

# Sermon Text for July 9, 2023

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## *Judges 2:16-18, Matthew 7:1-5*

### *“The problem with judging”*

The Supreme Court has been in the news a lot lately. It has made some controversial decisions, some of the justices serving have been under increased scrutiny. My whole life I have always considered the Supreme Court kind of this inviolable institution that no one really ever questions and what they do they do and that is that. Judges making decisions have been a part of human history for a very, very long time. This is true even, if not especially, in the arena of God’s people. From the beginning of God’s people judges played a role all the way through today where we see them playing a very public and at times controversial role

Now, we may not agree with the decisions that judges make, but I think it is very clear that we need judges. We are also judges, whether we like it or not and whether we want to admit to it or not. Every single day from the moment you wake up you make judgment on what to do. You decide between what to wear, the same clothes as yesterday or something new. You decide on what to eat, meat and potatoes or tofu and arugula. You decide on how to spend your money and with whom to spend your time, if you are going to be nice or not nice. Your day, all of our days, are filled with judgment calls where we are judges deciding between one thing or another, or more than one thing.

But when we talk about interactions with other people on how to treat them and how to be in relationship with them, well, it is here where we need to be especially careful, Jesus tells us. As we find ourselves back on the sermon on the mount, Jesus gives us very clear direction on how we ought to base our judgments of other people and ultimately it is based upon a self-reflection. How we view others, can we ourselves hold up under that same scrutiny, or as Jesus says, under that same judgment. If the answer is no, then we should probably view our neighbors, our brothers and sisters, in a much more generous and gracious light. Let’s read.

### **READ**

Stacy’s side of the family has a number of lawyers on it. Her brother-in-law is a lawyer, his brother is a lawyer. Stacy’s dad when I met her was a judge, so was a lawyer before becoming a judge. It is a bit intimidating dating the daughter of a judge. It helped that they lived on the West Coast, but I was still very, very circumspect. Rachel is studying hard to take the bar in a couple of weeks so she is going to carry on that tradition. So there never was a negative

sense in our family of lawyers and those cultural jokes and judgments against lawyers that they are all corrupt or all seeking after financial gain. Yeah, when you want to become a public defender, financial gain is certainly not on the top of your list.

Our first Scripture actually lays out a very interesting role that judges played back in the Old Testament when the people of God were first becoming a nation. Look at vs.16 where we find God raising up judges for the purpose of what? They were given the responsibility of to deliver the people of Israel out of the power of the people who were plundering them. They were surrounded by hostile nations and so they had to make sure that militarily they had what they needed to protect themselves.

Over history, the people of God transitioned from being ruled and protected by judges to kings, with Saul and David and Solomon. Today, we view judges as the gatekeepers of the laws, the guardians of the constitution, the third and very important cog in the wheel of checks and balances along with the legislative and the executive branch. So there are people within our society who are given the very clear role of being judges and they are either elected by the people or appointed by people in power. They serve a very crucial role of making very important judgment calls on issues and also on people.

Fast forward to Jesus as he finds himself once again on the sermon on the mount. This sermon on the mount that we have been following all the way since chapter 5 of Matthew. These three chapters in Matthew, from 5-7 serve as a clear guide to daily living. If you are not all that familiar with the Bible and want to know where do I go to understand how Jesus wants me to life, this is where you ought to go. He addresses in the beatitudes how the poor are blessed, the importance of loving your enemy, instructions on how to pray with the Lord's prayer in chapter 6, he talks about tithing and giving generously to the work of the church. He shows us how not to worry and be anxious. Today he tells us simply, do not judge. This is another step in understand what is our guide to daily living, and another tool in our belt to righteousness, to acting according to the will of God is do not judge.

Well, he doesn't actually say that, but he does say that there is a real problem in judging. That is our sermon title. The problem with judging, he says, is that when you judge then you will be judged in the same way that you are judging others. That's a problem, just like we saw that it was a problem when we pray forgive us our sins just as we forgive those who sin against us. We want God to forgive our sins more than we are capable, or willing, to forgive the sins of others. In the like manner we want God to judge us more graciously than we judge those around us.

So we are going to make up a word and it is called judgmentalism. Judgmentalism is a social sin. It is the habit of constantly finding fault in what others do and say. Let's all look at ourselves before we look at the person sitting next to us and thinking to ourselves, yup, the person next to me suffers from that sin. Let's look at ourselves first and ask if we have a problem with finding fault all the time with the person next to us. That's judgmentalism, that's a sin. I'm not giving you permission to label anyone else with that sin except yourself today.

When we judge others and easily identify their flaws then we inevitably place ourselves above them. Sometimes we even take pleasure in putting others down because it makes us feel like we are someone when someone else is a nobody. Instead, Jesus gives us a model to judge in a parable that he tells those who are listening in Matthew 18. How to judge correctly. There was a man who owed the ruler a lot of money, the ruler was going to sell him and his family into slavery. The man begged the ruler to give him grace, and the ruler did. But then that man turned around and beat his servant because his servant owed him money. The ruler heard about it and judged him in the same way that he had judged his own servant.

We forgive, because we have been forgiven by God. You see, judgmentalism is also a sin of ingratitude. The sin manifests itself in that we are not willing to provide the grace and forgiveness that God provides us. We ought to judge others in the same way that we understand that God has judged us. That's the problem with judging, we often judge based upon what we think is right or wrong as opposed to how God is judging us in the midst of our own sin. Jesus tells us in this parable and here on the sermon on the mount that when you judge, God is aware and is going to judge you in the like manner. That should be some motivation for us.

Maybe you are sitting there and saying, well, then how do we make any decisions in relationships and in community? It sounds like it is a bit of a free for all. Just live and let live and anyone can do anything that they want. Let's be clear, Jesus certainly didn't mean that if you tolerate the sins of others, you will escape the last judgment unscathed. To the adulterous woman he tells her, go and sin no more. He did not hesitate to call the sin of adultery sin, that circumstance. He did not shy away from calling sin, well, sin.

But if you harshly judge others, you will be harshly judged by God. It is about grace here after all isn't it?

Paul is the same way. While he warns us in Romans 2:1 that we are not to pass judgment on others because we are doing the very same thing as they do. He obviously takes this from Jesus' words here in Matthew. On the other hand, and this is key, and this is how we are to live as a community, as a church, Paul did not hesitate to condemn sin within the community. Look

at I Corinthians 5:1-5. When sin threatens the health of the Christian community the sin has to be addressed.

It is never healthy to silence all criticism. We are very much in need of criticism to help us treat others better. It is how we learn, when people correct us and lead us back to the right path, for we all wander from time to time. In these verses when Jesus says that we will be judged, there should be no doubt that it will be God who does the judging. In the Greek this verb judged is written in the divine passive tense, which is not something we have in the English language, but in the Greek it implies that it is God, the divine, who is doing the action, in this case the judging. So this ought to lead us to grace.

When Jesus is speaking here it is very interesting how the first two verses the you is singular, so he is addressing the individual. But then from vs.3-5 he uses the you plural, like y'all. Also, this word in the NRSV neighbor is actually brother which is a very different meaning. Jesus when he was talking about people within the community of faith would use the word brother, when he was talking about those outside of the community of faith, he would use the word neighbor. Who is my neighbor ends up being the Samaritan, the outsider.

But here Jesus is talking about judging the brother within the community of faith. This is us folks. We already know that in our social ministries when we reach out to the community we do it without any pretense, without questions asked, and certainly we don't set up conditions that have to be met or else we would have to meet those same conditions to receive grace.

How are we doing with each other? In just a few weeks we are going to be starting a pretty intense time together as a community, as brothers and sisters in Christ. We will purposefully be spending time together in prayer, Scripture, and action. This will then culminate in a church wide retreat that we will be spending together to pray, read Scripture, and do together. Our task is to treat each other with the same grace that we have receive from Christ in our own sin.

When we become aware of our own faults first, it will make us more charitable as we judge others. Jesus commands us to judge in a way that God judges us, look at others in the way that God looks at us, as God's creation, loved unconditionally by him. Amen.