

The Sermon on the Mount
Responding to the Sin of Others (Part 3)
Matthew 7:1-6
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I was thinking this week that, as in most of the world, we thoroughly enjoy all of God's good gifts. And one of those, somewhere far down the list, is our pets. Sheila and I have always personally preferred "canis familiaris," or "domesticated dogs." We're not big cat people. In fact, I think I sent my girls into some sort of catatonic state when I teased them and said I like cats, just in a good gravy. I didn't mean it. It was a joke—those of you who are cat lovers. I grew up with boxer bulldogs and my wife with old English sheep dogs. But for most of the last 20 years, we have had a Shih Tzu, because it's a house dog that doesn't shed. What could be more perfect than that?

It's amazing to me how spoiled an animal can become. I used to catch my own mother on multiple occasions actually cooking breakfast for our boxer bulldog. She denied it to the day of her death, but I can tell you that's exactly what happened. Our dog, our little Shih Tzu, is practically a member of the family. In fact, sometimes the dumb dog gets greeted before I do. But in spite of the work that they can be, and in spite of the headaches that they sometimes cause, we love our dogs.

But you're going to have to put all of that aside this morning. Because to understand the text that we come to this morning, you have to step out of our culture and into one that's largely foreign to us, a culture in which, for the most part, dogs were not loved and pampered but feared and hated. They were not primarily domesticated pets, but rather, they were semi-wild, roving packs preying on the weak and on anyone they could find.

If you've traveled much outside the U.S., you've probably witnessed this firsthand. In May I traveled with some folks from our church to do a conference over in India. And in a city the size of DFW, several times we came across roving packs of half-wild dogs looking for prey. In fact, my friend that I was serving there with, Chris Williams, (who grew up in India, is Indian by birth) he was telling me that he sometimes commutes on a bicycle, and one occasion he was attacked by one of those packs of wild dogs.

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That's the kind of culture behind the text that we come to this morning in Matthew 7. Let me invite you to turn to Matthew 7. We continue to work our way through our Lord's most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. And we're looking at the paragraph that begins in chapter 7, verse 1, and runs ultimately down to verse 12. But we're looking just at the first section of that, verses 1 to 6. Let me read it for us:

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”

Now again, the section we're looking at begins in chapter 7, verse 1, and runs down through verse 12. And this section deals with our relationships with others. Specifically, the section I just read to you, verses 1 to 6, deals with how to respond to the sin of others. Verses 1 to 5 deal specifically with how to respond to the sins of other believers. We've learned, as we've studied this section in verses 1 and 2, we are to respond to the sin of other believers with grace. We're not to have a harsh, judgmental spirit; instead, we are to show grace to them, because the way we measure out judgment, God will measure it out to us in this life in the chastening that we receive. If we're harsh with others, then we can expect that same harshness from God. On the other hand, if we are generous and gracious, merciful, He will be with us as well.

In verses 3 to 5 that we looked at last week, we learned that not only are we to respond to the sins of other believers with grace, but we're also to respond to the sins of other believers with humility. And Jesus teaches us this lesson by way of that powerful image of a person who has a beam in his own eye, a battering ram sticking out of his own eye, while he's trying to help his brother get a speck of sawdust out of his, an image from the carpenter shop where our Lord worked for almost 20 years. He goes on to teach us in this section how *not* to respond to others, and that is in pride, and how *to* respond to the sins of others, and that is in humility. In verse 3 and 4, He explains to us how pride typically responds. Pride will make you quick to notice the

sins of others and to be blind to your own. In addition, pride will make you quick to correct the sins of others, even as you tolerate and live with your own.

In verse 5, Jesus moves to the positive, and He says, here's how humility responds to the sins of others. First of all, understand that if you have a beam in your own eye, unconfessed and unrepentant sin, you're trying to help someone else, that is hypocrisy. You've got to understand it that way and deal with it, then take the log out of your own eye. That is, deal with your own sin. Confess it, forsake it, turn from it. And only then are you in a position to help your brother. Which you must do, we're required to do.

Now this morning we move to the next verse, but not to another complete concept. We've learned in the first 5 verses how to respond to the sins of other believers. In verse 6 Jesus teaches us how to respond to the antagonism of unbelievers, how to respond to the antagonism of unbelievers. Look at verse 6, one of those strange verses that doesn't fit our cultural context, and so it just doesn't seem right to us. But let's look at it together. "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

Now the first and most obvious question is, how does that connect to the context? It's not simply inserted here without context, it's in the flow of relationships. Why are the commands in verses 1 to 5 set in juxtaposition to verse 6? Well, verses 1 to 5 counter our normal human tendency to be harsh and judgmental of others. Verse 6 counters the opposite tendency, the tendency to overreact and to be too soft and too accepting in what we see as sort of sickie, sentimental love.

D.A. Carson puts it this way. "Jesus' demands for perfection can breed judgmentalism [verses 1 to 5,] while Jesus' demands for love can cause chronic shortage of discernment." And so, these verses are set there in opposition to each other to show us that we can't fall off on either side. We can't be harsh and judgmental, nor do we throw all discernment out the window and treat everyone exactly the same. In verse 6, Jesus expresses one basic lesson, but He does so in two powerful word pictures. Notice, picture number one is giving what is holy to dogs, and picture number two is throwing pearls to swine. So, let's work our way through those two pictures and try to discern Jesus' meaning.

Picture number one, notice verse 6. "Do not give what is holy to dogs." Now before we can

apply what Jesus is teaching, we first have to understand the picture itself, and it's a picture that's largely outside of our cultural context. The archaeological record of human history shows that domesticated dogs living among humans goes back to one of the earliest human cities, and that is the city of Jericho. They found dogs living alongside of people back in the earliest strata of archaeological data. They were used at that point for hunting, for guarding, and for shepherding. There are a couple of texts in the Old Testament that show that; in fact, this is how they were used in Israel as well.

There is even an indication in the apocryphal Book of Tobit. You understand, the Apocrypha are those books that were written between the testaments, between the close of the Old Testament and the opening of the New Testament. They are not inspired. They're not part of the canon, but they are interesting historical books. One of those books, the Book of Tobit, indicates that dogs, even at that period of time, were companions and pets for Israelites. That was certainly true of the nations around Israel in the first century.

You remember the interchange between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman in Matthew 15. They used the term, as they were talking about the dogs eating the crumbs from under the table, they used a term for "dog" which refers to house pets.

But, here's what you need to understand. Although dogs did serve as helpers in the culture, and in some cases as companions and pets, (listen carefully) for the most part, dogs were thought of at best, as an unclean nuisance, and at worst, as a dangerous threat to public safety. The word that's used here, the Greek word for "dogs" that's used in plural form, is not the word for house pet. This word occurs 15 times in the Septuagint, in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Thirteen of those times it's used negatively, and it's used of wild, street dogs roving in packs. These were unclean animals that were known for their viciousness and for their ravenous appetite of everything disgusting.

Let me give you a couple of examples from the Old testament. Exodus 22:31, God says to His people, "You shall be holy men to Me, therefore you shall not eat *any* flesh torn to pieces in the field; [[no roadkill]] you shall throw it to the dogs." Why? Because they're scavengers.

In 1 Kings 14:11, God is giving out His judgment on King Jeroboam, who sinned in his idolatry in causing Israel to sin in idolatry, and He says this, "Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city the dogs will eat. And he who dies in the field the birds of the heavens will eat; for the

LORD has spoken *it*.” God says, because of Jeroboam’s sin, nobody in his family is going to come to the grave in an honorable burial. If they die in the country, the scavenging birds will eat them; if they die in the city, the scavenging dogs in packs will eat them.

In Psalm 59, David refers to his enemies, and in this case they were enemies who were leaders in Israel, but were not true followers of the true God. And he refers to them as dogs. Listen to Psalm 59:14, They return at evening, they howl like a dog, and go around the city. They wander about for food, And growl if they are not satisfied. [They are a threat, barring their teeth to anyone who crosses them.]

In Jeremiah 15:3, God talks about His judgment on Judah coming from Babylon. And He says, “‘I will appoint over [Judah] four kinds of doom,’ declares the Lord: ‘the sword to slay [That’s death by armies.], the dogs to drag off, and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.’” God says, I’m going to bring judgment, and nobody’s going to be buried; instead, the roving packs of dogs are going to scavenge their corpses.

So, understand this, when you piece together the Old Testament evidence, you can see that dogs were primarily thought of as scavengers, as mean and vicious, roaming in packs, threatening everyone and everything.

Now, look again at verse 6, and we need to ask the question as we continue to look at this picture, what is the “holy” thing? Jesus says, “what is holy” must not be given to “dogs.” What’s He talking about? Well, the Greek expression or its equivalent occurs a number of times in the Septuagint. In this context, it’s specifically referring to meat that had been sacrificed on the altar at the temple. Here’s one example from Leviticus 22:14. It’s talking about if you accidentally ended up eating meat that had been sacrificed. It says, “But if a man eats [what is holy] unintentionally, then he shall add to it a fifth of it and shall give [what is holy] to the priest.”

In other words, as soon as he discovers “wait a minute, this is meat that was sacrificed on the altar, this is holy,” he’s to stop; he’s to take it, and sort of with interest, to the priest. But it’s referring to the meat that was sacrificed on the altar, the animal that was sacrificed. Among the rabbis there was an often quoted saying, “What is holy is not be released to be eaten by dogs.” So, this word picture is very clear, very straightforward: don’t give the consecrated meat from the sacrifice to roving packs of scavenging dogs, because they’re inherently unclean, and

because they have no capacity to distinguish between that holy, sacrificial meat and the rotting corpses that they normally eat. That's the picture.

So now the question is, how do we apply the principal? What is Jesus really teaching us from that picture? Well, first of all, we need to ask, in this little parable who do the dogs represent? You know that the Jewish rabbis sometimes referred to Gentiles as dogs. In fact one rabbi, Rabbi Akiva, named his dogs Rufus and Rufina, because he said they were just like the Gentiles in their behavior. But it's better to see the dogs here not as Gentiles, but rather as antagonistic enemies. And that's how they're presented in the Scripture.

Let me show you both an Old Testament example and a New Testament example. Turn to Psalm 22. Psalm 22. Now, you remember this Psalm is certainly about David and about the enemies that he faced in his lifetime, but it has a greater reference point, and that is to Jesus Christ. It describes the enemies He would face in His life, and particularly at the crucifixion. With that in mind, notice how the enemies both of David and Christ are referred to in verse 16.

Psalm 22:16, "For dogs have surrounded me." You get the picture of, here's someone caught alone, and there's this roving pack of wild, scavenging dogs who have surrounded this person who is vulnerable. "A band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet." So, the dogs here represent vicious, antagonistic enemies who desire to destroy.

Now let me show you a New Testament example. Turn to Philippians 3. Philippians 3, and let me just remind you, this is one of my favorite chapters in all the Bible. Paul here sets forth the truth of justification by faith alone, that we are declared righteous before God based solely on the work of Jesus Christ received by faith.

But he begins this chapter by warning us that there are enemies to that message. Notice verse 2, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision." Who's he talking about? He's talking about, in this context specifically, the Judaizers, those who believed everything you and I believe except they added to how to be right with God. They said you also need to keep the law of Moses, you need to be circumcised. And Paul said that's a false gospel. And here he calls them dogs. Why? Because they are enemies of the true gospel, using that same picture of dogs as vicious enemies.

So, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, you can see that dogs are the enemies of

the Messiah, they are the enemies of the true gospel of justification by faith alone. Now, go back to Matthew 7. That's why, when John Calvin was commenting on this verse, he said, "Here Jesus means by "dogs," those who by clear evidences have manifested a hardened contempt of God." Those are the dogs, those who are vicious enemies of Christ and His gospel.

Now, what does He mean by "what is holy?" As I mentioned, in the picture it refers to sacrificial meat. In the application, it refers to the message about Jesus and the gospel, the message of the kingdom. That will become clearer when we look at the pearl in a moment, the pearls.

So, let's put it all together. Jesus, in the first half of verse 6, commands us as His followers not to continue to give the message about Him and His gospel to those who have heard the message, who have defiantly rejected the message, and have become antagonistic to Jesus and His truth. One author puts it like this.

This saying of Jesus shows reverence for the divine Word. The majesty of the gospel should protect the disciples against addressing the message to the wrong people. They are not to decide to whom the gospel is to be addressed, or from who it is to be withheld, but they must see the limits of their ministry. In Matthew 7:6 the reference is to those who scorn the message rather than those who ignore it.

So, here we're talking about those are its avowed enemies. Jesus commands us not to continue to give the gospel to those who ridicule it, to those who scorn it, to those who are cynical about it. Do you know, the English word "cynic" comes from a Greek word for "dog." It means "to be churlish, to be violent, to be mean-spirited in one's antagonism." One writer says,

Dogs, with whom we are forbidden to share the gospel, are not just unbelievers, they must rather be those who have had ample opportunity to hear and receive the good news but have decisively, even defiantly, rejected it. If people have had plenty of opportunity to hear the truth, but do not respond to it, if they stubbornly turn their backs on Christ, we are not to go on and on with them, for then we cheapen God's gospel by letting them trample it underfoot.

"Do not give what is holy to dogs." That's the first picture.

Let's look at the second picture. Verse 6 goes on to say, "and do not throw your pearls before swine." Now again, because this is out of our cultural context, we need to understand the picture Jesus is drawing here. In Leviticus 11:7, and in Deuteronomy 14:8, swine are described as unclean scavengers. The Jews were not to eat their flesh; they were not even to touch their dead carcasses. So, in Israel in the first century, there were no domesticated pigs. No pulled pork sandwiches in first-century Israel.

Ten of the 13 New Testament references to swine are in the retelling of the story of the demoniac of Gadera, a Gentile living in Gentile territory. The only pigs and swine in Israel, (This is very important to understand.) the only pigs and swine in Israel in the first century were wild pigs. They were omnivorous, unclean scavengers, who were known for being mean and vicious. Living here in North Texas, we understand a little bit about that kind of animal (some areas of our country here), and that's what they had in that area.

Now, notice what He says here about pearls, "your pearls." What does He mean by that? Well, by the first century, because of the influence of Alexander the Great, the Romans, and the Egyptians, pearls were regarded as extremely valuable. They were found both in the Persian Gulf and in the Indian Ocean, but they were so expensive that the average person could never hope to own one. And so, the very word "pearl" in the first century became a sort of figure of speech for something that was supremely valuable. In the picture Jesus draws here, He says we are not to throw our extremely valuable pearls down before wild, vicious boars. Just like the meat that had been sacrificed to God, pearls were valuable and deserved careful treatment.

So, that's the picture. Let's apply the principle. To what group is Jesus referring as "swine?" The same group that He referred to as "dogs" in the first part of the verse. It's those who are not only outside the redeemed community, unbelievers, but those who are openly antagonistic, those who are the vicious enemies of Christ and His gospel. It's interesting, dogs and swine are only mentioned one other time together in the New Testament. And that is in 2 Peter 2:22, and it's talking about false teachers and their immoral lifestyles. It says, "It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.'"

Now what does Jesus mean in applying the second half of this, the second picture? What does Jesus mean by "pearls?" In ancient Jewish literature, pearls were commonly used as a symbol for excellent teaching. There's an old saying that maybe you've heard. We don't use it very

often, but, someone giving their “pearls of wisdom?” That’s got an ancient tradition, goes back to the ancient rabbis. And I think that’s the idea here. In fact, turn over to Matthew 13. In Matthew 13 Jesus gives a series of parables about the kingdom, belonging to His spiritual kingdom. And there are two of them that essentially have the same message. Look at verse 44. “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in ... [a] field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

Now if you’re a Christian, that has happened to you. There was time in your life when you saw how incredibly valuable Jesus and the gospel were, and you were willing to give up everything else in your life to have Him and to have the truth of the gospel. It’d be true of you.

The same point is made in the next parable, verse 45, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls.” Here’s a man who is actually seeking. Now, Paul tells us that no man seeks for God, so, if this man’s seeking, it’s because God is seeking him. But he’s seeking, and he comes across (Notice verse 46.) “Upon finding one pearl of great value [That’s Jesus and the gospel, the kingdom, spiritual kingdom, to which you can belong and follow Jesus.], he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

Again, here’s a man who understands the value of Jesus and belonging to Him, and he’s willing to give up everything else in his life. Nothing else in his life is more valuable or more important to him. He’s willing to sell it all in order to get the pearl. In these two parables, and particularly in this second one, Jesus compares the kingdom and the message of His spiritual kingdom to a uniquely valuable pearl.

Now go back to chapter 7 and verse 6. Here the pearls are the precious and valuable words about the kingdom over which Christ rules. They’re words about the gospel, about Christ. So, let me summarize both of these pictures then. In both pictures we have antagonistic unbelievers described as “dogs” and as “swine.” In both pictures you have the message of Christ and the gospel described as “what is holy” and “your pearls.” The point is this. Because the gospel is both holy and valuable, we should never continue to spread that message among those who have heard it, but have defiantly rejected the Lord and have become antagonistic to its message.

William Hendriksen, great commentator, writes, Christ’s disciples must not endlessly continue to bring the gospel message to those who scorn it. To be sure, patience must be exercised, but there is a limit. A moment arrives when constant resistance to the gracious invitation must be

punished by the departure of the messengers.

Now, as part of this second picture, Jesus also wants us to understand the reasons for this most unusual command. And there are two of them, two reasons that we're to respond like this. First of all, because they will treat the message as worthless. They're going to treat the message as worthless. Notice verse 6, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet."

If we give the valuable message of the gospel to those who are openly antagonistic, they will never appreciate its true value. They cannot distinguish between the pearls and the garbage they normally eat. They will treat our message as completely worthless. They will treat it with disdain. It's like the proverb. Proverbs 23:9 says, "Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words." They will show utter contempt for the gospel that we preach.

But there's a second reason not to cast your pearl before swine. Not only because they're going to treat your message as worthless, but they will turn on the messenger. Notice the end of verse 6, "and turn and tear you to pieces." New Testament scholar, A.T. Robertson, suggests that pearls, literal pearls, resemble the kind of food, little white peas and acorns, that pigs often ate in the first century. And he says,

Imagine the picture here. You throw your pearls down before the swine; they look at those pearls and for a moment mistake them for the kind of food they normally eat, and they greedily begin to eat them. They get them in their mouths, and they begin to crunch the hard surface of the pearls between their teeth causing them sharp pain. They spit them out, and in their fury they trample the pearls until they're buried beneath the mud. And then in their fierce anger they turn on those who have given them such worthless food.

That's the picture. In other words, those who are antagonistic to Jesus and the gospel will not only undervalue your message, they will carry out their hatred of that message against you. Charles Quarles writes, "Jesus warned His disciples that if they attempted to force their message on the wicked, who showed no appreciation for it, they were only inviting persecution." Again, Proverbs 9:7, says,

He who corrects a scoffer [someone who mocks] gets dishonor for himself,
And he who reproves a wicked man *gets* insults for himself. Do not reprove a
scoffer, or he will hate *you* (emphasis added) -- in addition to your message.

So, now that we understand what Jesus means in these two word pictures, I want to show you what that looks like. I want to give you several biblical examples, so you can see this fleshed out. The first one I'm not going to have you turn to, but you can jot in your notes and read it if you have time later this week. It's Luke 4.

You remember Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth, and He preaches in the synagogue there. He preaches from Isaiah the prophet, and He presents the gospel. And He rebukes them for not having listened to the gospel and responded. And how do they respond to Him? They try to kill Him. They take Him to a cliff and try to throw Him off a cliff at Nazareth. How did Jesus respond to their rejection of Him and the gospel? He left Nazareth. He established His new base of operations in Capernaum, and He never had any significant ministry in Nazareth again.

This is what He told His disciples to do as well. Turn over to Matthew 10, Matthew 10. Jesus sends out the 12 disciples to preach in the villages and towns of Galilee in His great Galilean ministry. And here's what He told them in verse 11. Matthew 10:11,

“... whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave *that city*.” [In other words, don't shop around for a better deal, you stay with the person where you were first received.] [And] As you enter the house, give it your greeting. [And] If the house is worthy, give it your [shalom] your *blessing of peace*. But if ... [it's] not worthy, take back your *blessing of peace*.

If you discover that they're deceitful and dishonest, then take that shalom back. But now notice verse 14, “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words.” What was He sending them out to preach? The message of the gospel. He says, if they don't “heed your words, as you go out of that house or out of that city, shake the dust off your feet.” Now that was an image a first century Jewish person understood. Because if you were a Jewish person, you visited a Gentile country, as you were walking back over the border into Israel, you shook the Gentile dust off your robes.

That's what Jesus is saying, but here He's saying, you're shaking the dust off in that you're

saying, I'm leaving him to God and His judgment. Notice verse 15, "Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city." That's sobering. Jesus says, it's going to be worse for those who hear the gospel and defiantly reject the gospel at the day of judgment than for those who lived in those cities of the plain that God destroyed by fire and brimstone. It's going to be worse. But He says, leave, move on.

Let me show you a couple of other examples. Turn to Acts 13. Here in the ministry of Paul and the Apostles, Paul is ministering in a place called Antioch of Pisidia. And he ministers in the synagogue and got an interesting response. And so, verse 44 of Acts 13,

The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and *began* contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and [they] were blaspheming. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."

Of course, verse 48, the Gentiles are thrilled about this. Verse 49, "the Word of the Lord was ... [spreading]," but, verse 50, "The Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, ... drove them out of their district." Now watch what happened in verse 51, "But [as they left] they shook off the dust of their feet against them and went" [on] to [the next city,] Iconium.

Turn over to chapter 18. Chapter 18:5. This is in Corinth. Silas and Timothy joined Paul there in Corinth, and

... Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the ...[Messiah]. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* on your own heads! [I'm] ... clean. [I've told you the gospel, and] From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

And he leaves there, and from that point he ministers to the Gentiles. You see, Paul patiently explained the gospel to a group, and he would do that over weeks of time even if they didn't accept his message so long as they remained open to it. But when the audience began to

adamantly reject and to blaspheme his Christ and His gospel, he turned his attention elsewhere. That's the pattern. That's what Jesus is commanding in Matthew 7:6.

So practically, how should we apply this lesson that our Lord has taught us in this most unusual verse? Well, let me first of all, talk to you if you're here this morning, and you're not a Christian. I'm confident that there are folks here this morning who aren't in Christ. If you're not a Christian, please listen to me for just a moment, because I want to explain to you how the Lord intends you to apply this verse to yourself.

You see, there is a holy God who created you, and He has every right to tell you how to live. He sustains your life. Every good thing you enjoy comes from His hand. But like everyone else on this planet, and like everyone else in this room, you have chosen to reject His authority, to rebel against your conscience and against His just law, and you've decided to live life by your own rules. The result of that is a constant display, day in and day out, of attitude and words and thoughts and actions that the Bible calls sin. They are a violation of your Creator's purpose and will for you.

Because God has given you a conscience, you know that many of those things are wrong, and yet you continue to choose to do them, because you want to, because you enjoy them. As Paul says in Romans, you are storing up for yourself wrath in the day of judgment. When you stand before God, not one of those acts will be missed.

But here's the good news. The God who is absolutely just and righteous is also gracious and merciful, and He sent His Own Son into the world. He who has always been eternally God, also became fully and completely man. He became just like you are, except for your sin. His name, as you know of course, was Jesus of Nazareth. But understand this, He's not imaginary. Jesus was a real man, who lived in a real place you can visit today. He lived at a real point in history. And Jesus lived an absolutely perfect life. God said He lived a perfect life. Never once did He sin against God's law in what He thought or what He said or what He did. He lived the life you should have lived, and I should have lived.

And then He died on a cross. Not because of His own sin, He had none. This is the shocking thing. He *came* to die. He said, I *came* "for this purpose." Why? What did His death accomplish. Well, He explained it like this. He said, I came to die as a substitute in the place of sinners, in the place of those who would believe in Him. He died to pay the penalty of their sin,

the penalty their sin deserved before a just and holy Creator. And to prove that God accepted that substitution, God raised Him from the dead on the third day, gave Him life. He appeared to witnesses who testified of His resurrection, and then God took Him back into heaven where we wait for Him to return.

If you are willing to turn from your sin in repentance, if you are willing to put your complete confidence in Jesus Christ as your Savior and as your Lord, if you're willing to follow Him as your Master, then God will apply everything that Christ accomplished *to you*—at that moment you believe. At the very moment you believe in Jesus Christ, God will give you spiritual life to know Him. He will change your heart and your desires. He will forgive your sins against Him and never bring them up against you again forever. He will adopt you as His own child. And someday He will take you perfected into His eternal presence, where you, as we saw this morning in Revelation, will forever live on a perfect, new earth enjoying His presence and serving him. That's the gospel.

Now listen to me. If you're not a believer, I want you to listen to me for just a moment. Maybe you've heard that message dozens, even hundreds, of times, but to this point you have rejected it. Listen, Jesus has a very clear message for you in the passage we studied this morning. If you continue to refuse and to reject the gospel message, what Jesus shares in this verse is a shocking and sobering precursor of your future. God is incredibly patient. He has been already with you, as He has been with all of us. But listen, don't you dare mistake God's patience with His apathy or indifference toward your sin. The entire Bible testifies otherwise. Jesus said otherwise.

Just as He commanded His disciples to leave those who were resistant or antagonistic to the message, He will some day do the same to you. You will cross a line, and He will say, leave him alone. Your rejection of Christ and the gospel will eventually bring God's judgment. In this life, what Paul calls the wrath of abandonment, God will just let you go; and when you die or Christ returns, you will experience what Jesus refers to as eternal hell. Listen, I plead with you. In God's name, hear the good news, hear the message. Don't walk out of this place and reject it again. Cry out to God for forgiveness. Turn from your sin and embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And in a moment, He'll change you, He'll forgive you, He'll make you His own.

Maybe you're here this morning, as most of us would be, you're a Christian. How do you apply this text? Listen, don't be surprised when people not only reject the gospel, but when they become antagonistic in response to it. And don't force the gospel of Christ where people have

already understood it, but now blaspheme and hate it. Just move on. Shake the dust and move on.

Now I know what you're thinking, because it's what I thought as I was studying this text. How do I know? How do I know when to keep on sharing the gospel, when to be patient as God is patient? How do I know with that family member or that friend or that coworker? Well, first of all, I would encourage you to err on the side of patience, even as God is patient. Err on that side. But I would also say, whatever happens, continue to pray for their salvation. Never stop that.

But, how do you know when it's enough? The answer is, you ask God for His wisdom to help you understand. This is here in the very text we're studying. Look at Matthew 7 again. Lord willing, we'll study this next week. This is in the context for a reason. Verse 7,

“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. [But] ... what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, [he'll] ... not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

The context of this is, how to deal with difficult relationships. So, you ask God to give you wisdom to know when to keep on sharing, when to be patient and persistent, and when to draw the line and say, I'm not going to offer what is holy to the dogs, those who are openly and defiantly antagonistic, and I'm not going to throw the pearl of the gospel to those who will simply trample it under their feet in blasphemy. Shake off the dust and move on. Let's pray together.

Father, grant us Your wisdom. We desperately need Your direction to know how to live out this command our Lord has given us. Father, help us to treasure the good news in Christ so much that we don't allow Him to be blasphemed and trampled underfoot.

Father, I pray for those here this morning who have heard the gospel countless times, but who have been stubbornly defiant. Father, I pray that You would help them to see the dangerous position they're in. Help them to see that there is a line in Your patience, and they don't know

where it is. The time will come when You will merely let them go.

Father, I pray that today they would cry out to You, they would submit themselves to Jesus Christ as Lord.

For it's in His name we pray, Amen.