'm about to say." So this is a matter of great consequence. It behooves every one of you to pay heed to what is being said here. There are consequences that will follow from how you respond to the word of Christ here today and so we need to come with a sober, reverent spirit and see what our Lord has to say.

Having said that, let me remind you of something very important: our Lord is a gracious Lord. He is a good Lord. He is a loving Lord. He tells us these things not to frighten us into an abject submission, but he says these things in order to bless us so that, speaking to each one of you, there is a sense in which I wish I could sit down one on one with each one of you to say these things to you directly to your face in the way that would be fitting with this, but Jesus is saying this for your blessing. He is saying it for your good. He is saying it so that eternity would be maximized for your reward and blessing. Now, why wouldn't you want that? Why wouldn't that be the number one priority of your life to know that my judgment and my eternity with God is going to be the best that it could possibly be? Why wouldn't you want that? That's what Jesus has in mind. You see, Jesus speaks at an elevated level. He speaks in high and lofty terms about high and lofty themes. His mind and the word of God is animated by things that blow to smithereens the superficial level at which most of us live our lives. So Jesus is warning us, he is calling us, he is beckoning us with promise of things that matter and that are of the utmost consequence and so he's pointing us to our coming judgment and he is warning us that God is going to judge us in the way that we judge others. That's the basic theme of the text here.

Now when we talk about judgment, I always think there's a question that comes up that kind of needs to be addressed in Christian circles and it's this: does the thought of judgment, of a future judgment before God even apply to Christians at all? I mean, I thought that the purpose of salvation was that we were going to avoid judgment? Why then is Jesus talking and telling us that you're going to be judged by the measure with which you judge? Is he saying that even his own disciples are going to be judged? Wow, if so, this is pretty serious. Well, what we need to do today is to be very precise and that's what we're going to do our levelheaded best to do today, to think through what the Bible teaches about judgment. And just by way of a little bit of introduction here, Scripture speaks of a particular kind of judgment for unbelievers, for sinners who do not repent and receive Christ, it speaks about a judgment that applies to them, and then it also speaks of a judgment that applies to those of us that know Christ and that's what we want to try to unpack for you here this morning, is to distinguish those two things so that we are thinking rightly about what is to come.

So first of all, our first point here this morning is this: God will judge non-Christians in eternal hell. God will judge non-Christians in eternal hell and it should immediately be obvious that we are not trying to be a Seeker Sensitive church here today with what we say, and we don't try to avoid things that will offend people by what Scripture says. You know, what we want to do is we want to speak the truth. We want to tell you the truth and let the Spirit of God use that and apply it to your hearts. I read recently somebody, I can't remember the context in which I heard it, but someone said that your best friend is the person who tells you the most truth and if we tell you truth from the pulpit, if we point

Scriptures to you and it is true, then the fact that it's uncomfortable doesn't mean that we are being unkind, the fact that it's a fearful thing at times doesn't mean that we are not being loving. The best thing that you could hear is to know the truth about what the future holds for you so that you can respond to it now before it's too late. You know, the Bible says that it's appointed for men to die once and then comes judgment. When the period on your life is applied at the end of the sentence, so to speak, then your judgment is going to be sealed, as it were, in the courts of God. Your position at death seals it for you. There is no second chance. There is no opportunity to make amends. There is no fiction like purgatory to kind of give you a way to burn off your sins. None of that is true. You see, you have a window of time, you have a window of opportunity, my friend, during this life to come to grips with Jesus Christ, to come to grips with what Scripture says about your sin and the holiness of God, you have an opportunity in this window of life to respond to it and what you do with that is going to have eternal ramifications that you cannot reverse after you die.

So it is essential for us to know the truth and what Scripture describes is that for the natural man, for the unsaved man, the person that has not turned to Christ, it describes this: there will be an eternal judgment at the end of time where those who do not know Christ will be cast into an eternal lake of fire which is the just judgment for their sins against God during their earthly life. And if you'll turn to Revelation 20, you'll see this stated plainly. Revelation 20, beginning in verse 11, and we're not trying to develop a full-fledged doctrine of hell here this morning. We'll do that in the near future within the next year I hope, in the course of our study on systematic theology. For today, we just want to make the point briefly and succinctly. Revelation 20:11 where it reads,

11 ... I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Do you see it, beloved? If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. You know, I would want to know if I were you, is my name in the Lamb's book of life or not? That's a matter of pretty great consequence. You know, one of the things about eternity is it doesn't end. There is no cessation to it. Those who would teach you a doctrine called annihilationism that says that the unsaved are judged and God annihilates them so that they cease to exist, are not telling you the truth. You have an eternal soul that is going to live forever and it is your duty, it is your responsibility, to make sure that your soul is well before you die because those that die in an unsaved condition, those that die with unforgiven sin, are facing an eternal judgment

in hell. This is the natural consequence, this is the right thing for a holy God to do. When, think with me, when those who have an eternal soul sin against an eternal God and break his eternal law, well, there are going to be eternal consequences to that and we have to come to grips with what Scripture says. So Scripture here in Revelation 20 brings us, as it were, and we peek, we look over and we peek into the very brink of hell itself, and every man must contemplate this reality that if you die in your sins, you will face a terrifying judgment.

Now, that's the reality for every unsaved person. Here's our question for this morning: is Jesus, is our Lord applying that threat of eternal judgment to Christians? Is he threatening eternal damnation upon those who have put their faith in him for salvation? Is that what he is doing here in Matthew 7? And the answer to that question is no. That's not what Jesus is talking about here in Matthew 7. You see, let's remember some of the basics about Christianity. The whole point of Christianity is that Jesus Christ suffered the judgment our sins deserve on the cross. He stood in our stead. He stood in our place. Stated more graphically, he hung on a cross in our place in order to bear the judgment that your sins and mine deserved. So he has already paid the price of eternal judgment for those who come to him for salvation. He has already paid the price and God is not a God who inflicts double jeopardy. The whole point of the New Testament Gospel can be summed up in John 5:24 where Jesus said,

24 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Does not come into judgment. Does not come into that eternal condemnation of which Scripture speaks for the unsaved, but rather believing in Christ, we have passed out of death, out of judgment, into life, into forgiveness, into eternal blessing. That's the promise of the Gospel. That's why we can gather together in the name of Christ in a spirit of joy and confidence and peace knowing that our Lord has made provision for us. And it would be my privilege as a teacher, as a preacher, to invite you to come to Christ if you don't know him. To come to the foot of the cross and to come to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins that this awful judgment of Revelation 20 would pass you by. That in Christ you would pass through that judgment safe and enter into eternal life. Christ, as it were, would extend his hand to you and say, "Come to me you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Come to me and I will deliver you from this eternal judgment that is certain to come. I have paid the price for sinners. Believe in me and the gift can be yours."

So we recognize that Scripture speaks of an eternal judgment for sinners who reject the Gospel and yet we realize that we have this great blessing from Christ for those of us that have believed in him, that he has delivered us from that; he has rescued us from it so that that threat does not hang over our own heads and we rejoice and have peace in that. My Christian friend, my brother and sister in Christ, let me assure you based on the testimony of the word of God that if you are in Christ, you need never fear hell again. He who saved you will keep you. He who brought you into his hand will not let anyone pluck you out.

Satan can do his best against your soul but he cannot take you out of Christ because Christ has saved you and Christ keeps you. That's what a great, faithful, loving Savior does, he keeps those that he has saved. So we are greatly blessed to be free from that fear of eternal judgment.

Now with that said, the Bible does speak of another kind of accountability, another kind of judgment that we face as Christians, and that's what I want to move into here in the second point of our message today. The fact that Christ has delivered us from hell and death does not mean that there is not going to be an accountability that we give to God at the end of our lives when we stand before him. The Bible is equally clear on this point as well and so that brings us to point 2: God will judge the lives of Christians. He will judge the lives of Christians and this is perhaps not as emphasized as often as it could be in the Christian circles in which we live and move and have our being. As I'm going to show you, and I state simply by way of introduction here right now, the Bible teaches us as believers that we will stand before God and give an account to him for our lives after we came to faith in Christ. So Christ deals with our sin, takes it away, and we enter into life in Christ, and then God gives us a window of time in which to live as Christians. He gives us a stewardship, you might say, a stewardship of life and ability and talents, and there is a time coming where we're going to have to give an account to him for what we have done with that opportunity and with the life that he has given us.

If you'll turn to Romans 14, there are three or four different passages that I want to take you to that just teach this unmistakably. Romans 14, beginning in verse 10. Here in Romans 14, Paul is writing to Christians. He is addressing believers in Christ as shown by the language of "brother" that he addresses them with. In Romans 14:10, he says... Actually, let's back up to verse 7, let's say, to set the context a little better. He says,

7 ... not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Now notice, brothers and sisters here this morning, notice something very important: Paul is addressing those who are in the Lord. He is addressing those who belong to Christ, who have been saved, who have been ransomed by the blood, and so he's addressing Christians here in this portion of his letter. In verse 9 he says,

9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Now in verse 10 we come to what is pertinent to our discussion here this morning. Verse 10 he says,

10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God."

Then he goes on and says in verse 12,

12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

Beloved, I want to just remind you, those of you that have been with us over the years, this is what I have said to you so many times. I have told you again and again to contemplate the fact that you have an appointment with God that you are inexorably moving toward and so we plead with you as a church, we plead with you to take that into account, to take life seriously, to be mindful of the fact that you have a coming appointment with God, an appointment of some kind of judgment that we are going to talk about in a moment, because that's the only way that you can live life with the proper perspective is if that is somehow anchored in your thinking. Only then can you assess life properly. Only then can you establish priorities correctly, to realize that all of my priorities and all of my choices and all of my decisions are coming in a context where I'm going to give an account to God for my life and what he has done for me. And what I've said, I'm pleading with you, I'm pleading with you in what I'm saying here right now, what I have said so many times do you and I repeat in love as your pastor, is that the only thing in life that matters for you and what I want more than anything for each one of you under the sound of my voice, is that that time of judgment for you would go well; that that would go as well for you as it possibly could because nothing else matters by comparison.

So all we can do is point you to this. You know, ultimately, I wish I could remember the context in which I said this recently to somebody, but ultimately as a pastor you have very little influence, in one sense. You have no authority. You can't make people listen. You can't make people do things. All you can do is you show them the truth and you plead with them and then what you do with that is between you and God. I can't guarantee the well-being of your soul. I can't even guarantee that you're going to respond with any kind of sense of sobriety and in your own best self-interest in what's being said here. So all I can do is just plead with you to hear the word of God and to let it shape the way that you think about life because I want that day to go well for you. Scripture invites you to consider things that would let that day go well for you and if that day goes well for you and God blesses you, you're going to carry that reward throughout all of eternity and that's the greatest possible thing. I can't help you if your life falls apart here on earth but do you see the great value of what Scripture is laying before you here to contemplate the fact that there is a day of accountability coming for you, to give you time in advance to contemplate what you're going to do with that? Does anything else matter by comparison? You become wealthy, you go into poverty. You live a long life, you live a short life. Your marriage is great, your marriage is bad. You're happy, you're sad. All of that is secondary by comparison to the issue that we're talking about right here, right now.

So Scripture tells you that if you are a Christian, you are going to give an account to God for your life. Look at 1 Corinthians. I tried to set these up to go a little bit in canonical order here. The next book after Romans, 1 Corinthians 3, beginning in verse 10. It says this,

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me [me, being Paul here], like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

You start to see a theme: each man, each one of us, each person being brought into this calculation, into this calculus of what is to come, every one meant to consider it closely. Verse 11,

11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Now notice a couple of things here. Notice how often Paul says "any man, each man, each man, any man, any man." It's in practically every verse of this passage. Don't you see, beloved, don't you see that you're included within the scope of that? Doesn't it awaken you to eternal realities and the matters of eternal significance? Doesn't it awaken you to those things to realize that somehow this is addressing your life as well?

This is of great consequence. God is going to evaluate our lives in a way that is like fire testing physical materials. Now this is not the false doctrine of purgatory. We addressed that recently in our series on Catholicism and I'm not going to spend any time on it here. But what Paul is describing here is that there are aspects of life that we do, there are things that we say, things that we think, that have eternal value and eternal consequence that will become the basis upon which our reward is given to us. These things of indestructible quality like precious gold and silver, precious stones, matters that endure compared with matters of temporal insignificance, let alone eternal insignificance, wood, hay, straw that just is going to evaporate before the fire. Paul is saying that God's judgment is going to be something like a fire. Not that we are going to actually go through eternal flames, not that, but that our work is going to be tested by fire. The matters of our life that have eternal significance will endure and will become the basis of our reward. The opportunities that you've squandered, the time and the other things that you've devoted to things of no significance, will burn up. There will be nothing left upon which to give a reward. So that will bring, I'm using a metaphor here, will bring a big basket that has some precious stones in it and has some straw in it and it will be dumped out and it will burn up and what's left will be the basis upon which God will reward us, and only those things that have eternal value will be the basis of your reward.

Go to 2 Corinthians 5, if you will. Again, I want you to see that Paul is necessarily and obviously addressing Christians in what he has to say here. 2 Corinthians 5, beginning in verse 6. It says,

6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight-- 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Who is it that's going to be with the Lord when they die except for Christians? True believers so that's who he is addressing. He goes on in verse 9 and he says,

9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

Now in this context of addressing Christians, watch what he says in verse 10,

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Paul talking to Christians says we are going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ and be recompensed for how we have lived our lives and he says to them we must all appear before the judgment seat.

Now, let me clarify something for you here: at that time, at that seat of judgment before Christ, Christ is not going to rehearse all of our sins before us and castigate us for them and criticize and judge us and bring all of our sins up as if, you know, as some of the tracts used to do, that he's going to play a videotape of your entire life and everything is going to be exposed like that. I don't believe that's true at all. Scripture says plainly for those of us that are in Christ, we have a promise from God in Hebrews 10 and other places that says, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Praise God for that. I am so thankful that he is not going to rehearse my sins again. Our sins were dealt with finally at the cross. Christ satisfied the judgment of God against our sins at the cross. The payment was made in full for those who believe in him and so he's not going to promise us that and then yank them back out at the last minute and reverse everything that he told us to base our life and hope upon. He's not going to do that otherwise this was kind of an inadequate work that Christ did for us when he suffered on the cross.

No, he's not going to rehearse our sins before us, for those of us that are in Christ. I'm talking to Christians now. But Scripture does make it plain that God will evaluate our lives at that time – listen, listen, listen – God will evaluate our lives to determine a reward that somehow will echo forth throughout all eternity. There are eternal consequences to the very thing we are talking about right now. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this on this subject and I quote, he said, "This judgment does not determine our eternal destiny. No, we have passed through that in Christ. But it is a judgment which is going to affect our eternal destiny by deciding what happens to us in the realm of glory. We are not given any further details about this in Scripture but that there is a judgment of believers is

clearly taught. It will make a difference to me. It is a judgment of my life since I have become a Christian."

Now, let's step back. Here we are, I'll address you all as Christians. I don't believe that every one of you is in Christ but I'm going to assume that for what I'm about to say. Here we are as Christians, we are in Christ, we have been saved, there was a point in which our lives were converted and now we are living for Christ. We are in him and we are safe and secure from eternal judgment. Now, what we have to realize is that this realm of blessing he has bestowed upon us, it has been given to you as a stewardship. What you do with that stewardship is ultimately something that you are going to give an account for with the lives, the relationships, the resources, the opportunities, the giftedness that God has given to you. There is a sense in which there is going to be a time where it is laid out before Christ and he'll say, "Let's see what you did with what was given to you. What did you do with it?" And the answer to that question will be reflected in the reward that you were given as you enter into eternal glory.

Do you know what that does? Do you know what that does, what the reality of the truth of that does? It makes you realize that this life is very significant, even if it seems like you have been assigned a portion where you don't have much significance, you're not a high profile person, you just kind of quietly live life. There is eternal significance to what you do and you will not be judged by God according to the opportunities that have been given to me, for example, and I won't be judged according to the opportunities that have been given to you. You will have a unique accountability, a personal accountability for everything that God gave to you and say, "Okay, what did you do with it?" Then you realize and you step back, you step back and you say, "Wow, this matters! This is of consequence!" And what should the impact of that be on the way that you think about life and the way that you live and the way that your whole perspective on existence, what should that be? Well, Paul says in verse 11, 2 Corinthians 5:11, look at it with me. He says, "Therefore," because those things about the judgment seat of Christ are true, "Therefore," as a consequence of that, "knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." Paul says, "Knowing these things are true instills a fear of God in me that makes me reverent in my approach to life and it causes me to want to persuade men to consider Christ for salvation if they don't know him, and to persuade men who are in Christ to take life seriously, to be devoted to Christ."

The fear Paul describes is the sober reverence that comes from knowing that you will give an account to God. That holy fear, my brother, my sister, sometimes I'm just overwhelmed with the consequence of what we're saying here and I think with Paul, "Who is adequate for these things?" My tongue is not worthy to speak of these things and I realize that some in front of me will blow it off and you'll just say, "Who is adequate for these things?" Unless the Spirit of God helps us, we are wasting our time, aren't we? But what that fear should produce in your heart is this: it should produce, that holy fear should cause you to take God's word seriously and maximize your life opportunities for his glory. Has God given you a family, God given you a spouse? Whatever the circumstances of that may be, it's for his glory and you say, "God, what do you say in your word about how I should deal with my family relationships? I want to get this right."

You're in a body of believers like Truth Community, "God, here is my giftedness. What can I do? How do I use this? How do I live amongst other believers in order to promote the unity of the body for which Christ died? And how do I serve in a way that will be pleasing to you and which will position me for reward when I stand before you?" These things become matters of great urgency because, because you realize that the most significant thing is still ahead; that that time of judgment, you know, you live 70 years in this life, it's a puff of air compared to the eons of the eons of ages of ages, and there is just eternal consequence to this window of time and that eternal consequence is what really matters. Not your job. Not your profession. Not any of this other stuff. It's incidental by comparison.

So I don't know how else to tell you. I point you to Scripture, plead with you to take it seriously, but ultimately your response to that is not to me, it's before the Lord in what you're going to do with it. All I can do is tell you that your response to the things that you are hearing today have great consequence for eternity. And I'll say it one more time: I want that day to go well for you. Scripture would have that day go well for you. But I can lead you to the water but I can't make you drink it. You have to respond on your own. You have to believe these things by faith to be true based on the word of God, and then work it out, work out your salvation with fear and trembling as Philippians 2 says.

Point 3. I'll introduce the point by saying this. You know, here's the thing, we've laid the foundation to get back to Jesus' words and if you think for just a moment this question should become of burning importance in your mind. Okay, I accept the fact that Scripture tells me that I'm going to give an account of my life before God and that somehow there is going to be a reward to me and there is going to be some kind of accountability, there is going to be some kind of judgment Scripture describes it as. Here's what I want to know, if I were you, this is what I would want to know, I would want to know this: by what standard is God going to judge me? What is going to be the basis upon which he makes his determination about the generosity of his reward to me that I'm going to carry throughout all of eternity? What's the measure of that going to be, recognizing and understanding that Scripture does not give us everything that we would like to know. The quote from Martyn Lloyd-Jones spoke about that. It doesn't tell us everything that we might want to know about it. I want to know what's the standard. I'd like to move my life in that direction, in the direction of blessing and reward rather than squandering the opportunity and finding out that I had missed reward that otherwise could have been mine.

Well, Jesus is teaching you that very thing here as we come to point 3. It's this: God will tailor his judgment to each individual. God will tailor his judgment to each individual. Everybody wants teaching to be practical. Nothing could be more practical than this, than what I'm about to say. Beloved, the tenor of your life will be the basis for the tenor of your judgment. The way in which you live and interact with men is going to contribute substantially to the standard of judgment that God applies to your life. This is very sobering. This is very sobering.

Go back to Matthew now, Matthew 5:7. You know, when I think about how miserably short of the glory of God I fall in my life as a believer, as a pastor, as a husband, as a father, when I think about that, I really want, I'm really hoping that God will deal generously with me, kindly with me, graciously with me, because I know that in myself, that everything that I do is tainted and tinged by sin. That I myself have squandered opportunity, wasted opportunity time and again. That my prayers are often so cold and formal and mechanical. I'm praying to the God who ordained my salvation and I'm just going through the motions, what in the world is wrong with me? I'm a pastor. What's wrong with me? Times where his word has been a matter of indifference to me. Cold, indifferent, whatever. And I think about that in light of these themes of which we speak here today and my heart cries, "God, don't give me what I deserve. God, be gracious to me. Be merciful to me. Give according to your grace and kindness that which goes far beyond what I deserve, because if it's according to what I deserve, Lord, it's going to be very meager for me."

Now, is there a basis upon which we might expect that? Is there a way in which we could orient our life so that that might somehow be true for us? Well, Scripture is pointing us to words of hope and direction here. Look at Matthew 5:7. Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Those who pattern their life with a merciful disposition are positioning themselves to receive mercy from God at their final judgment. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Notice, Blessed are the merciful, present tense. Now in this life, merciful. Marked by kindness. Marked by forgiveness. Marked by grace. Future tense, people like that are going to receive some manner of mercy. They will receive something different from the hand of God than those who were not merciful.

Think about James 3:1. You don't need to turn there, a verse that hangs over the lives of guys like me. James 3:1, listen to it when it talks about judgment here,

1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

I'm making a very small point here. It's a very important point but it's a very narrow point that God is going to apply different standards of judgment. For teachers, there is going to be a stricter accountability than those who are not teachers. Those who have taught God's word, those who have held positions of spiritual leadership, a stricter standard will apply to them. I often am jealous of all of you that are not in spiritual leadership and are not facing that stricter judgment. Honestly, I think that way sometimes and I need to get over it. But there is a stricter judgment for teachers. There is a merciful judgment, a more merciful judgment that awaits those who have shown mercy in their lives. And all you need to see at this point is this: we don't know exactly what those standards of God are going to be, we know they are going to be righteous, we know that they will be right and they will be true, but Scripture tells us to recognize that there will be different standards applied.

Now with all of that in mind, finally let's get to our text here in the first two verses of Matthew 7 and now we have the groundwork laid so that we can land this plane where it needs to go. Matthew 7:1 and 2 with the sober reality of judgment laid before us, with the warnings that it's going to matter. Matthew 7:1 and 2 Jesus says,

1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."

He's speaking to his disciples and, beloved, here's what he's saying, he says you will be judged. Notice that he doesn't say who is doing the judging. It's a passive voice. You will be judged. By whom? Well, it's a divine passive. You will be judged by God. He is our only Judge. He is the one to whom we will give final account.

So Jesus says plainly you will be judged. Now, in verse 1 he says, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged." He does not mean that you can avoid absolutely all accountability before God whatsoever if you just take an entirely passive approach and exercise no discernment and say nothing to anyone about sin or error and you can avoid all judgment simply by being a limp Christian. He's not saying that. We established that last week. Indeed, verse 2, look at verse 2, it says, "in the way you judge, you will be judged." So he's assuming that there will be a judgment in everything that he's saying here. Here's what he's saying, he's talking about judgment in a comparative sense and here is his point: how you judge others is somehow going to flavor the manner in which God judges you. That's what he's saying and in verse 1 when he says, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged," it could be translated like this, "Stop judging. Stop being so harsh and judgmental and critical and hard on people, my Christian friend," he says, "because as you live life that way, God is going to judge you by the same critical standard that you're judging others in this life. You are setting yourselves up for a difficult time before the judgment seat of God by the harsh critical spirit with which you live your life. So," Jesus says, "stop that so that your judgment won't be so difficult." It's a word of grace. It's a word of instruction. It's a word of warning.

And this is so sobering, beloved, and think about it in the context of your own family relationships, think about it in the context of your own marriage. I insist that you do this. Or your other family relationships, and realize this: that your own attitudes in the context of those close relationships is somehow going to influence the final reward that you receive from God, and if you are harsh and unbending, you can expect a stricter judgment as a result. God will measure out our rewards according to the measure that we use with men during our earthly lives. What Jesus is saying is that if you deal generously and graciously and in a forgiving spirit with others and that's the tone of your life, there is mercy that comes out of you, you can expect a judgment from God that is going to be more generous and merciful and gracious as a result so that the reward, you'll walk away having lived a merciful gracious life – I'm making this up, I'm just using a picture – you'll walk away staggered with reward and bending under the weight of what God rewards you with because he has not applied that strict standard to you. But on the other hand, beloved, you've got to listen to me, you have to. It's too important. It's for your own sake

that I insist upon it. If you love to criticize the faults of others, if you are harsh and unbending in your dealings with men, be warned. God is going to use your own unbending standard on you. If you are ungracious and unforgiving, don't expect God to be merciful to you. It's the merciful that are going to receive mercy.

Pastor Kent Hughes summarizes this well when he says this and I quote, "Judgmental believers will still be with God forever but they will have very little reward for their hypercritical spirit will have vitiated much of the good they have done. Our Lord means to put a holy fear in us so that we will put away our critical hearts. The tone of our lives is going to become the tone of our judgment."

Now, in defense of the holiness of God, God is not going to judge you by the childish way that you and I sometimes act. "I'm going to get him back!" No, God is not going to be petulant the way that you and I sometimes are. What God will do is this: he will extract the sinfulness of your attitudes and then apply the overall tone of your standard among men to you.

So we are left with the question, my friends, that each one of us has to answer: how would you like your judgment? You know, you order eggs, "I want my eggs scrambled, fried, poached, boiled, soft, hard. That's how I like my eggs." Let's ask a more important question: how would you like your judgment to be? Do you want it to have a disposition, a flavor of generosity and mercy and leniency in accordance with what you need? Or do you prefer to get your pound of flesh now out of relationships? Oh, choose carefully. Choose wisely.

Now, some of us are further along in life than others. I get paid for saying silly things like that. It's amazing. We are further along, maybe you're 50, 60, 70, 80, and you are brought under a great weight of conviction as you realize that the word of God has exposed your sinful, critical, hypercritical spirit, and you realize, "This is the way that I have been all of my life. What's going to happen to me? Is there any hope for me? Is it too late for me to avoid the strict judgment that my Christian lifestyle deserves? Is it too late? I've got a long history and a lot shorter window ahead, as I do the math, is it too late?" Well, I've got great news for you. I've got great news for you. The answer to that question is no, it's not too late. Even if you're old and decrepit it's not too late. Jesus' command literally means, "Stop judging so that you will not be judged." That command "so that you will not be judged" implies great grace. Christ is telling you now through his word that if you recognize you have lived with that hypercritical spirit and you have been a harsh unbending taskmaster in your relationships, there is still opportunity for hope. It can be different for you. Your past does not have to define your eternal future, your reward. This command is simply a call to repent, to fall before him with your face in your hands and say, "O God, I'm guilty of that! I confess my sin! I confess my critical spirit! Have mercy on me and in this window of time that you have left for me, let me be different! Change me because I take eternal realities seriously! I want you to deal with me in kindness and so, Lord, I would have a kind spirit for whatever window of time you give me going forward." Jesus says if you will respond in that way, you won't be judged according to the harsh standard that your prior life deserved even as a Christian. What a blessing. What

grace. What grace. My Christian friends, if you would just repent of your judgmental faultfinding heart, God would be delighted to expand the sphere of his grace to you when you stand before him in judgment.

So here's the question that will reverberate throughout your eternity, my Christian brother, my Christian sister. Here's the question that will reverberate throughout all of eternity how you respond to this very thing, to Jesus' words here in Matthew 7:1 and 2. I'll say it again: how would you like your judgment? How generous, beloved, how generous would you have God be toward you in that day that is sure to come? Jesus says let your answer to that question guide – watch it – let the answer to that question guide the grace, the mercy and the forgiveness that you extend to others right now. How will you have it?

Let's pray.

Our Father, in some ways nothing about life really conditions us to think about the eternal consequences of the way that we live except for your word. Everything around us and in our own minds and hearts would point us toward the immediate and the temporal rather than these eternal matters. Thank you for your word which awakens us to what is to come. I pray for each one here, Father. I ask you by your grace through no deserving of my own but just appealing to your grace as it has been revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord, to have mercy on each one under the sound of my voice today. Lord, the consequences are eternal and we are such dumb stupid sheep, we're just mindless. We don't even think about these things. We just go through life doing what we do without any thought of the consequence to come. So God, have mercy on us. Have grace upon us. Those of us that are in Christ, use your word to shape us that it would go well for us on our Judgment Day and that we would experience the fullness of the reward that you would have for us throughout all of eternity. Be gracious to us on that day, O God, and as we contemplate that, Father, we realize that there is a reciprocal responsibility of grace on ourselves to be gracious in the realm of our relationships here. Help us to that end. For those that are under the sound of my voice and do not know Christ, Father, help them realize their present course is in the first part of the message, God will judge non-Christians in eternal hell. Open their eyes. Move their hearts that they would believe in Christ and pass from death into life, from judgment into grace, from the dominion of Satan to the dominion of our gracious Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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