

Read also Psalm 72:1-14

Imagine Jesus working as a carpenter in his father Joseph's woodworking shop. On one side of the shop lay huge logs waiting to be shaped into useable furniture. A rough-hewn plank is readied for its surface to be smoothed. Jesus picks up a plane and begins work. He's young and strong – 28 years old – so he works with gusto. Chips and sawdust fly everywhere. A piece of sawdust flies into his eye.

When his eye stops throbbing and he can focus again, He looks around, wishing He had come to earth in 2021, after designer safety glasses had been invented. Perhaps this is the thought in his mind when he said these words during the Sermon on the Mount. READ Matthew 7:1-5

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.”

When I was a child, my brother and I had baked little cakes in my new little oven. We were very proud. But the cakes had to cool before we could frost them. Well, my brother kept walking past the table where they were, and each time he would pick a little piece of cake out of mine and eat it. I saw him. So I did the same; picking a little piece out of his—but not as much as him. Soon I noticed he had eaten half my cake! So I protested to my mother. I pointed out his wrong, even though I was doing the same thing. He then told on me, and I was the one who got in trouble!

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged,” Jesus says. But it is so fun to judge! Check out this little boy who judges.¹ (watch video) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKChwyn_Twg

There are times judgment is called for. When is judgment appropriate, and when are we not to judge? One thing that helps us answer this question is to understand how God judges. What does judgment mean to God?

In the Old Testament, the word for judging others also means ruling. Moses was a ruler and a judge. Rulers rule by making

judgments. In Jewish thought, God is the Judge, not people. God rules over society's relationships. God defends against injustice. God “judged” Egypt's sin when Egypt enslaved Israel. So judgment has a purpose. God judged Israel when they oppressed people or ignored the poor and the widow. God has a legal claim that every individual be treated fairly in God's eyes. God judged in order to bring about righteousness.

God wants us to follow God's terms for judging.

Psalm 72 covers some of those standards. In that Psalm Solomon asks God to help him be a righteous judge. Solomon, as king, represented God. Therefore, his job was to administer justice and righteousness according to God's ways.


Hebrew is a holistic language so the word, *צַדִּיק*, embraces a broader meaning than English. It encompasses the whole realm of justice/righteousness.

In Psalm 72 some of the attendant words are:

- Fairness
- Defending the poor
- Rescuing the children of the needy
- Helping the oppressed
- Crushing oppressors
- Stopping violence
- Fearing God
- Defending those who are helpless
- Feeling pity for the weak and needy
- Holding the lives of people as precious

This Psalm does not contain all the words that describe *צַדִּיק*. But when we think of God's point of view, let's add what Jesus says about it. Jesus expands its meaning to self-examination:

“And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can't see past the log in your own eye?”

Has anyone ever pointed out to you that when you are pointing at someone, there are three fingers pointing back toward you? 

We need to be careful of the blame game because we do not always have the full picture. And when we don't have all the information, we are inclined to fill in the rest ourselves.

¹ Jaden Broke, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKChwyn_Twg, accessed April 15, 2021.

Watch the Donut video²:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=965305737012132>

The man with the donuts had to make a moral decision that he was not going to confront the “donut thief” but share instead. In contrast the donut thief’s body language was unfriendly because he was judging the man.

Who is the better man? The one who decided not to judge, even though the man was wrong. Jesus says that not judging brings benefit:

*The standard you use in judging
is the standard by which you will be judged.*

There are positive outcomes when you do the right thing. The old man had to make a judgment: am I going to confront the donut thief or willingly share?

We might think about this in terms of political conversations. Is the “Other Party” always wrong? Even if you think so—might we surprise someone occasionally with a response of grace? This might lead to an important conversation. People everywhere take note of judgment that includes grace.

God’s judgment with grace is a template for us.

So when Jesus says “do not judge” He is also saying, “If you judge only with justice in mind, you will receive justice in return.” I was seeking justice with my brother. And I got a spanking for my part!”

Paul picked up this theme. He said to the church in Rome:

Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God’s judgment when you do the same things? Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? . . . Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? (2:3-4)

God’s purpose in judging is to gently and patiently help people turn away from sin.

Sometimes judgment is very severe and ends in great hurt. In 1791 a man named Joseph Priestley lived in Birmingham England. He was a philosopher, a theologian, and a chemist, famous for his discovery of oxygen and invention of carbonated water. He was well-known in the field of science, and regularly published articles on religion and politics. But at that time, political tensions were high and not everyone agreed with his opinions.

One day a mob of locals attacked his home and chapel and burned them to the ground. They ransacked his laboratory, tore up his library, and destroyed priceless and irreplaceable manuscripts. Only his life was spared. Devastated by the attack, he wrote a letter to the townspeople. The letter became one of the world’s great letters.

He told the whole town the facts:

- *I’ve lived a quiet life and made many contributions.*
- *I would have never expected these injuries which I have received from you.*
- *You think these attacks are meritorious and the means right.*
- *But your bigotry has been inflamed to the highest pitch causing you to believe you did God and your city a favor.*
- *Thank goodness you at least have restrained yourselves from murder.*
- *He pointed out their destruction of the most advanced and crucial research of the times, was against someone who never did or imagined them any harm.*

Priestley told them, you could have answered my opinions and writings with equal reason and argument, but instead they took recourse in violence.

He concludes,

“[Your violence] is only a proof that you have nothing better to produce. Should you destroy myself, as well as my house, library, and apparatus, ten more persons, of equal or superior spirit and ability, would instantly rise up. If those ten were destroyed, an hundred would appear. . . .

In this business we are the sheep and you the wolves. We will preserve our character, and hope you will change yours. At all events, we return you blessing for curses; . . .”
“I am, your sincere well-wisher,” J. Priestley³

That is an incredible example of confronting what happened, not backing away from the truth, but judging with grace. He eventually left Birmingham and sailed for America where he was embraced most enthusiastically. He continued in his writings and chemical experiments, doing more to advance science in the 18th century than any other Englishman.

We will rarely be forced to deal with such hard tragedies. In case we are, Jesus gives advice about overcoming the blame game. Follow that advice and you will make the world a much better place. Follow that advice and hold your head high.

AMEN

² Little Things, “Don’t Be So Quick to Judge Others,” at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=965305737012132>, accessed April 15, 2021.

³ “Joseph Priestley Returns Blessings for Curses in a Letter to His Neighbors of Birmingham” in *The World’s Great Letters*, edited by M. Lincoln Schuster (Old Saybrook, CT: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1940), 187-189.