

Righteousness Starts at Home

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I heard a story several years ago about an idealistic young man who wanted to improve the world, as many young people do in their idealism. He began to work with an environmental group thinking that that was the way to bring change and that which would help the earth and help his fellow man, but he soon found that the leaders of this group were unkempt men who happened to be chain-smokers beside, and a better environment somehow wasn't personal to them. They were happy to impose standards on others without applying them to their own heart and the young man could not tolerate their hypocrisy. In discouragement and disillusionment, he resigned and went on to other things in his life. That's instructive for us as we come to the word of God here this morning in light of the passage that we are about to see.

For those of you that are visiting with us, we're very glad that you are with us. Thank you for coming to Truth Community today. We would have you know that we have been preaching verse by verse for many months through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Today we happen to come in the natural course of things to a passage in Matthew 7.

Now a key verse in the entire Sermon on the Mount that speaks to each one of us is found in Matthew 6:33. It's familiar but I would ask you to let your eyes fall upon it as I call your attention to it. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Jesus lays forth before his disciples, to everyone who would hear these words, that the first priority of life is to seek the kingdom of God, to seek his righteousness, and then let God add other things to your life as he chooses to see fit. Now here is a most important question, in some ways you might rightly say without the risk of too much hyperbole, the key question as you read that verse as you contemplate its significance for your life is this: where do you start in seeking his kingdom and his righteousness? Where do you start? You could put the emphasis on that. You could put the emphasis on the pronoun. Where do "you" start in the seeking of his kingdom and his righteousness? Now this is a very critical matter. This determines the entire way that you think about spiritual life, about the world around you, and about the application of Jesus' words to your own heart. You have to decide, you have to know where God would have you start and what the significance of it is when he says seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Where do you start that search? Where do you start in seeking the priority of life?

Well, Jesus said in Matthew 7:1 and 2, if you look at that, we looked at these verses last week. He said, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged." By the way, there is no chapter break here. This is closely tied to the preceding context at the end of chapter 6. What I mean is that when this was originally written, there was no chapter break. There is obviously one in your Bible now but this is not a sharp break with the end of chapter 6, it's a continuation of it, is the point that I would have you see. Seek first his kingdom and Jesus after saying don't worry about tomorrow, he goes into chapter 7, verse 1 and says, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." Last week we saw what Jesus meant by this and you can see how it applies to the idea of seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness. Last week we saw that those verses mean this: that each one of us, you and I, face a future time of accountability before God for the way that we have lived our lives. Unbelievers, those who have rejected Christ, will face a final judgment which will send them to hell, and I trust that those of you who are not in Christ will take those words to heart and realize the sobriety in which God's word addresses your soul. But even for those of us that are in Christ, we face a future accountability before God. We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and how God judges us we saw last time, will be determined in part by how we evaluated, how we judged others in our own earthly lives. We go through life, we make assessments of people, we see their faults, we respond to them, we see the way they've sinned, maybe we forgive them, maybe we don't, and what Jesus is saying here is that your attitude in your evaluation of other people, particularly in light of their sins, is going to have an effect, is going to flavor, it is going to impact the way that God judges you in the end. That's very very serious. It stops you short in your tracks, doesn't it, to realize that our daily reactions to our fellow men and to fellow believers within the church of Christ, the things that we do without really thinking about them, are going to have an eternal consequence when we stand before God and give an account for our lives. How God judges you will be determined in part by how you judged others during your earthly life.

Now, that is a sobering thought, beloved, that is designed to change and impact your character. It is designed to humble you and it is designed to soften you. When you see things, when people wrong you even, it is designed to soften you so that you would not have such a critical spirit that you might otherwise be inclined to have; that you might not judge others so sharply into their sins and weaknesses when you encounter them. Now in the passage that we are going to see today in verses 3 through 5, Jesus is going to introduce something further in this discussion and he is going to help you understand why your demeanor toward others should be soft and gentle, and also he's going to show you how to develop the softness of demeanor that would be fitting in light of the fact that you have a coming judgment.

You know, this is the way that we should think about it, this is the way that we should think about it and I'll speak in the first person here, you know, kind of illustrating the way that each one of you should think. You think, "I am going to stand before God soon enough and give an account for my life, and I realize that even as a Christian, I'm nothing more than a sinner saved by grace. There is nothing great, there is nothing special, there

is nothing elite about me. I am a sinner saved by grace and I am going to give an account of my life before a holy God who knows everything and who knows my heart inside and out. And I realize that I have fallen short of his glory even as I'm one who has put my faith and trust in Christ from my salvation." So I look at that and I realize and I kind of picture it in my mind walking down a hall just because it's a visual that's in my mind that I see, I see the hall right in front of me that leads to the center doors going out, walking down the hall and approaching his throne. I don't know exactly what it's going to look like but bowing down for my moment of accountability and being humbled by his majesty and his glory and the significance of what's happening, and bowing low and saying, "Lord, I'm here to give an account. Be merciful to me, the sinner, as you do." And you approach it and you look forward to that and then you bring it back into the present, as I often say, and you realize that in light of the sobriety of that moment, it softens my heart toward others who are heading toward that exact same point of accountability in their own lives before God. It's a sobering thought.

Now, here's where we go with that. Here's where Jesus, better stated, goes with that in light of this future judgment that is coming. He says it will be measured to you. You will be judged. Now in verse 3, look at it with me as we consider our text for this morning. Jesus says in light of those great truths seek first the kingdom, you will be judged, and all of those, he says in verse 3,

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 we've all heard this saying. We've all heard it, perhaps not as many of us have understood exactly what Jesus is saying, and most importantly why is he saying it here at this particular point in time? Well, what Jesus is saying is this and if you want to put a title on the message for your notes here, it's that "Righteousness Starts at Home." Righteousness starts at home, and by that I mean this: seeking the kingdom of God, seeking the righteousness of God in your life, speaking to you one on one, not speaking corporately here, Jesus here in verses 3 through 5 is using the singular form of the pronoun "you." It's singular. It's direct. It's immediate. This is not a corporate discussion, in some ways. This is an individual discussion and so I'm talking very directly and personal as if we were talking one on one today and what you need to understand and what I need to understand is this: is that seeking the righteousness of God does not start by turning a critical eye toward the lives of others. Quite to the contrary, it starts with a sense of self-examination and concern over your own sins. It starts with self-examination and concern over your own sins. Beloved, this is so plain and obvious when it is stated like what I'm about to say that I think it's utterly undeniable. In light of the fact that you are facing a personal accountability before God one day, it should be obvious to you the truth of what I'm about to say. When Christ addresses you in the Sermon on the Mount, when the word of God convicts you, God is not calling you to repent of the sins of society. That's not true repentance. It doesn't do you any good to repent of the sins of

abortion and homosexuality in society and to think that that is the extent of the repentance that you owe to God, "God, I disassociate myself from the sins of the world around me." Well, if you haven't committed those sins, if you're not particularly drawn to those sins, that's really kind of meaningless. There is no cost in that to you at all. There is no personal accountability in that at all. No, the Gospel, the conviction that the Spirit brings upon hearts through the word of God is more direct and immediate to your sins.

Let me put it another way. As you look around in your family, as you look around in the church, as you look around in the workplace, God is not calling you to repent of your neighbor's sins or your spouse's sins, or your brother's sins. No. No. No. No. You see, it could be no other way in light of future accountability than this: God is calling you to repent of your sins. And we know, I know and you know, that each and every one of you have sins of your own of which you are personally responsible, of which you are the one to repent of, and that is where righteousness starts. That's where the search for righteousness starts. Not with saying, "God, I am surrounded by these guilty sinners and aren't you glad that I'm not one of them?" That's not the point at all. Righteousness starts at home. It starts in your own heart and that is the point at which Jesus is addressing you. Rather than looking through the window at the sins of those around you, this passage is calling you to look in a mirror, look in a different kind of glass, look in the mirror and see the reflection of your own sinfulness and start there in your confession of sin, start there in your pursuit of righteousness, start there in your mourning and discomfort over the nature of guilt. "God, I am the sinner. God, I am the one with unclean lips. I am the one with an unclean heart. I am the one who has done this or that." That's where you start and this is the requirement of righteousness, that you start by addressing, contemplating, examining yourself in light of your own sins and confessing those, and that's Jesus' point here this morning.

He draws us in with questions. Look at verse 3. He draws us in with questions and you can see that in verse 3. He has just said you are going to be judged, now in verse 3 he asks a question,

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?"

As I said, the prior two verses, 1 and 2, they had been in the plural: you plural, you all of you. Jesus has switched to the singular now makes it as though he's pointing the finger directly at you. He has isolated you. He is speaking to you alone in a room and says, "Let me address your soul directly in what I have to say at this portion of Scripture." So we are going to look at two aspects of these three verses here. We're going to look at the question and we're going to look at the command. The question and the command and the way that we respond to this, beloved, the way that you respond to this text of Scripture is somehow going to impact your eternal reward. This is worth taking seriously and looking beyond the moment and considering deeply what kind of person are you going to be in light of what Jesus says here.

So the question is this, this is point 1, the question is this: where is your focus? Where is your focus? What do you concentrate on? What do you think about when you contemplate spiritual reality and the reality of sin and guilt and all of these things? Where is your focus? Are you focused on someone else's sins? "You wouldn't believe what that person did to me. Did you see what So-and-so did?" and you are casting that critical eye outward. Or are you saying as Peter did in the passage we read, "Depart from me, Lord, I am a sinful man." Notice in that passage that we read from Luke 5 earlier in the service, Peter saw the great haul of fish and he was convicted because he realized he was in the presence of God Incarnate and his response to that was, "Lord, I hope these other fishermen depart from you for they are sinful men." That's not what he said. "Lord, depart from me for I am a sinful man." That's the spirit. That's the idea.

Look at verses 3 and 4 as we read them again. Jesus says, "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? 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?" Notice in English, notice the question marks at the end of verse 3 and verse 4. These are questions in the singular which are designed for you to answer them. You're not supposed to read this passage and simply view it as another academic exercise as if you were reading a book on the Civil War that had no application to your heart; you're just gathering and acquiring more information. This is Christ asking you a question that calls for an answer. Why do you do this? Why are you like this in light of future accountability, in light of the fact that you're going to stand before God?

And what he does here is he uses an obviously exaggerated picture, an obviously exaggerated illustration to communicate spiritual truth about the urgency of what he is saying. When he says, "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye," a speck is referring to something small like a wood chip or maybe a splinter of some kind, and in this context what he's saying is this, "Why is it, my friend, that you look at a comparatively insignificant fault and sin that you have found in the life of your brother here within the church, why do you focus and elevate and complain about it?" I'm talking generally here. I'm not talking about anything specific that's going on in the life of our body here but this plays out in the life of the community of the people of God. "Why is it that you would see a fault or a sin in someone else and elevate that and make that the object of your consternation? Why would you be so upset about the sin that you see in someone else's life, why would you complain and criticize and fault-find in that, whether it's within the body, within a family, why would that be your focus and what you talk about and engage your energy in when there is another problem so obvious that it's incredible that you overlook it?"

That's the point of what Jesus is saying. You see, we are all sinners. Scripture says we all stumble in many ways, James 3:2. I quote that verse a lot because it's important for us to remember as we interact with one another. We all stumble in many ways. Every one of us stumble and we all stumble in many ways, multiplied, variegated ways of stumbling. We need to factor that into the way that we relate to one another, don't we? That's Jesus' point. The question is whose sin dominates your personal attention? Is it his sins? Is it her sins? Or is it your sins? That's the question that Jesus is getting to. Jesus, as it were, he

reaches up and he takes one of these spotlights in the ceiling and he isolates the beam of light and focuses it directly on you so that you are the one that is under the searchlight in what's being said here, and what he's teaching is this: your first priority, beloved, the first thing, the preeminent thing in your mind as you seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, the surpassing priority, the engaging thought that ever comes back and becomes the center of gravity in the way that you think about all of spiritual life, your first priority is your own righteousness. Your first priority is your own righteousness, not to be a self-appointed corrector of the lack of righteousness in someone else's life. Do you see this and do you understand it? This is absolutely fundamental to being a Christian and it's certainly absolutely fundamental to living a life within the context of a local church.

Jesus says, look at it there in verse 3, "Why do you look at that speck, that comparatively insignificant fault in the life of your brother, but you do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" Now this word "log" refers to a beam of wood. It highlights your own faults and sins and it creates this really absurd picture in your mind. You're going to get close to the life of someone else and say, "Here, let me remove that speck from your eye," is the picture of it, and Jesus says how can you do that? You have this big 10 foot 2 x 4 sticking out of your own eye, how are you going to get close enough to them to help them? How are you going to have any effect when your own faults, your own sins that you don't recognize, that you don't confess, are standing in the way of any kind of effective ministry like that? All you're going to do with that attitude, let me seek first his righteousness in your life, is just knock a whole lot of things over and bump into a lot and cause a lot of hurt and pain simply because of the way you're swinging around a log and you don't even realize it. Jesus says how could you even do that? How could that even be the case?

This beam, this log of which he speaks, is highlighting your own faults and sins; your own harsh attitudes; your own sins in secret; your own divisive spirit; your own anger and lust and bitterness and harshness, all of these things; your own dominating demanding way of interacting with others, whatever the case may be. He's highlighting your own faults and sins and saying how can you not see this, and he says what you don't see and what you're not recognizing is far more important than the specks that you're seeing in your brothers. How can a man with a beam in his eye think that he's going to remove a speck from someone else's eye? This is an absurd picture. It's ridiculous, designed to make the point. The extremity of the picture is showing you the seriousness of the issue that you have to deal with.

And even the verbs in this passage suggest a contrast that's not readily apparent in English. Look at verse 3, he says, "Why do you look at the speck," then he uses a different verb at the end of the verse, he says, "And you do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" You're looking but you're not noticing. What's he saying there? The idea of "look" has the sense of turning your attention to your brother's eye and you're turning your attention there. The word "notice" is a stronger word that implies a greater sense of concentration, careful consideration, intense mental activity. The point being this: that when it comes to your own logs, to your own beams, you are to be giving proper and

decisive thought to them as you go through life. It's communicating a sense of someone who is going through life aware of sin, examining himself, and confessing it humbly before the Lord and dealing with his own heart as the first matter of priority. You see, you seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. You seek that first at home, by which I mean you seek it in your own heart. "So, Lord, before we ever get to addressing somebody else, Lord, let's deal with me. Let's deal with my harsh and impatient spirit. Let's deal with my words that are critical and unforgiving and ungracious."

Just to kind of add a perspective to this, turn over to Ephesians 4, if you would. Ephesians 4. You see, there is a spirit with which a true Christian goes through life. There is an attitude, there is a perspective that informs the way the Christian goes through life and you can see this reflected in many places in Scripture. We'll just turn to the end of chapter 4, verse 32 where the Apostle Paul said, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Now this is not a direct parallel to what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7. We'll see another verse in a moment that is a more direct parallel, but you can see the whole thing here and that verse in Ephesians 4:32, you can kind of reverse engineer it if you want to think about it that way. You start your thinking with this, beloved, this is so very important, you start your thinking with this as a Christian vertically, "Do you know what? God in our Lord Jesus Christ has forgiven me of all of my sins. He had the prerogative to judge me. He knew my sin. My guilt was laid before him. I had nothing to recommend myself for mercy in my own merit. There was nothing about me that called forth mercy or called forth his love. I was simply a guilty blob of sin before him and what did he do to me?" You say to yourself, you think about life this way. You think about life this way. You say, "Here I am in Christ, Christ at his own initiative went to Calvary to shed his blood to wash away all my sin. Whereas before I was burdened with guilt and I was facing a certain judgment, now that guilt has been removed and he has put peace between me and God. Christ has stood before me like an eclipse, Christ has come before the holiness of God and the sin, Christ has come before that and blotted out in darkness all of my sin, washed it away in his perfect blood, and now the burning heat of God's judgment will not fall on me because I'm under the shade of a perfect Savior who loves me and cares for me and represents me before the Father who is in heaven. I have been forgiven in Christ." And you start your thinking there and then you realize that that starts to impact the way that you think about the sins of others. God has forgiven me in this manner, now someone has sinned against me, I see sin in the life of someone else, well, in light of how gracious and merciful and kind God has been to me, as the preeminent first priority, then the only thing that I can do is to turn to others of lesser sin, others who have stumbled along the way just like I have, and respond to them with tenderness and kindness and compassion, and when they have sinned directly against me, that I freely forgive them as freely as God forgave me. If God who is righteous and God who had more against me could forgive me of the greater things, then I can gladly take my cue from him and show forgiveness and tenderness toward the one who has wronged me. This is Christianity 101. This is not doctoral level stuff. This is the basics of what the Christian spirit and the Christian heart looks like.

So going back to Matthew 7, if you will, verses 3 and 4, this informs the way that you look at the faults and sins of the brothers around you. Young people, this affects the way

that you look at the failures of your parents. Parents, this affects the way that you look at the faults and sins of your children. Even within a family dynamic, there should not be a harsh unbending spirit that marks the families of those that are led by Christian parents. You should be setting a tone that brings discipline, yes; they need correction, yes; you have to bring them up in the instruction and admonition of the Lord, yes; but don't you realize that you're dealing with little sinners that are just a product of what you yourself passed on to them? It was your own sinful nature that you passed on to them. Well, then can't you find a measure of mercy as you deal with them? Can't your home be flavored by a sense of grace and kindness that you say that God has dealt with you personally and vertically in your own life? Can't you do that? Can't we deal with one another that way in light of the great mercy that God has shown to our individual souls? This is really undeniable, isn't it? This becomes a moral imperative. This becomes, "I have to do this because that's the only right thing I can do in light of the mercy that God has shown to me."

And that's what Christ would have you to see. The looking and the noticing bring out the relative attention that you should pay to your own sins compared to the sins of others. You should say, "I've got to cultivate my own righteousness. That's my big priority here. That's what's going to occupy my attention. That's what I'm going to notice. That's what I'm going to turn my attention to. My own soul needs to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. And oh, by the way, do you know what? There are people stumbling along the way, I'll be kind and merciful to them. Maybe I can help them but I realized that the one who really needs the help here is me." Jesus says but instead of having that point, instead of having that spirit, I should say, rather you've devoted yourself to putting the finger on the sins of others.

You can find that in a lot of bloggers, can't you? You find that in a lot of people claiming to speak for God in social media who can tell you everything that everyone else has done wrong behind their own persona that they create online, to which Scripture would come in its fullness and say, "What are you doing? Your entire perspective is wrong. You're thinking about this all wrong. You're thinking that your assigned commission from God in life is to identify everything wrong in everybody else. You have flipped it entirely upside down. You're a lumberyard coming out of your eyes." And what Scripture says and what Jesus would correct is that if your concern for righteousness is sincere, if it's real, put it this way, if it's born from God above, the desire for righteousness that is born from God above produces a concern for righteousness in your own spiritual life as the first priority, it's the first thing that you want. "Lord, others may stumble but I've stumbled too. Lord, this is what we need to correct here. It's me that needs to be corrected." That's what Jesus is imparting here and he says until that becomes your focus, you're not equipped to help others.

Look at what he says in verse 4, he says,

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?"

To drop the metaphor, why do you rush into the realm of someone else's life to correct them when you haven't first applied it to your own self? Do you see the hypocrisy in it? If you're seriously concerned for righteousness, start in your own life. Start at home. Start in the home of your heart. And what Jesus is saying in that question, verse 4, how can you say this, let me take the speck out of your eye, the logs in your own eye, that offer of help is only a pretext in reality. It's only a pretext to point out someone else's faults from a position of pride. Jesus says you should be giving complete attention to your own faults which are far greater by comparison. Anything else is a blatant inconsistency.

And in the whole context, beloved, this is serious. This is sober. This matters. Jesus teaches for keeps. In the whole context of this passage that we've been looking at for two or three weeks now, what Jesus is saying, what he's warning us together is this: he says that hypocritical attitude, that hypercritical attitude, is something that God will not treat lightly at judgment. The argument is profound that Christ is making. He says you profess concern for righteousness, good for you. He says if your concern is so sincere, why not repent of your own sin? Why not address that as the thing which matters the most to you? Your concern for your brother's speck is only an indication of your own proud heart and it indicates hypocrisy of the worst kind.

And it's remarkable, our capacity to deceive ourselves in this is unlimited. I have a friend who says no one can buffalo me like me, talking about himself. No one can fool me like me. The heart is deceitful, desperately sick, who can understand it? Your capacity for self-deception in this area is so great and profound, and so is mine, that it's easy to miss it. It's easy to assume everything is okay and you miss the whole point. And back in the Old Testament, King David gives us a very sad illustration of this. Turn if you would, to 2 Samuel 12. You remember King David, he was at the pinnacle of what God had given him but he took Uriah's wife, committed adultery with her, and abused his military authority to murder Uriah as part of the effort to cover it up. It was an astonishing fall from his position, which incidentally, just reminds us as we look at David in the Old Testament, we want to look beyond David to his greater son who never failed, look to David's son who is the true King of righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ. David is an imperfect pointing to someone else to come from his loins in the Lord Jesus.

But here we have David who shared our human flesh and propensity for sin and so you know the background and God sent the prophet Nathan to rebuke him after months had gone by. Chapter 12, verse 1, you can see that, "the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said, 'There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb Which he bought and nourished; And it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, And was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man,'" the one who had many flocks and herds, and that rich man, verse 4, "'was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; Rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.'" What an abuse. This man with all the resources and far more than he needed could have given without diminishment of his own wealth to this traveler who came to him. He wasn't willing to do

it. Instead, he went to this poor man who had one little ewe and said, "I'll take that and I'll use that to fulfill my obligation, my duty. I will provide my hospitality at your expense." The poor man is not in a position to respond or resist that. He just has to watch it happen.

Verse 5, Nathan is presenting this. Remember, David is the king. He thinks that this is something that has taken place in his realm and he is outraged and he'll use his authority to pronounce punishment upon such a one. Verse 5, "Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion.'" Then verse 7, remember, David is saying this while sitting on top of his own far more egregious sins. David speaking with logs coming out of his eyes. Verse 7, "Nathan then said to David, 'You are the man!'" Wasn't talking about somebody else, David, I was talking about you, and the judgment that you have pronounced that this rich man deserved is the judgment that you pronounce against yourself. "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.'" David, the illustration was about one little lamb, look what you've done by contrast. Let me show you the log in your eye and feel the weight of conviction that comes by the speck that you were pointing out in what you thought was someone else. David, forget that speck. Take the log out of your own eye.

Beloved, you and I are fully capable of the same kind of self-deception. If you reflexively deny that and say, "Not me," you are in a position of great spiritual vulnerability to think such a thing. David's sin was obvious. This was undeniable. And yet because he looked outward rather than inward, he missed the whole point.

So here we are, here you and I are in this really vulnerable position spiritually. We all stumble in many ways. We are prone to self-deception. We are heading toward a final accountability that is going to be flavored by the way that we judge others and we are so mixed up, our thinking and our desires are so distorted that they would lead us astray and set us up for a less than best outcome in the end.

What should you do? Well, what you need to do is follow the command that Jesus gives. Here's our second point for this morning: follow Jesus' teaching. You know, one of the many many many things I love about our Lord Jesus is this: is that he doesn't simply rebuke us and correct us and point out what's wrong, he leads us by his teaching in order to change, in order to improve, in order that he might protect us by what he has to say. And as you go back to Matthew 7, you'll find that he has done that in this section of the Sermon on the Mount as well.

He rebukes us. In verse 5 he says, "You hypocrite," to which apparently we are to somehow say, "Guilty as charged." You hypocrite, here's what you need to do, and he gives a command here in verse 5,

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."

He's calling you to self-examination, to stop, to step back and to look at your own heart, look at your own life, and look at it critically looking for the faults and sins that you will find there. That is your first priority. He says you do this first.

Look at it there in verse 5. Adopting this as your approach to life, adopting it in individual situations that may come your way, "You hypocrite, do this first. Before you do anything else, do this as the priority. Make this what you do first." He says, "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." "First" and then "then." Watch it with me: first, then. You do this immediately and then after you've done that, something else follows. There is a sequence that is involved that we must make ourselves conscious of. First take the log out of your own eye. First recognize and confess your own sin, beloved. First recognize and repent of your own sinfulness. No one should be correcting someone else in sin that is carrying around their own sin that is not dealt with, right? The hypocrisy of that. The hypocrisy of the. "I confront you in your sin." What's that baying of the sheep that I hear behind you? Deal with your own sins before you address the shortcomings of another. Charles Spurgeon said this, he says, "Jesus calls that man a hypocrite who fusses about small things in others and pays no attention to great matters at home in his own heart. Our reformations must begin with ourselves or they are not true."

I would love to have the opportunity to preach this at the Republican National Convention when moral issues start to dominate the discussion, if they ever do again. That's not going to happen but I would love the opportunity on both sides of the aisle to rebuke the self-righteousness of politics that points out the faults in others when the one speaking has not addressed sin in his own life. Wouldn't that be great? Do you see how this would just turn upside down society?

But Jesus isn't speaking to society, he's speaking to us. He's speaking to his people, to his disciples and, beloved, here's the thing: self-examination equips you to genuinely minister to other people in their sins and in their struggles, but until you have examined yourself, until you have repented yourself, until you know something of the brokenness of your own sin yourself, you're not in a position to do it. What self-examination does when you say, "Oh, that was my tongue, those were my eyes, this was my conduct, this was my ingratitude, this was my unfaithfulness," once you come to grips with that, beloved, what does it do to you? If you don't know by direct personal experience, what Scripture says, the impact of Scripture is this – oh, this is so important – when you have taken the log out of your own eye, when you have examined your own heart for sin and been broken by what you have found there, when you realize Jesus opened this sermon, Matthew 5, verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." It all starts there. You recognizing your own spiritual bankruptcy, you mourning over your own sin before you ever get to somebody else, what that does is, beloved, it softens your critical spirit. You deal gently with the misguided, you deal gently with the fallen. Why? Because you yourself have fallen and the Lord has dealt gently with you and that's the whole point. You remove this and you look at your log and you say, "Oh, that was me. Oh, you have a speck, brother, let me help you now. Let me help you as a fellow fallen sinner who has been on the receiving end of undeserved grace."

In the book of Hebrews 4, 5, if you want to turn back there with me, we'll take just a moment to see this. This was the pattern in the Old Testament also, beloved. Hebrews 5:1 says, "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." Look at verse 2, "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself." The Old Testament high priest was a man who was to deal with the people who came to him gently as they confessed their sins. Why? Because he knew that he was also beset with sin and weaknesses and so it flavored the way that that ministry was to be done.

That's what Jesus means when he says, go back to Matthew 7:5, when he says, "then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." What he's saying is that when a brother comes to you in sin and you have done this, then you have the right perspective in order to deal with him, in order to speak with him, in order to respond to him. The sins of others seem much smaller when you've dealt honestly with your own.

The Apostle Paul may well have had Jesus' words in mind when he wrote Galatians 6:1, and let me invite you to turn there because this is my closing passage and you can see it for yourself. Galatians 6:1 says this, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

So beloved, where does your concern for righteousness begin? Does it begin through the window or in the mirror? Does it begin with someone else or does it begin in your own heart?

Let's bow for a moment and examine our hearts humbly before the Lord.

Dear Lord, this whole subject searches us. We come to you and acknowledge each individually, we speak to you and acknowledge that we ourselves are sinners who have fallen short of your glory, that we all stumble in many ways, and we acknowledge that and confess it before you. We pray, Father, that you would help us remove the log from our own eye, Father, that you would give us a sense of humility, of proper humility and gentleness that would flavor our interactions with all that we see and meet. Be merciful to us, we pray. Thank you for this word from our Lord. We ask you, Father, not only for mercy today but that you would be gracious to us on that day when we will give an

account to you for how we have lived our lives and responded to your word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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