

The Clock is Ticking

Scripture: Matthew 6:33-34

Lesson Goal: Seeking first the Kingdom of God.

Introduction: In the mid 1980s, I was introduced by my son Daniel to Leonardo, Raphael, Donatello and Michelangelo. Since that time, I have become quite familiar with each of them, their individual tools of trade and their ongoing struggles against evil and crime. Before I lose you all, let me explain. The Leonardo, Raphael, Donatello and Michelangelo I make reference to are not four Renaissance Italian artists. They are four fictional anthropomorphic turtles who were trained in the martial art of *ninjutsu* by their anthropomorphic rat sensei. Wikipedia says, “From their home in sewers of New York City, they battle petty criminals, evil overlords, mutated creatures and alien invaders while attempting to remain hidden from society.” During Daniel’s childhood we were quite familiar with these masked heroes. In fact, I still enjoy watching them from time to time. In addition to watching the movie and television series of the eighties and nineties, Daniel collected quite an assortment of Ninja Turtle memorabilia.

One specific thing I have in common with the Ninja Turtles is the enjoyment of pizza. During those days, delivery pizza was just coming on the scene in small cities and towns across the United States. On many occasions the turtles would take time from their busy lives of crime fighting to phone in a pizza order which they would have delivered to their residence in the New York sewer. One of the marketing tools of those early pizza deliveries was they offered a prescribed time for delivery, or a deduction was made for each minute the delivery was later than that prescribed time. After placing each order, the Ninja Turtle would add these words: “The clock is ticking, dude.” These words served as a reminder to the pizza delivery person that there was no time to waste. I have used that simple phrase literally hundreds of times through the years. “The clock is ticking, dude”

As we come to the Scripture passage of today’s lesson, we learn that there is no time to waste for the clock is truly ticking for all of us.

(V33) “But”—Greek “*de*,” which is primarily a conjunction of contrast. It also carries the idea of “rather than” or “instead of.” We must remember that throughout our study of the “Sermon on the Mount,” we have observed Jesus’ emphasis on the contrast and distinctions between true religion and false religion, between spiritual truth and spiritual hypocrisy, true righteousness and false righteousness.

“Seek first the kingdom of God.”

“kingdom”—Greek “*basileia*.” The word does not mean, or refer to, a specific geographical ground or territory. The word *basileia* refers to rule or dominion. As followers of Jesus Christ, our greatest priority in life should be to seek to live under the rule and reign of God. Our lives should be lived in daily surrender to His lordship. The number one, and most important, priority of the believer’s life is to live in daily obedience to the Lord.

The word “seek” is a present imperative which is a command with continuing fulfillment or continuing results. The priority in a believer’s life is simply to please and honor God through loyalty and obedience to Him.

What are you seeking *first*?

What has the priority of your commitment?

What is the first, or central, priority of your life?

“Disciples of Jesus must understand the action (seek, strive), the priority (first) and the objectives (the Kingdom of God and His righteousness) (*Life Application Bible Commentary*).

The *Life Application Bible Commentary* also offers some very practical advice concerning the seeking of God’s Kingdom:

When we attempt to assign the appropriate amount of time to the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, so that we can figure out how much time we have left to do other activities, we reduce Jesus’ words to a lesson in sequence and planning rather than a command about the whole of life. But if we think of “seek first” as consistently look for, honor throughout, represent constantly and remember always, then the way we deal with family, friends, work, leisure, etc. will all be transformed. The rule of God and God’s rules will determine and direct our efforts in every area of life. If this is not the case, we are not seeking first God’s Kingdom of righteousness.

Please explain what it means to “seek first the Kingdom of God.”

In a personal, literal way, how are you seeking first the Kingdom of God?

Please give details of how seeking first the Kingdom of God affects your many different roles of life. For example: as a student, mom, brother, employee, employer, teacher, friend...

John MacArthur explains: “Seeking God’s Kingdom is losing ourselves in obedience to the Lord.”

(V33) “and all these things shall be added unto you.”

David Platt offers this insight:

Those that have a righteousness that flows from the heart of God should no longer be consumed with the things of the world. Now, this does not mean that if we ever struggle or give in to the pull of the world, that we are not disciples of Jesus. There is an “already—not yet” aspect to the Christian life. We are *already* saved, but we are *not yet* in heaven. We are not perfected. We are not glorified. There will always be a struggle in this life. Nevertheless Jesus’ point is that even though we will still battle these ungodly ambitions, and even fail many times, there ought to be at least a competing desire in our hearts for the glory of God and for the Kingdom of righteousness.

The cause of much of our worry, anxiety and frustration is that we are living life constantly seeking things of this world. We, as believers, are not to have the same priorities as the world. We understand that true contentment and peace does not come as a result of things or “stuff” in our lives.

Please read Romans 12:2 and Philippians 4:6.

(V34) We are told that we are not to worry about today and certainly there is no need or benefit about worrying about tomorrow. I have heard it said that we labor in this life worrying about two days—yesterday and tomorrow. Jesus assures us that we can rest upon His promise and the assurances of God’s Word. We should focus our lives on daily obedience to God. The priority of our lives should be to please Him in all that we are and in all that we do. Each day that the Lord blesses us with the gift of life should be a day we live honoring unto Him with our actions, attitudes and behavior. With pure hearts, we should surrender daily to His role in our hearts.

How great is our God! The cool thing is—We get to live for Him today! What can be better than that?

Lesson 105—March 13, 2016

Improper Judging

Scripture: Matthew 7:1

Lesson Goal: To learn and understand Jesus’ meaning of “Judge not, that you be not judged.”

As we begin our study, allow me to explain how I literally compose, or write, these lessons? Most of you know that in many ways I still live in days of yesteryear, as evidenced by my manner of writing these lessons. I still use the old yellow note pads. I literally handwrite each lesson and then pass it on to our high-tech individuals—primarily Judy. Without boring you with the details of my research, study and exegesis, I would like to share the first four things I do before any content is written. First, I write the number of the lesson in the series of lessons, followed by the date the lesson will be used in class. For instance today is lesson 105 for March 13, 2016. The second thing I do is write “Lesson Title,” but this line remains blank until the lesson is completely written. The title comes when the lesson is complete. The third item is the Scripture passage that serves as our primary lesson content. Finally, I write the lesson goal, which in a few words describes our learning goal for the lesson.

I share this brief information because as I write today’s lesson I had to take a pause after the first words on the yellow pad. As I sit in my study on a cloudy, rainy January day, I focus on the day this lesson will be studied—March 13, 2016. March 13 is a special day for my family and me. This day would have been my sweet Mama’s (Granny Brackin’s) 95th birthday. This year she is celebrating her birthday in Heaven. Enough said! Amen!

Matthew 7:1

“Judge not, that you be not judged.”

For us to gain a true and full understanding of this verse, we must look at it in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the totality of Scripture, and certainly the words that follow in verses 2-6.

Jesus' words: "Judge not, that you be not judged," have often been misinterpreted, misunderstood and misapplied. Some have gone so far as to interpret that Jesus was forbidding or denouncing any court of law. This is a gross misinterpretation and misunderstanding of His words.

Others misinterpret this passage by saying that Jesus was giving instruction what we, His followers, are to disregard all critical love in regard to others, but Jesus is *not* teaching that we should disregard all discernment concerning others. We must view this passage in the light of the New Testament which speaks and offers many illustrations of proper legitimate judgment of the condition, conduct, and teaching of others. Please read Matthew 7:15-23; Matthew 18:15; Romans 16:17; and 1 John 4:1.

"judge"—Greek *krinō*

Since it is translated some ten different ways in the New Testament, context is an important factor in determining the word's significance in a particular passage. We can determine, that here the Lord did not say "Judge not" in the sense of forbidding us to distinguish between this or that, for in the same context (7:6), He told us to be discriminating (between good and evil, truth and false). He used the expression to warn us, His followers, against coming to adverse conclusions about people in a condemning way. He warned us that if we foster a critical spirit toward others we will reap what we sow. We can expect to be judged and condemned by others in the same way and to the same extent that we judge and condemn them (Phillips).

As we study the Sermon on the Mount, we must remember to constantly be aware of the contrast of the scribes and Pharisees whose self-righteousness was in complete and direct opposition to the true righteousness of God. Please read Matthew 5:20.

John MacArthur writes:

When an individual or a group develops their own standards of religion and morality, they inevitably judge everyone by those self-made beliefs and standards. The scribes and Pharisees had done that. Over the previous several centuries they had gradually modified God's revealed Word to suit their own thinking, inclinations, and abilities. By Jesus' time their tradition had taken such a hold on Judaism that it had actually replaced the authority of Scripture in the minds of many Jews (Matthew 15:6 and 15:2).

MacArthur goes on to explain:

Along with the many other sins spawned by their self-righteousness, the scribes and Pharisees had become oppressively judgmental. They proudly looked down on everyone who was not a part of their elite system. They were unmerciful, unforgiving, unkind, censorious, and totally lacking in compassion and grace. Their evaluation of others, like every other aspect of their hypocritical system, was based on appearance, on the external and superficial (John 7:24 and 8:15). They lived to justify themselves in the eyes of other men; but Jesus told them that their judgment was utterly contrary to God's and was detestable in His sight (Luke 16:15).

Please prayerfully read Luke 18:11-14.

When we elevate ourselves, what therefore do we do to others?

What are some ways that we show from the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees? How do we judge others (be real!!)?

How does the spirit of the scribes and Pharisees rear up its ugliness in our lives?

How quickly do I judge the hearts of others, because they may look, talk, sound, dress or even believe differently than I do? (The key word in this question is heart.) Please read Luke 16:15a.

Matthew 7:1 should not be viewed as instructions for us never to look critically at the actions, behavior or attitudes of others. See 1 Corinthians 2:15; 5:9; 2 Corinthians 11:4; Philippians 3:2. Matthew 7:1 *does* warn us, His followers, against having a bitter, resentful, hostile and unkind spirit which delights in finding faults with others. Simply stated, hypocrisy has no place in the heart or life of a follower of Jesus Christ.

What are some times in your life when hypocrisy was evident? Please answer prayerfully.

Concerning Matthew 7:1, according to the *Believer's Study Bible*:

This verse is particularly applicable to the area of motives. No one of us can know the heart of another, and thus to draw conclusions as to the 'why' of people's actions, especially when those actions are indifferent or even good, is to invite God's judgment upon one's own life.

Verse one does not mean that as a follower of Jesus Christ we should never offer constructive evaluation or judgment concerning the attitudes, actions, or behavior of others. But we must be careful and wise in our discernment of others.

What should be our motivation when we, led by the Spirit of God, offer truly constructive evaluation of others?

Next week we will continue our study on the subject of judging others. We will hear again from Jesus as He continues to expound on this subject. Also next week, I will share the testimony and witness of my own life on this subject.

Lesson 106—March 20, 2016

Proper Judging that can Lead to Mourning

Scripture: Matthew 7:2-6

Lesson Goal: Lord, help me to see clearly the real me.

In verse two, Jesus wants His followers to understand this truth—it is absolutely unacceptable for a person to excuse his/her own personal sin while trying to hold others accountable for the same or similar action. Many times, in regard to our own lives, behaviors, actions, attitudes and dispositions, we like to hold the mirror outwardly, pointing out the flaws in others. We want to expose all their blemishes, warts, scars, and imperfections. While we hold the mirror of judgment outwardly, exposing others, we remain safely on the backside of the mirror comfortable and neat, not having any of our own flaws exposed. Jesus tells us that we should use the same mirror facing toward us so that when we look into it, we see our own blemishes, warts, scars, and imperfections. For most of us, it is much easier to hold the mirror so others are exposed, while we dare not turn it toward ourselves.

Jesus is simply saying the mirror of judgment that you hold to expose the flaws of others will be the same mirror which you must face. In our human nature, we are more comfortable holding the mirror for others to see than we are facing into it ourselves.

What are some flaws we can easily point out in others? Now, what are some flaws we find in our own lives when we face the same mirror we held for others? (Be honest. Be real.)

Why is it easier to see the faults in others than to see our own faults?

Please share a time in your life when you were quick to make a judgment about someone only to find out that you had misjudged this person.

Before we move on, let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us with a loving and careful examination of our own hearts. May God help us to look honestly into the purity of our own hearts. Please answer the following questions prayerfully and honestly as they pertain to your heart. May God use these questions as a mirror into our hearts.

Do I find it easier to find faults in others or to encourage others?

Do the words of my mouth reveal the heart of an encourager or a fault finder?

Do I share encouraging words with my circle of life, or do I share negative words?

Is my tongue an instrument of righteousness or unrighteousness? Please read Romans 6:13.

Is my mind a fountain of righteous thoughts or a sewer of unrighteous thoughts?

Do I ask God to extend my borders of love and friendship, or am I content with my same little circle?

Do I have to sit by the same person at the same table every Sunday morning during doughnut time?

Do I save the same seat for the same person so we can be comfortable sitting by each other in *Life Focus* class every week?

Do I show forth the positive love of Jesus by my attitudes and actions, or do I allow the forces of evil to use me to criticize or spread negative thoughts?

Am I living life showing the love of Christ to others (not just to my family and buddies)?

Am I more like Barnabas or Judas?

(VV3-5) Jesus illustrates this truth by using the example of the “speck and plank.” As we read these verses, we quickly understand He is not talking about literal pieces of foreign substances in our physical eyes. He is making a point by offering an example or illustration to help us better understand His point. Jesus wants us to understand how easy it seems for us to find and see the faults of others, while we have even more serious shortcomings in our own lives, but are blinded to, or simply refuse to see, our own shortcomings. Please read James 1:23-24 and Isaiah 6:9-10.

When we judge others, we do so under the misguided presupposition that we are somehow superior to them. The Pharisees saw themselves measuring up to the law in their own eyes, while all others failed to measure up to their pre-described standards.

An Important Truth

In the midst of Jesus' teachings concerning judging others, we must remember one all-important truth. As we attempt to judge others, we are not all-knowing or all-seeing. We simply do not know all the facts. We are not qualified to be judge!

“speck”—Greek “*dokos*” means “beam, a log upon which planks in a house rest.”

**Please connect Matthew 7:3-5 with Matthew 5:3 and Matthew 5:6.
How do these verses shed light on Matthew 7:3-5?**

How do we take the plank (log) out of our own eye?

Can we clearly see our brother's fault while we have a log in our own eye?

Please read Luke 22:32. How does this verse relate to Matthew 7:3-5? (Please answer prayerfully and thoughtfully.)

Please read Galatians 6:1 and explain the meaning of this verse.

(V6) To understand the truth and dynamic of this verse, we must understand the day and culture of Jesus. In His day, dogs were very seldom kept as household pets like they are today. Most dogs were half-wild scavengers. Many were vicious and often infected with diseases. They were dangerous. Jews would never have given a piece of holy meat (meat that had been consecrated as a sacrifice at the temple) to these wild animals. Never would this part of the sacrificial meat be thrown to scavenger dogs.

Swine/Hogs were considered by the Jews to be the supreme example of uncleanness. Jews did not try to raise or domesticate hogs. These hogs were like the wild dogs that foraged for anything and everything. They were violent and dangerous.

A wild animal cannot appreciate the beauty or value of a pearl. In verse six, Jesus hurls a verbal lightning bolt at His listeners. Hogs cannot eat pearls; they spit them out and then trample them in the mud and muck. Dogs and swine represent those who, because of their great perversity and ungodliness, refuse to have anything to do with the holy and precious things of God, except to trample them under their feet and turn and tear God's people to pieces.

Please read 2 Peter 2:18-22.

What two animals are mentioned in verse 22?

Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ will not always bring about simple acceptance or rejection; there will be times when the witness of the Gospel will be resisted with harshness, violence and blasphemy unto God. People's resistance will result in mocking, reviling and resistant force. We must be very wise in our efforts to share the gospel. Read Acts 18:6.

Please apply Matthew 5:4 to Matthew 7:6.

Please read and apply Luke 19:41-42 to Matthew 7:6.

Do we have a genuine sorrow over the lostness of sinners?

Lesson 107—March 27, 2016

If There Was No Easter

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Matthew 28:1-8

Lesson Goal: To celebrate the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

Introduction

Please complete the following: If there was no **Easter**, _____.

How would you complete the Apostle Paul's statement: "And if Christ is not risen, then _____" ?

Have you ever thought about how powerful the little word "if" can be? Perhaps we think on the "if" times in our lives with sorrow, grief, doubt, or regret. We say, "if only," or "if I had it to do again." Sometimes that little word makes all the difference. And there is no place it can take on greater meaning than when used in this phrase: "*If* there was no Easter..." "If" would steal away all that true believers are, all that we believe and all of our eternity.

"And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty" (V14). Paul tells us that our preaching would be in vain. For me, personally, that means that I would have given the last 42 years of my life in vanity and in preaching an empty lie. Paul's testimony to the church in Corinth is that he preached the Gospel; they received it; he was persecuted because of it, and he labored much for it. If

Christ is not risen, all of this has been in vain.

Today, upon the authority of the Word of God and the witness of many, we can stand and teach with absolute authority and assurance that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Today is a day of celebration. Throughout the pages of Scripture, the children of God are told to remember the mighty works of God. As we have already learned during the past three years, remembering should lead us to celebration. To the follower of Jesus Christ, remembering leads to celebration of who God is and what God has done.

List 10 things which cause you to celebrate the goodness of God in your life. Please prayerfully respond.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Please read the following Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Luke 22:19-20; John 19:17-30.
What do these Scriptures teach us concerning remembering?

Today we celebrate the empty tomb. Please read Luke 24:1-12. What does the fact of the empty tomb mean to you?

Today we celebrate the victory over death. What does this fact mean to you?

We began this lesson with a simple little word “if.” Hallelujah! We know from the Word of God that there is no “if” when we read or speak of Jesus Christ’s resurrection. Hallelujah! Jesus is alive!

For true believers, what does the knowledge of the fact of Jesus’ resurrection mean to us? What does it personally mean to you? Answer prayerfully.

Please complete this final statement: Because Jesus lives, _____.

As in past years, the lesson has been kept brief on this special day to allow your class a time to remember and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Please use the remainder of your class time to testify, sing and celebrate the glorious truth that Jesus is alive!