

Matthew 7:1-12 CC 9&10.30 6th Sept 2015

If you have read the book *Les Misérables* or perhaps seen the show or film you may remember the part where the lead character, Jean Valjean, is made aware by Inspector Javert that a man has been charged under Valjean's name and faces imprisonment. This creates a dilemma for Valjean. Having been shown great grace by a Bishop, which had given him the chance to make something of his life, he now faces the question should he show the same grace towards this man. Should he own up thus being himself imprisoned or let the man take his punishment?

The question is having been shown grace how then should he live?

As we continue looking at the sermon on the mount that is the question for us.

Here was Jesus with his disciples around him and a large crowd listening in as he taught them but he was not just teaching them he was, through them, teaching all those who would follow him down the centuries.

We have seen that much of what he has to say be it about keeping our word, about loving enemies or not worrying, has been hard and the same today as we are told not to judge others but in this as in all the other things Jesus has said we need to understand the context in which he says these.

1. the context of grace

If you are here this morning for the first time you might be a little surprised if at the end of the service I said "could you get the hoover out and clean the Wesley Hall". If you were a regular you might be less surprised. As we read all that Jesus has to say here we need to hear the words difficult as they are in context and that context is grace.

For Jean Valjean that was the context in which he heard about the man who stood condemned in his place. Years before as a prisoner out under licence he had stolen some silver from a Bishop and when brought back the Bishop said he had given the silver to Valjean and even added some silver candlesticks. Thus he was set free and with the means to make something of his life. He had received grace.

Many of us here this morning have received grace. We have recognised what God has done for us in Jesus. God is the loving ruler of the world. He has made the world and he made us and he has made us to enjoy a relationship with him. However, we humans reject that. We try to run our own life our way without God. For that rebellion against God, which is sin, we deserve to be punished and that punishment is death. Yet because he loves us God sent his own Son, Jesus, into the world and he died on a cross taking the punishment we deserve and offering us forgiveness. That is grace. We did not deserve God's love and yet in Jesus he offers us his love and his forgiveness.

It was in that context of grace Valjean struggled with what he should do.

It is in this context of grace that Jesus speaks these words to us today. If we have received God's grace and been through Christ made children of God how then should we live? Well in effect there are two ways to live either we continue to reject God as ruler or we submit to Jesus as our ruler and live with grace. If you want to know more about this do ask me for one of these little Two Ways to Live booklets which fill out what I have just said. In the context of grace God wants us

2. Show grace to others v1-5

We should show grace to others.

What Jesus says here is I hope pretty clear. He calls his followers not to judge others. Why should we not judge, because we all have our own faults. We can easily understand the metaphor he uses of not being able to help someone with a speck in their eye if we have a plank in ours.

The bottom line of what Jesus is saying as we read it post the cross is "as you, though undeserving have been shown grace, then show grace to others".

One of the ways we show grace is by not judging and criticising others because we too have plenty of faults which God in his grace overlooks. In the play Valjean's song has these words in it, "Can I condemn this man to slavery, pretend I do not feel his agony". Pretend I do not feel his agony but in one sense that is what leads us to judge others, we don't feel their agony. Their faults are not ours and so we feel we can criticize. Yet how hypocritical because we know too well our own faults.

Look at again Jesus says to his followers "do not judge" in the same way he has said "Do not resist and evil person" and "Do not worry". Hard things which Jesus expected his followers to take on board and do not as rules to be obeyed but because of the grace through which they and we have begun a new relationship with God our Father and in which he provides us both the desire to obey his word and the strength when it is hard.

Think for a moment of when you can be judgmental of others. So what are you going to do in the light of these words of Jesus? As we will hear in a couple of weeks' time with Gordon the wise person is not the one who hears what Jesus says but does it. So think because as we have been seeing so much of what Jesus has to say in the sermon on the mount requires a new way of thinking it requires a mind which recognises his grace and then seeks to live in the light of that.

God has shown us grace so cut that person a bit of slack. Rather than focusing on someone's faults, as you see it, see them as God sees them as loved and precious and see their good points and in grace seek to ignore their faults. As one writer puts it, "The heart that has tasted the Lord's grace and forgiveness will always be restrained in its judgement of others." (Ferguson p153)

3. Grace rejected v6

However Jesus is not here suggesting that we are totally non-critical v6 puts paid to that idea. Jesus says that while we are not to lack discernment. In very graphic terms he was telling these early

disciples and us that we need an element of discernment especially when it comes to sharing our faith.

I remember years back helping a parish with its faith sharing and we were going round knocking doors and inviting people to an event. I knocked on one door and when a man opened it explained I was linked to a local church. He shouted "I think God is a ratbag" and slammed the door. I suppose I could have knocked again and tried to explain that I didn't think God was a ratbag and explained about God's grace as I did earlier but I have a feeling he wouldn't have been interested in that sense I would have been as Jesus put it "throwing pearls to pigs".

When we were doing Lifeshapes I spoke from Luke 10:6 about the person of peace. That is someone who, when we speak to them of God, responds with interest rather than a slammed door. This is what Jesus is suggesting here. He is saying that, while we should not be judgemental, we do have to have a measure of discernment.

4. Sustaining grace v7-11

If the question is how then should we live as we hear what Jesus says we may well ask how then can we live? The issue is how can I do this. How can I love my enemies? How can I not worry? How can I not be judgemental and Jesus provides here the clear answer, through prayer.

Jesus encouragement to his disciples was ask, seek, knock.

He then used the example of the fact that parents give good things to their children how much more will our heavenly Father give good things to his children.

Now before we get carried away and think great God will give me whatever I want whatever I ask for lets recognise a couple of things.

Jesus said, "how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him" (v11).

God gives us what is for our good not just what we want. But then using the illustration Jesus used we understand that. V9 "which of you if his son asks for bread will give him a stone?.....If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children". That is it isn't it? We as humans are far from perfect but we try to give to our children what we think is best for them.

We have little Samuel here with us this morning and Caroline and Ben I know are and will do their best for him. They will give him things. They will give him good things and certainly not a rock if he asks for bread. But they won't give him everything he will ask for because they know that certain things will not be for his ultimate good. How much more does our heavenly Father know what is good for us and so does not give us everything we ask for but what is ultimately for our good.

I have mentioned before that in times past I used to read the Perishers a cartoon strip in the Daily Mirror. In one cartoon a little boy, Baby Grumplin is walking to church with his sister Maisie and the conversation goes like this, "If I pray very hard I'll get everything I want won't I Maisie?" "Well

everything within reason.” “Here what’s this within reason lark? Ask and thou shalt receive is what it says!” Maisie responds “Oh I shall lose patience I shall. It means ask for something proper something unselfish, something within reason. To which Baby Grumplin replies “I knew I should have read the small print.”

However the main point here is that God does hear and does answer prayer and so if we wish to live Jesus way then prayer is essential and if we wish to live with grace we need to ask God to help us not to be critical of people but to see them with his eyes and to deal with them with grace. That is the grace to see ourselves properly so that we do not feel that somehow we have the high ground when looking at other people. Such a prayer God will answer in the affirmative because it is in keeping with his will as expressed in his word.

A man is praying, “So far today God I have done alright. I haven’t gossiped I haven’t lost my temper, I haven’t been greedy or grumpy, nasty, selfish or indulgent. I am very thankful for all that. But in a few minutes God I’m going to get out of bed and then I’m going to need a lot more help.”

We know the battle with ourselves, our character and nature and with the world around us which puts pressure on us and where we find conflict with others. We need God’s help if we are to live with grace.

It is to God’s grace we must look if we are going to live with grace because grace is not our natural default position is it?

5. Grace in everything v12

Jesus concludes with the clear command of living with grace in every situation. But again we need to be reminded that unless we are aware of the grace that has been shown to us we will not have the desire nor the ability to show that grace to others. As one writer puts it “Only the person who see he is a beggar before the Lord and has nothing to offer will be sufficiently set free from self-centredness of character to put others first and to do to them what he would appreciate receiving from them.” (Ferguson p 158)

In grace God has done everything for us that we might live with others with grace.