

LEARN TO WALK THE PLANK – Matthew 7:1-12

Have you seen the new movie that is filled with Oompa-Loompas, chocolate rivers, and big tests for little children? In the movie, there are two kids:

Charlie Bucket and Veruca Salt.

A good seed, and a bad weed.

Charlie's honest, kind, brave and true.

Veruca is a spoiled-rotten brat.

Both get a chance to win and own the mysterious chocolate factory of Willy Wonka, a place that has been sealed up tight and closed to the public for a decade.

Charlie and Veruca have found Golden Tickets in their Wonka chocolate bars — Charlie's ticket was in a Whipple-Scrumptious Fudgemallow Delight, to be exact — and because of this they get to go on a tour of the chocolate factory, along with three other lucky children.

Their tour guide is none other than the reclusive and eccentric Willy Wonka himself, a part played by Johnny Depp in the movie Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, which recently was in theatres. When the children walk through the factory doors, they enter an amazing world known only to Willy and his staff of Oompa-Loompas.

The tour is a dream come true for Charlie, a child born into poverty, but it turns into a nightmare for the other members of the group. Willy Wonka is beset with problems: There's Augustus Gloop, whose hobby is eating; Violet Beauregarde, a dim-witted gum chewer; and Mike Teavee, a gangster-wannabe who is obsessed with television.

As for Veruca Salt, let's just say that Willy is not amused when she demands of her father, "Daddy, I want a boat like this! ... And I want lots of Oompa-Loompas to row me about, and I want a chocolate river and I want ... I want ..."

Now it wouldn't be right to give away the secrets of the chocolate factory, but suffice it to say that a number of the children get in trouble when they disobey Willy's orders. One by one, the nasty are punished and the good are rewarded, in some spectacular and disturbing ways.

That's what we love about this flick: the good kids get rewarded, and the bad kids get what's coming to them. It's a replay of good vs. evil, light vs. dark, and in the end goodness and light triumph.

We love it when the wicked are punished, when the unrighteous are mowed down, when the weeds are uprooted in the garden.

But here is the problem: who gets to pick who is the unrighteous and who is the righteous?!? Who gets to pick who gets mowed down? One person's weeds are another person's flowers!

We don't need a Willy Wonka in the church. We don't want someone who shows the way to the sweetness of Jesus, but then sets up all these traps in the path of others.

Every Christian here has something sweeter than a chocolate factory to give away: the grace of Christ. If we are like Willy, however, people can't see how sweet Jesus is. Jesus calls us to love like Him, and then everyone around will enjoy the sweet benefit of salvation, holiness, grace, and mercy.

That is why the words we are going to study today are so important. We are going to see that Jesus gives us concrete advice on how to live as Kingdom people. Turn with me to a section of the Sermon on the Fat Hill, beginning in Matthew 7:1.

Years ago, the most familiar passage in all the Bible, the verse most often quoted was probably what became known as the Golden Rule found a little later in this section in vs. 12: "Do to others what you would have them do to you."

But in recent years there has been a major transition. The passage now most quoted is verse 1: "Do not judge."

Most people who quote this mean something different than what Jesus had in mind. When someone says, "do not judge," they really mean, "Stay out of my business! Who are you to judge me?"

Let's read verses 1-5 to figure out what Jesus is talking about here. READ

Jesus says, that if you want to be a Kingdom person:

1. Offer grace to others.

The opposite of offering grace is judging others. Few issues create as much anger in our society today than the issue of judging. If you want to get someone mad at you real quick, just say that you think they are wrong about something they've said or done, or about an opinion or belief they have.

When you do that, you instantly become accused of being judgmental and intolerant.

Steve Martin said, "Never judge a man unless you've walked a mile in his shoes. Then you'll be a mile away and you have his shoes."

Dare to share your opinion, and you're faced with, "Who are you to judge? Remember, Jesus said, "Don't judge lest you be judged." And they're right - Jesus did say that. But they're also wrong, because they don't understand His words.

When Jesus says, "do not judge," many people think that He is saying that we should never evaluate what is right and wrong.

If He is saying that, then He contradicts Himself when He says in John 7:24, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

If He is saying that we should never evaluate right and wrong, then He would also be contradicting other Scriptures like:

- 1 John 4:1 where John tells us not to believe every preacher that comes along, but "test the spirits to see whether they are of God."
- 1 Corinthians 5:11 where Paul tells us not to associate with someone who calls himself a brother but is "sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat."

The command not to judge others doesn't mean that we can't see the sinfulness of certain actions. If it did, then no Christian could serve on Jury Duty and really be right with God.

Don't be confused about what Jesus is saying here – He wants us to be aware that we all have the tendency to be judgmental. He is talking about our attitudes towards others. We have to admit that we tend to feel good about ourselves when we put others down.

We'll say things like: "I'm not as bad as that person, so I must be a good person."

I believe that what Jesus is really speaking of in the passage is an attitude that is critical and condemning and continual. When a person goes through life they have to evaluate what is right and what is wrong! In fact, evaluation, or discernment, is continually necessary regarding decisions, actions, motives, plans, or whatever life throws at you!

When you have a decision before you, God wants you to look at what His Word says, find out what God wants through prayer and study, and then do it. God wants you to discern. A condemning attitude, however, is a whole different matter. Jesus is talking about the self-righteous, egotistical, hasty, prejudiced, unmerciful, ungraceful and unwarranted condemnation of others.

Jesus even says that judging is like a boomerang. It comes back to you. The measure that we use on others will be the measure others use on us.

We have to understand that the person with a critical spirit is inviting a lot of criticism.

This is why Jesus talks about a speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and a huge plank of wood in your own. He tells you to take out the plank! I think this is one of those times where Jesus uses humor to talk about a serious subject.

What does Jesus mean when He says to "First take the plank out"? If you wear contacts, you know that if you get a speck of dirt in your eye, you've got a problem. A speck needs to come out! It hurts and it causes your vision to be blurry! Your eyes start to water and you've got a problem!

One can desire to help their fellow brother get the speck out, but Jesus says to watch out! Before you start to help someone with their shortcomings or fuzzy vision, check your own eyes for not just specks, but logs! Can you imagine a log sticking out of someone's eyes and they are trying to help someone else. They would keep smacking the other guy in the head! He might even poke the other guy's eye out!

Jesus wants you to help your brothers and sisters, but you have to be aware of and intentionally remove the sin in your own life. Otherwise, you will wind up causing more damage than just a speck would. Jesus wants you to throw out your log - get right with God yourself - before you try to help others.

Peter Marshall wrote this little prayer: "Dear Lord,
When I am wrong, make me easy to change;
When I am right, make me easy to live with."

When you are critical and condemning you have lost sight of God's grace toward you, a sinner. You have forgotten that you are saved only because of Christ' sacrifice.

Jesus tells us how to live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. We should recognize that we have received divine mercy and forgiveness in our own lives, we should then freely offer mercy and forgiveness to others.

To be a Kingdom Person, Jesus wants you to:

1. Offer grace to others, and...

2. Love those who don't like you.

READ Matthew 7:6. This is a confusing passage to our ears - It sounds like it doesn't belong in this passage at all.

However, Jesus was making reference to some specific things that we each face.

He was not giving us a tip on how to treat animals. Jesus talked about dogs and pigs to refer to certain kinds of people. He is talking about those who aren't ready to handle the truth of God, the sacred precious pearls of the Gospel.

You can take a pig and put him in a bathtub. You wash him. You floss his teeth. You can shine his hoofs. You can do whatever you want. Then you put him back outside, and you know where he'll go? Right back to the mud!

Jesus was saying there are people like that. These words are harsh, but we have to understand that not everyone will accept our Gospel. It is not flattering to call someone a dog or pig, even more so in Jesus' time. It was not common to have dogs as pets back then. The dogs were vicious and roamed the streets. Pigs were regarded as the most unclean of animals.

Jesus says you will come in contact with some unbelievers who are so hardened in their resistance to the gospel that they make a mockery of you and your faith

Jesus is saying that if you try to share the Gospel, what is right and wrong, what is Truth and you are met with intense resistance, then back off.

Jesus is not calling unbelievers dogs and pigs but using this analogy to teach us an important lesson: dogs and pigs that have no use for pearls or things of value, some people have no use for the gospel.

Some people will take in our message of holiness and grace and then trample all over our words. They will twist our words and our intentions. Jesus wants you to be aware of this and discerning with a loving heart. Jesus wants you to realize what a person can accept and love them unconditionally.

You see, if we are to be kingdom people then we should offer grace and mercy and the truth of the Gospel to everyone, but Jesus also wants us to avoid something else. Jesus wants you to avoid sharing the hard truths of the Christian walk with those who aren't ready.

We have to be careful because there are some people, even church people, who no matter how tenderly you confront them with their sin they will turn on you.

They won't accept your efforts to help them find freedom because they believe themselves to be without error - Rather than go to work on their sin they go to war with you.

Proverbs 9:7-8 – Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult;
 whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse.
 Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you;

Our mission in this life, however, is bring the lost to Christ and into His Church. Once they've committed their lives to Jesus, we are to challenge them to live according to his teachings.

Where we sometimes go wrong is when we become frustrated when the world doesn't embrace Christian values when they've never come to accept Christ who made those values Christian.

Gene Appel is a preacher who tells about a time when he was watching a softball game, seated next to a good friend. And he said as he sat in the bleachers watching the game, he was eavesdropping in on the conversation of the people seated behind them.

Gene said that the people behind him were basically talking about the previous week. And he said basically, their weeks went like this: get up, go to work, go party after work, find somebody to sleep with, go home and go to bed, get up, go to work, party after work, find somebody to sleep with, go home and go to bed, get up, etc. He said that's what they talked about doing that whole week. He was appalled at this conversation.

Rather than have sympathy over these lost people, Gene turned to his friend seated next to him and recounted what he'd overheard behind him. And then he whispered to his friend, "These people are a bunch of sleaze balls!"

Gene said his friend turned to him and said, "You know Gene, every time I'm around people like that I think, 'These are the kind of people Jesus would be hanging out with. These are the people he would be trying to love and spend time with.'"

Gene said right then he just put his face in his hands and prayed, "God, what is wrong with me? Sometimes I can be so unlike your Son."

God wants you to love those who don't like what you stand for and those who might not even like you!

To be a Kingdom Person, Jesus wants you to:

- 1. Offer grace to others,**
- 2. Love those who don't like you, and...**
- 3. Be Persistent with God**

Jesus switches the focus. After talking about how Kingdom people should treat others, He then talks about how Kingdom people should treat God.

Read Matthew 7:7-11

Jesus says to ASK and you will receive!

Does this mean that God will give us everything we ask for?

Not according to James 4: 3 – *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

Jesus wants us to Ask with the right motives!

Jesus says to SEEK and you will find!

We have to realize that if it's important to us, then it's worth pursuing. Is God worth seeking?

Jesus says KNOCK and the door will be open! In other words, the path your life is suppose to take will be revealed to you! Your door will be opened!

We miss something, however in our English translations. What Jesus is really saying is not ask, seek, and knock. What Jesus is really saying is keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. It is a continual thing!

Jesus is saying that if you want to be a Kingdom person, persistence with God is pivotal!

If Jesus tells us that we are to be persistent with God, then we have hope!

Too many times we think we are defeated. Maybe there is a sin in your life that you can't kick. If we come to God and ask for the grace and yet we continue to be defeated we are not to just stop asking. We are not to be hopeless.

We are to continue to ask, seek and knock—diligently seeking the grace that comes from the goodness of the Father that will enable us to walk in victory and holiness.

If Jesus tells us that we are to be persistent with God, then we are to walk in the will of God every day and every hour and every minute and every second of our lives!

God is not a "genie in the lamp" nor a "vending machine." Just because we ask, seek, and knock, doesn't mean we will get everything we ask for.

Listen to these two verses and tell me when God answers the prayers with a big YES every time:

- 1 John 3:22 – “Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.”
- 1 John 5:14 – “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

God gives a big YES to our prayers when we want what He wants. REPEAT

This is why Jesus wants us to keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. Our relationship with God is pivotal and we must be persistent in our search for Him.

To be a Kingdom Person, Jesus wants you to:

- 1. Offer grace to others,**
- 2. Love those who don't like you,**
- 3. Be Persistent with God, and...**
- 4. Finally, Follow the Golden Rule**

Jesus wraps up this section with one final command. READ Matthew 7:12

This is awesome! In this one sentence Jesus brilliantly communicated the secret of meaningful relationships.

Think of how different this world would be if people truly practiced this teaching.

- Think of how few murders there would be.
- Think how few robberies there would be.
- Think of how little abuse would go on in this world.
- Think of how many wars would be prevented.
- Think of how many marriages would be salvaged
- Think of how many church fights would never happen.
- Think most of all of how many lost people would find Jesus.

Our church should be filled with people who love to practice the Golden Rule.

Jesus tells us that the Golden Rule summarizes the entire Old Testament! We have to realize that this one piece of advice also summarizes everything that Jesus teaches us about how to live for God in the Sermon on the Fat Hill!

“Do to others what you would have them do to you” is a simple phrase, but a difficult command to carry out.

It takes power! It takes power that only Christ can give:

- God became human – gave up His power to give us power for life!
- Jesus was perfect – showed us that life can really be lived, if we follow Him!
- Jesus took our sin at the cross – conquered sin for us so that we could really live!
- Jesus raised from the dead – gave us a glimpse of the kind of power that resides in us! Gave us a glimpse of the future that we have!
- Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit! The ultimate power to really live!

Romans 8:2 (The Message) - *A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.*

If you want to be a Kingdom person, you should realize that Jesus wants you to:

1. Offer grace to others,
2. Love those who don't like you,
3. Be Persistent with God, and...
4. Follow the Golden Rule

But to do all of this takes the power that Christ brings. Will you accept His power?

Believe
Confess
Repent
Be Baptized
Live for Him