

Revolutionary relationships—Matthew 7:1-12

Theme: our relationships with one another and God will shape how we live and how effectively we cause the revolution to break out in our neighbourhoods

The danger for people caught up in Jesus' revolution, who've listened to and taken his words seriously, is that they could think they're better than other people. So, as he concludes the main teaching section of the sermon, Jesus reiterates the need for maintaining healthy relationships with everyone—especially fellow disciples—and the need to trust absolutely and solely in God and no one and nothing else

Questions:

1. Have we been on the receiving end of someone's judgemental attitudes? What does it feel like?
2. What is the point of Jesus' little parable/joke about planks and specks (v3-5)?
3. How does what Jesus says here fit with Paul's advice in Colossians 3:17?
4. What do you think Jesus is talking about in v6? [the notes will almost certainly help you!]
5. How do we think Jesus' word in v6-8 applies to our lives in Britain today?
6. What is Jesus saying about our relationship with God when he tell us to 'ask, knock, and seek' (7-8)?
7. In what ways is God like an earthly father? And in what ways is he not like an earthly father?
8. Is Jesus saying that if we badger God enough, he will give us anything we want? If not, what is he saying about prayer and how does it relate to 6:11?
9. v12a is called 'the golden rule': do you think it's a summary of everything Jesus has said from 5:21-7:11? If so, how?
10. What difference would living the golden rule make in your family, your street, your workplace?
11. In what way do we fulfil the Law and the Prophets (12b)? How does Gal 5:13-14 help us to answer this?
12. What have we learned from our study of the sermon on the mount in this series? [share your thoughts]

Your stories:

Potted summary

Jesus concludes the central teaching section of the sermon by reminding us how essential it is that we maintain good relationships with one another and with God.

Normal behaviour and allegiances results in us looking out for number one and not caring about other people.

Those caught up in Jesus' revolution, on the other hand, rely totally on God and so are able to speak well of and help others and be generous to all.

More over the page....

What the passage is about....

Jesus concludes his teaching about how the people of revolution should live by focusing on our relationship with one another and how vital it is that we trust in our daily lives.

A 'triad' structure

One very helpful way of reading the central section of the sermon (5:21-7:12) notes that each unit of teaching opens with an outline of an issue, often accompanied by traditional teaching about it. This is then followed by a description of its consequence. Each section then concludes with a positive instruction or initiative that opens the possibility of living a transformed life. There are 14 such 'triads' where Jesus outlines a way of behaving along with its outcome, before showing us how people of his revolution can make a difference in the world.

Seeing the central section of the sermon in this way helps us avoid seeing Jesus' teaching as impossibly idealistic and when we reach this concluding section (7:1-12), it helps us to understand the otherwise quite baffling saying in 7:6.

7:1-12 falls into two sections (1-5, 6-11—not as the NIV breaks it up): the first (1-5) tells us not to judge and then looks at the consequences of our judging other people when we lack self awareness, before suggesting that the transforming way of behaving is to sort ourselves out first; the second (6-11) outlines the consequences of trusting the powers-that-be—in Jesus' case the Roman Empire—and offering the transforming initiative of trusting God so that we can live as generously in the world as he does towards us.

It suggests that Jesus concludes the main teaching section by repeating his emphasis on the need for good relationships among the disciples (the thrust of his teaching in 5:21-48) and the need for each of us to trust God totally (the thrust of 6:1-34).

This section ends with an echo of 5:48 in 7:12, showing how the call to be like God affects the way we live our daily lives in all our relationships. The thrust of the verse is that every issue Jesus has touched on since 5:21

is in view and his teaching is summed up in the transforming initiative that you treat other people in the way that you'd like to be treated. This way of living fulfils, sums up the Law and the prophets—the very thing Jesus said he'd come to do (5:17-20) and which Paul says we do if we live by the faith of Jesus (Galatians 5:13-14).

Let's look at the two sections in a little more detail:

1) removing logs (1-5)

The command not to judge is wide-ranging. It's only when we get to v3 that Jesus mentions 'brothers' which suggests that his concern is to deal with our judgmental attitudes in general as well as among the disciples.

The negative command is followed by the consequence of not following it: we tear each other apart if we all point fingers and find fault. The result is that relationships fall apart; life becomes a bitter game of one-upmanship both in the church and beyond it. This echoes what Paul says in Galatians 5:15.

The transforming initiative is repentance (3-5). That's what Jesus' joke about planks and specks is all about. Obviously you can't remove a speck of sawdust from a brother or sister's eye when you have a plank in your own without braining the one you're trying to help. Even with good intentions, we participate in the vicious cycle Jesus has outlined in v1-2.

This is the only place where Jesus uses the word 'hypocrite' of disciples in Matthew; every other use is of the Pharisees. Jesus is saying that until we repent of the things we judge others for, we are just like the Pharisees—and our righteousness has got to be greater than theirs (5:20; 6:1)

Once we have repented and sorted ourselves out, we're in the right place before God to help our brothers and sisters. This is exactly what Paul says in Galatians 6:1-5.

2) relying on God (6-12)

The final triad reminds us that if we are to live as people of the revolution—treating people as we want to be treated because that's how God has treated us (12)—we've got to rely

solely and absolutely on God and on no one and nothing else.

Again Jesus starts with a negative 'do not give' (the verb 'give' is repeated 6 times in this unit). But what does he mean? What are the sacred things and pearls? Who are the dogs and pigs? And why does Jesus use this kind of language here?

It was common for the Old Testament to refer to the Gentile nations as dogs (Psalm 22:16-20; see Matthew 15:22-28, especially 26). Many of Jesus' contemporaries called the Romans dogs or swine. But many of those same contemporaries looked to Rome for their security, their daily bread; 'better the devil you know,' they said. They offered their service to Rome, a service that should have been exclusively given to God (Ex 19:3-6). And Jesus says the consequence of this is unpredictable—you might do okay but you might be torn apart and left for dead because Rome doesn't really care about you. He would not, at this stage, however, have wanted to say this explicitly (just as he didn't spell out his views on Israel's leadership in the parable of the sower as starkly as he did in the parable of the tenants). So he uses coded language that his hearers would certainly understand but any listening centurions would not.

The transforming initiative in this triad is that we actively trust God. Asking, seeking and knocking are continuous not because God is reluctant to give us good things and only responds to being badgered—quite the contrary, he delights to do it—but because we need good things every day (6:11; 34). The good things that God gives are contrasted with the unpredictability of throwing your lot in with Rome or the world: God is reliable, trustworthy. Jesus is not, of course, saying that anything we ask for we'll get; only what we need (6:32-33)

Because of this, we can afford to be generous to others, treat them as we'd like to be treated. And in doing that, we find ourselves fulfilling the Law, as Jesus does.