

Handling the King's Teaching

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[0 : 00] Well, imagine someone turns up at your door with an invaluable treasure, a priceless treasure, the crown jewels of Great Britain on your doorstep.

Wait, there's more? The contents of the Louvre. Hang on, something else as well, the gold reserves of the United States. Sign here, it's all yours.

Imagine a gift of incomparable worth, unimaginable value given to you for absolutely nothing. That is what Jesus has been handing over to us in the course of this sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. Later, in the same gospel, Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like stumbling across treasure in a field or finding a pearl that you would sell everything that you had to own.

He's taught us that it is the spiritually bankrupt that received this treasure, his own kingdom, when we turn to him for forgiveness and grace.

[1 : 19] And into our empty hands and empty hearts, he gives the blessing of God, God's favor and approval. And he promises us the world.

But better still, he gives us a new relationship with himself as our king and with God as our father. And in that new relationship, a whole new life under his good and loving rule.

Jesus reminds us in verse 6 of our passage this morning that what he's given us is something sacred, something precious like pearls. And this morning he teaches us as the recipients of that great gift, how then to handle it.

They say, don't they, that winning the lottery could ruin your life. We think, don't we, that coming into a great fortune would vastly improve our lives, things would get so much better.

But what we do with what we receive depends completely on what we already have in our hearts, who we are as people.

[2 : 35] Jesus has been teaching us who his kingdom is for, how we can live rightly in his kingdom as children of God. But it is possible. It is possible for us to receive his teaching, to understand it, or at least some of it, and take it very seriously.

But if our hearts are not right, that treasure can ruin our lives and bring great harm to other people along the way.

And we think, how can we use Jesus' teaching in such a harmful and a self-destructive way? But Jesus shows us today we have it in us to do that, as unthinkable as that is.

And he teaches us then to be on our guard against that tendency of our hearts. He teaches us how to handle his teaching rightly, with others, with God, and ultimately with love.

Those are our three points this morning. How then should we handle the king's teaching rightly then with others? Jesus has said a lot in his sermon so far about righteousness or rightness in our lives.

[3 : 48] But it does not take much, does it, for our hearts to hear teaching about right living and to turn it into a teaching about self-righteousness.

You know, I guess we could imagine Jesus holding out to us a beautiful crown full of diamonds and precious jewels and us reaching out with hands covered in dirt and grease and sweat to take hold of it.

We so easily, can't we degrade Jesus' teaching with the filthy rags of our own desire to be righteous in our own right, to be proud of our own works.

And that is what Jesus is warning against us doing here. He says, however much you study his teaching, however much you understand it up here, or however far you get in living it out here, even.

There never comes a point where you or I get to act as judge, jury, and executioner of another person. He says, verse 1, Now what does he mean when he says that?

[5 : 14] Is he saying, you know, in the end, do we really know who's right or wrong? You live and let live. You do you. Well, I think verse 5 rules out that possibility for us.

Whatever verses 3 and 4 are saying, the story still ends, doesn't it, with eye surgery? You hypocrite. First take the plank out of your own eye and then leave your brother's eyes alone?

No. Then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. So Jesus can't mean, can he? There's no such thing as righteousness. And never call anything wrong.

Wrong. In the words of Don Carson, verse 1, certainly does not command the sons of God to be amorphous, undiscerning blobs, who never under any circumstances hold any opinion whatsoever about right or wrong.

Now, 10 years ago, that was, I think, the cultural headwind that we faced as Christians. You shouldn't tell anyone else that the way they think or live is wrong.

[6 : 22] You Christians be Christians. That's fine. We'll be us. That's a tolerant society. And the challenge for us then was to show that it is possible to disagree with gentleness and respect.

That it is possible gently and respectfully to hold a different position. Today, the cultural headwind has swung the other way.

And the tolerance that was once preached has turned into an intolerance of anything that isn't secular and progressive.

So that now what we're more likely to hear is your teaching is harmful and shouldn't be allowed in a compassionate and a fair society. So that the challenge that we have today, brothers and sisters, is to gently and respectfully disagree.

To show that it is possible to be a compassionate and fair, gentle and respectful person who disagrees. So, let's not conveniently pretend that when Jesus says, do not judge, he means, don't disagree with things that are wrong.

[7 : 35] What he's actually saying is much more challenging than that. Do you point out what is wrong, he says, but do not do it in a self-righteous or judgmental way.

A holier-than-thou sort of way. And it's important we notice that before we get beyond the walls of the church, Jesus is teaching us first how to do that inside of the church.

See that verses 3 to 5 are all about how to handle Jesus' teaching with a brother or sister who you can see isn't seeing things rightly. So here's an illustration of how not to handle Jesus' teaching with others.

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there's a plank in your own eye?

Why? You spend enough time in a church family like ours, and you will begin to see a lot of specks, a lot of flaws, a lot of failings in the people sitting around you, in the person preaching to you now.

[8 : 47] In a healthy gospel church, that is a good thing. We get to know each other, we get to see not only the good, but also the bad and the ugly in each other. That's an important and a good thing in a church like this.

But before you dive in with your scalpel, says Jesus, before you do it, to take that speck of self-interest or anger or pride or lust out of your brother or sister's eye, Jesus says, take a chainsaw to your own eyes.

It's one of the illustrations of this sermon that makes it so unforgettable, isn't it? Of someone trying to sort of tweeze a speck of sawdust out of someone's eye when they've got a plank of wood sticking out of their face.

It illustrates, isn't it? It illustrates so powerfully how blind we can be to our own failings, even serious gaps in our righteousness, in our following of Jesus, and yet how quick we can be to spot other people's failings, even relatively minor flaws or quirks.

And how much more passionate we are about that person getting it sorted than we are about me getting it sorted.

[10 : 18] In light of that, a really practical implication of this is that we should never ever point out somebody else's failings to them or others if we are not dealing with our own sins before God.

Or if we have not owned up and confessed our own sins and failings, we should never try to handle somebody else's issues as if we don't have issues of our own that need handling and that we wouldn't be happy to have somebody else come and help us to handle.

Otherwise, Jesus tells us just what we are in verse 5. Hypocrites. Now, the point isn't that you have to be sinless before you help others with their sins.

But, he says, it's how we deal with our own sins that qualifies us to help others with theirs. You wouldn't want to be operated on by an eye surgeon with cataracts, would you?

So, make sure you can see yourself clearly before you try and treat others. Now, Jesus is clear that as we do that for one another, we see each other's flaws and failings and we humbly and compassionately and self-effacingly come in to help one another.

[11 : 48] That is not judging in a wrong sense. Because we are not coming then with a judgmental and holier-than-thou spirit, but a humble spirit, poor in spirit, to handle each other humbly and compassionately and not harshly or rudely.

Jesus says, Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. He teaches us to pray, Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

How God has dealt with us in our sins and in our failures is the way that Jesus teaches us to deal with others and theirs. And he's equally clear that the opposite is also true, isn't he?

If we judge others harshly or self-righteously, well, that is how we can expect God to treat us. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

That's not to say that we can out-sin God's grace, but that if we are merciless in the way that we treat others, we probably have never experienced God's mercy for ourselves.

[13 : 00] We can't expect God's forgiveness if we are so unwilling to forgive. And briefly, verse 6 is a similar warning that takes that same point outside of the church.

It's really unusual because the thrust of the New Testament is about everyone hearing the gospel. We want to scatter the Word of God like seeds in a field, but Jesus also says here, don't scatter pearls before pigs.

So here's the question, why might we do that? Why might we insist on sharing the gospel with this person who tramples it with their words or turns on us when we do that?

Why might we be pushy or tactless in that way in our handling of Jesus' Word? Could it be sometimes that we have a judgmental spirit that is more interested in being right or proving this person wrong than we are interested in God's work in their life through the gospel that we share?

Now, I don't think that that is a problem that many of us have, but it is possible, isn't it, for us to share Jesus' teaching with others in a way that is just self-righteousness dressed up as passionate evangelism.

[14 : 32] So again, let's not conveniently pretend that Jesus is saying, well, some people don't need the gospel. Everyone needs the gospel. Everyone needs the gospel. He's just saying again, brothers and sisters, check your hearts.

Is your handling of Jesus' words with others coming from a personal need to have this person see the need for the change in their behavior and life and thinking?

Or is it coming out of a genuine love and desire to see God at work in them in his way and in his time? Are you gently sowing seed?

Or are you dishing out unsolicited pearls of wisdom? Sometimes the best thing we can do for people is let it rest, love them, and pray for them.

And as they open up to the influence of the gospel and as God gives opportunity humbly and prayerfully, give a gospel pearl here and a gospel pearl there and trust God with it and don't force it.

[15 : 44] That's how our king teaches us to handle his teaching with others, not with a superiority complex, but dealing first with the sin in our own hearts and lives and then handling others and their sins and their needs out of a deep, deep sense of our shared common need for the teaching of our king Jesus and his righteousness and kingdom.

And given who it is who's teaching us, it should be no surprise how much further that love and humility gets us with people in our lives, Christians and non-Christians, who we know need to hear the teaching of God's only chosen king.

Secondly then, Jesus turns to teach us how to handle his teaching with God. Because if dealing with ourselves and others is hard work as it is and takes careful, patient investment, well, the key that unlocks that work for us is coming to God.

So just compare the painstaking surgical operation of verses three to six with the throwing open of the floodgates in verses seven to 11.

Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. What's the key to personal and collective change in our lives?

[17 : 16] Ask God. Ask God. Jesus says everyone who asks receives. How many people do you think have ever asked God to help them to take his teaching to heart and learn to live in his way and he has said no?

How many people do you think have ever gone looking for God and a right relationship with him and not found him? How many people have ever knocked on God's door and it has not been opened?

The God of the Bible does not live in the hope or fear that you will one day find him. He is not worried, friends, that he is not going to be able to heal your heart or meet your needs.

If we ask, seek, and knock for him, it is only because he has first put it in our heart to do so. We love because he has first loved us. So how likely is it that God would give you a real desire for him and to live in his way and then shut the door in your face and tell you to get lost?

If you've been a Christian 90 years, you're hearing about God for the first time today, know that when you ask God to give you himself and help you to live in his way, he will give you what you're asking for.

[18 : 48] There are very few prayers that we can say so confidently that God will always answer with a yes, but this is one of them. When you seek him, you will find him.

When you knock on his door, it will be thrown open and there you will meet God, your father, and your king, Jesus Christ, and there will be great rejoicing there over this one sinner who has turned to him.

You know, I don't know what your dad was like growing up, what your dad's like now. Some dads are brilliant, some are terrible. Most of some are in between.

But however imperfect your dad is or was, we all have an idea, don't we, of what a perfect dad would be like.

We know, don't we, that even a passable dad would never do this in verse 9, which of you, if your son asked for bread, would give him a stone? Or verse 10, if he asks for a fish, would give him a snake?

[19 : 55] If that is the bare minimum of what a dad would do or not do for his kids, which you may or may not have experienced in your life, well, what is a perfect dad?

If you then, though you are evil, says Jesus, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more, how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

However imperfectly your parents cared or care for you, says Jesus, even the very best mom and dad, at their very, very best, are only the lightest shadow of your heavenly father and his perfect and overflowing love and generosity towards you.

If any parent provides food when their children are hungry, why do we expect less from our father in heaven when we ask him for good gifts?

I think in the context here, that does extend to our basic provision. Jesus has just promised unconditionally in verse 33 that if we are his people, God will give us what we need to live.

[21 : 16] So if we ask him for those good gifts of food and drink and clothing and a place to stay, he's not going to refuse, even if he doesn't go about it in the way that we would choose.

But in the immediate context, I think these good gifts are mainly speaking about our spiritual needs. How can we handle Jesus' teaching about right living without becoming self-righteous?

How can we genuinely help others with their issues in a way that isn't really about my issues? or how can we share the gospel in a way that respects others without either ignoring them completely or shoving it down their throats?

If you've got a trick for those things, let me know. Because if we've taken Jesus' teaching in this sermon seriously, those are questions that we're going to be coming up against all the time.

But Jesus says, it's not actually about finding a trick, is it? It's as simple as asking God for the faith and love and humility, mercy and compassion that we need to live as his people and he will give it freely and abundantly.

[22 : 27] If you're struggling with judgmental thoughts about somebody, pray. If you're not sure how to help someone caught in sin, pray.

If you're not sure how to go forward with a friend or someone in your family, someone in your life, you just don't know what the next conversation needs to be.

You've hit a brick wall. What do you do? Pray. Rewinding back through the sermon, if you are anxious about tomorrow, pray.

If God is taking a back seat in your life to your ambitions and plans and earnings, pray. If you want to be seen to be righteous more than you actually want to be righteous, pray.

If you struggle with anger and lust and lying and love in your heart, pray. If your light is dim or it is not shining out, pray.

[23 : 36] And most urgently of all, if you are not poor in spirit and grieving your sin and turning to God for mercy and crying out to be clothed in his perfect righteousness, pray.

Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks the door will be opened.

Those words alone should drive us to our knees in prayer not only out of a deep sense of our own need, but in a deep, deep sense of confidence that our Father in heaven delights to shower good gifts on his children who come and ask him.

And so handling Jesus' teaching rightly before God means praying that what we have been taught would be true of us, that it would be true of us, root and fruit, the roots deep in our hearts and the fruits in our lives, behaviors, words, relationships.

Lots of us are held back in our prayer life, I think, out of a sense of shame or a sense that we need to kind of bury the mess in our life behind a load of kind of threadbare formulas and long words and things we've heard other people say when they've prayed.

[25 : 14] But what our Father in heaven wants more than anything for us is to tell us what we need and to ask him for the things that we need. That brings him far more delight and far more honor than pretending that we don't really need anything from him or saying that we do but resisting his work in our lives.

And so, brothers and sisters, ask, seek, and knock for these good things, these treasures that Jesus is so freely handing over to us, just shoveling into our lives in heaps, and you will receive, find, and enter into the good things that you are asking for.

That's how we handle his teaching with God. And finally, then, Jesus teaches us how to handle his teaching with love. So, this is verse 12, one of the most famous verses in the whole Bible.

So, in everything, says Jesus' summary, in everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets. Now, how is this to do with love?

Well, the way that people generally understand this is in the sense of, well, however I personally would like to be treated, that's how I should treat others.

[26 : 33] But that assumes a subjective standard for how God wants us to treat others, as if God was just inviting us to set our own terms on which we relate to each other.

Whatever I prefer is what goes for everyone, right? So, so that I heard someone say once, well, why should I be treated in the way that you want to treat me? shouldn't it be due to others what they would have you do to them?

That sounds reasonable, doesn't it? Shouldn't others get to set the standard by which they are treated rather than me decide how I get to treat them? Sounds great, doesn't it? But friends, if you want a case study of a society that lives in that way, well, we are living in it now.

And what we're finding is that sometimes the ways in which different people want to be treated conflict. And not everyone can be treated in the way that they want.

And the effect of that is that everyone fights for their right to be treated in the way that they want. And the outcome is a deep division and hatred for people who disagree and a fear on the part of everyone else of getting it wrong.

[27 : 47] But the problem is that we began with a subjective standard. as soon as we think Jesus is inviting us to decide how others get to be treated, well, the result is the opposite of what he's actually saying, which is not you decide how you get to treat other people, but God commanding us, love each other in this way.

It is a law of love. The way Jesus puts it here is another way of saying, love your neighbor as yourself, and how much do we love ourselves? Our love for ourselves is like a helium balloon, isn't it?

It just naturally floats upwards unless it's being weighed down. That's why it's a struggle for us to put God first in our lives or to serve the people in our lives, because silently but surely I have floated

back up the ranks to take first place in my own life again.

And so verse 12 is saying, tie everyone else's balloon to yours, so that your love for everyone in your life sits at the same level as your love for yourself.

That love for others, says Jesus, sums up the law and the prophets. So how do we express that love to one another? Well, how has Jesus taught us before in this sermon about the law and the prophets?

[29 : 18] He has, hasn't he, in chapter five. And so understand, God is not saying to us, make up some rules for how you're going to treat people or how you want to be treated.

He's saying, I've done that for you. I have given you my law. Follow my ten commandments, go after my king, and you will learn from him how to show the same love to others that you show to yourself.

Brothers and sisters, there is an objective standard for how we treat one another, and God has written it down in his word, and here is his king sitting and teaching it to us now.

So how do we handle his teaching in these words with love? love? Or we don't just tick the boxes, and we don't just read through it once a week and say, have I done this?

Have I not done that? We live out the intention behind these commands, which is that we love others in the same way that we love ourselves. And when we live in King Jesus' way, we will do to others what we would have them do to us, because that is the law and the prophets.

[30 : 36] And so brothers and sisters, if we think we've got a handle on Jesus' teaching, but we don't find that our love for others is catching up with our love for ourselves, well, we haven't got a handle on it yet.

If we find ourselves becoming, okay, less bothered by other people's flaws, but we don't love them enough to still prayerfully and carefully search our hearts and help them to follow Jesus more closely.

Again, we haven't yet got a handle on his teaching. It's said that the rabbis at the time would teach, don't do to others what you wouldn't want them to do to you.

But Jesus flips that on its head, doesn't he, from a passive not doing to others to an active doing for others, do to others what he would have them do to you.

Because the whole thing is summed up in a law, not of tolerance, but of love. Love. And we only grow in that love when we ask God our Father to give us that good thing.

[31 : 45] So let us come to him then, and ask him together now, as our king has taught us to do, for that great love towards others that he commands. Let's pray together.

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