

**SCRIPTURE INTRO:** Last Sunday I started a new sermon series based on a book by Paul Miller called *Love Walked Among Us*.

The subtitle is *Learning to Love Like Jesus*.

What Paul Miller does, and what we’ll do, is look at a bunch of stories in the Gospels where Jesus interacts with people, and look for patterns that emerge that give us insight into how Jesus loved people.

And then we’ll think about how this applies to us and our interactions with people God has put in our lives.

We’re not looking for strategies or steps.

We’re trying to know Jesus better and learn from him.

The more stories we read, the more layers we’ll add to our understanding.

You will start to see some of the things Jesus does over and over—sometimes surprising things that he does, sometimes very direct points that he makes with his disciples or other people.

I hope the Holy Spirit will use this study to make me a more loving person.

And that’s my prayer for you too, for all of us.

Our reading today is John 9. It’s a long chapter.

We’re not going to get anywhere close to covering all the details.

Instead we’re going to look at it for a very specific point.

**INTRO:** One day last winter I was at the church by myself, about to leave for lunch when a homeless couple showed up. They weren't just homeless, carless. They had walked up St. Joseph and came in the church. Young, obvious drug abusers, all their possessions in a few plastic shopping bags. And without a howdy doo they started begging me to get them a motel room. That bugged me. But what really bugged me was were carrying an ugly little dog. As my mother-in-law would have said: "They didn't have a pot to pee in." They couldn't take care of themselves, but here they were with a dog.

I never buy a motel room for someone in the middle of the day— no matter how down and out they are. If it late in the evening, ok, maybe. But not in the middle of the day. I'm not at home laying in bed watching TV. Go look for work. But it was about 40 degrees that day, and raining, I didn't know what to do with them,

So I said: Ok, the church will buy you a room, just for tonight. But we're not going to pay for that dog. You'll have to make other arrangements. They said: Ok, we will. We have a relative who will take the dog. I put them in my car and drove over to the Economy Inn over on 31, the old Anderson Motel. On the way I stopped by our house to get them some food and I said: While I'm inside, call your relative and tell him to meet us at the motel.

We got to the motel and I got them a room and said: Did you call about the dog? Well, they said, our cell phone died. So I gave them my phone and they called but said: He wouldn't talk to us. I said: What do you mean he won't talk to you? What's his name? I hit redial but when I mentioned the couple's names, he hung up on me. And I realized he had been to this rodeo before with these two. I said: Look, we had an agreement. I will put you up, but not your dog.

How much extra is it, they asked? It's \$20. So they started digging through their junk and found a couple wadded up dollar bills and some change. And finally, not in compassion, but in exasperation, I went back in the office and gave the Indian man \$20 and came out and said: Your dog can stay with you. They both burst into tears. She threw her arms around my waist and put her head on my chest and started sobbing, thank you, thank you. He grabbed my neck and was just hanging on me, boo-hooing and saying—

Our baby, our baby. He wasn't talking about me, he was talking about his dog. I patted them on the head and said: Come on, don't fall to pieces on me.

I did the obligatory preacher things:

Told them Jesus loved them, invited them to church, prayed for them.

As I was praying they were saying: Yes, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus.

When I drove away conscience started bothering me about the ugliness of my heart.

Yes, I got them food and a room and a prayer—but in a cold, obligatory manner.

I looked down on them for their irresponsibility and foolishness.

I told them Jesus loved them, but I didn't love them.

What was my problem? I judged them. And judging blocks love.

That's one of the lessons in this story of Jesus healing the man born blind.

It's not the only lesson of this chapter, or even the main one, but important.

So let's talk about judging people—three heading.

1. How we do it
2. How it blocks love
3. How to overcome it

## **MP#1 How we do it, how we judge people**

If there is one Bible verse unbelievers know and love it's

“Judge not, that you be not judged.” Matthew 7:1

The way that verse is popularly interpreted is—Don't make any moral judgments.

Don't condemn another person's beliefs, motives, or behavior.

Especially my behavior. Don't you dare judge me.

Of course, it's always applied selectively.

Think of the way smokers are routinely condemned in our culture.

You never hear “judge not, that you be not judged” about smoking.

But don't you dare condemn immoral sexual behavior, for example.

Not judging people can't mean suspending moral judgment,

or not condemning behavior or not warning people what they are doing is wrong.

Jesus himself does that in this very passage, doesn't he?

Here's a passage about how judgment can block love,

but Jesus says to the Pharisees: For judgment I have come into the world.

And then he judges their hearts and motives—he calls them blind and guilty.

This isn't the only place.

Jesus told one man he healed, the paralyzed man at Bethesda—

“Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

He told the woman caught in adultery.

“Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.”

Which is a fascinating statement—because it means you can point out a person's sin and urge him or her to sin no more—and yet not condemn the person.

He even once told his disciples:

Judge not according to appearances, but judge righteous judgment.

Which means, judge according to God's revealed Word.

As we move into this sermon series we're going to look at some of these

interactions Jesus had with people and will see that love is honest, speaks truth.

But that's not our lesson for today.

Today it's a caution that judging people can block our love for them.

So what exactly is it?

It's when you take a God-like stance above another person and

relate to the person from your lofty, superior position.

You take a god-like stance.

God is all-knowing.

And you think you know everything about this person with just a glance.  
Druggy deadbeats, incapable of gratitude.

Who sinned, this man or his parents? the disciples asked Jesus.

They thought they knew everything about the blind man with just a glance.

He was blind because of family sin, his or his parents, just not sure exactly which.  
But they had this guy pegged.

God is all-wise.

And you think you know exactly what this person needs to do to fix himself,  
or to fix his marriage, or to fix his children.

If he would just listen to you then he could clean up his life—

and the fact that he doesn't, well, that just confirms your assessment of him.

God is all-good.

Of course you admit you are a sinner, and there but the grace of God go I,  
but look, I don't lay in bed and watch TV in the middle of the day,  
I don't ask other people to provide for my ugly little dog.

I don't even have a dog!

There's a strong whiff of self-righteousness here.

God is all-powerful.

It's going to take will-power and determination, but I've done it, you can too.  
So you take this stance and then relate to the person from on high.

Now here's the thing, your assessment of this person might be spot on.

Can you sometimes draw a bold line between a person's sinful, foolish  
beliefs or attitude or behavior and the mess they are in?

Of course you can. Sometimes it's obvious. Sometimes it's not.

And Jesus makes that point to the disciples rather strongly when he says—

Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened for God's work in life.  
We'll talk about that in a moment.

But what I want you to see is that the judging that blocks love is not

making moral judgments or trying to assess the cause of someone's problems.  
It's taking a god-like stance and then relating to them from that lofty place.

That brings us to the second point.

## **MP#2 How judging blocks love**

Let's look at this by contrasting Jesus with the disciples and with the Pharisees.

If you were here last Sunday, when we studied Luke 7 and Jesus' response to the widow who had lost her son, there are remarkable similarities. We can't talk about all of them but a few that stand out.

### **Judging blocks you from really seeing the other person.**

What is the very first thing Jesus does? It's in verse 1.

“As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.”

It's like Luke 7 which says:

“When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her.”

I told you last week, as we study how Jesus loved, this is going to be a repetitive theme. It appears over and over in the Gospels. Jesus looked at people. He concentrated on them. He saw them.

They were the object of his interest. He valued them.

It's not that the disciples literally didn't see this man.

I'm sure they noticed him as part of the scenery.

But they looked at him more as a problem than as a person.

Like the way I groaned inwardly when I was walking out on the way to lunch, and the homeless couple was walking in. I just saw a problem.

### **Judging also blocks you from feeling compassion.**

There is no specific comment in this story about Jesus feeling compassion for the blind man like there was in Luke 7 for widow who had lost her son.

That's instructive, because it shows us that even with Jesus,

compassion as a feeling varied in intensity. He was a man, just like us.

Our emotions vary from situation to situation.

But we know he felt compassion because he moves toward this man.

Which is exactly what the disciples did not do. They didn't ask Jesus to heal him.

There was no identification with him in his condition.

### **Judging also blocks you from giving the person hope.**

Remember Jesus with widow of Nain. He told her not to cry.

In doing that, he gave her hope—not a vague hope, but specific hope in him.

He does the same thing here. He is fully aware the blind man is listening—

Neither this man nor his parents sinned,

but this happened that the works of God may be displayed in his life.

I'm sure the man had never heard anybody say anything like that—

that his blindness might be an occasion for God to work in his life.

The disciples were busy analyzing the man.

Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?  
That was their cultural grid. If a person was blind, someone sinned.  
He's not a man, he's a diagnosis. Sinner or son of a sinner.

Paul Miller points out that every culture does this.

American culture uses psychological categories to analyze people.

He has an addictive personality. She's co-dependent.

Is using psychological categories wrong? Not necessarily. Might be helpful.

But any time you categorize a person, you introduce a note of fatalism.

Jesus gives hope.

God is at work in your life. God can be glorified even in your blindness.

But judging blocks you from giving that hope.

### **Judging also blocks you from remembering the person's spiritual need**

Do you remember last week how after Jesus raised the widow's son,

he deliberately gave the young man back to his mother.

Jesus remembered her. He didn't just help then move on to the next thing.

Why did he do that?

He does something similar in this story that gives us deeper insight.

He later finds the man he has healed, tracks down, and calls him to faith.

That shows Jesus understood the man's physical blindness, his physical needs,  
even his emotional and social needs, those just pointers to his deeper need.

So Jesus comes back to him later and says, now it's time for you to believe in me.

Now it's time for your spiritual eyes to be opened. That's what's important.

Judging blocks that.

If I wasn't a minister and hadn't felt a ministerial obligation, I probably wouldn't

have read the Bible and prayed with that homeless couple. I would have split.

Here are the Pharisees, the religious leaders.

An amazing thing happened in this man's life, but didn't use to point to Christ.

In fact they did the opposite.

Give glory to God, we know this man (Jesus) is a sinner.

They talked about God's glory, they used religious language,

but instead of giving the man hope, tried to cut him off from only source of hope.

They wanted him to join them in judging Jesus.

When he didn't they said: You were steeped in sin at birth. God-like stance.

Judging blocks love in lots of ways. Brings us to third point:

### **MP#3 How to overcome it**

Jesus. Jesus is how we overcome our judgmental hearts.

But to be more specific.

## **1. We overcome our judgmental hearts by Jesus' perfect example**

Someone commented in our Covenant Group last week when we were talking about Luke 7 that Jesus responded perfectly in that situation.

Everything about the way he dealt with the grieving woman was perfect.

He had just the right touch, just the right balance and compassion.

And that might make us think that we ought to try to imitate Jesus.

But he also raised her son from the dead.

And that reminds us that we can't imitate Jesus.

Is Jesus an example for us to follow and seek to emulate?

Of course he is. That's the premise of this sermon series.

But he's also so loving and good we will never come close to imitating him.

He's the incarnate Son of God.

He strides across the stage of human history as the greatest man who ever lived.

Here's the wonderful thing: His perfect example is credited to me by faith.

I get Jesus' perfect record in God's eyes. Judgmental me. Cold-hearted me.

God sees me in the robes of Christ. I get credit for Jesus love for blind man.

I get credit for Jesus' love for the homeless couple.

What an inspiration to try to be a better man.

## **2. We overcome our judgmental hearts by Jesus' enabling power**

My favorite part in this story is when the disciples ask:

Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind.

And Jesus, instead of reprimanded them, just answers their question.

Neither, but this happened that God's work might be displayed in his life.

He's gentle with is judgmental disciples who are trying to follow him.

And he shows his gentleness by giving them something deep to think about.

He basically says: It's not as simplistic as you think.  $A+B=C$

Man sins or parents sin, man born blind.

The workings of God's grace in a fallen world are far more complex and wonderful.

God has a sovereign plan for his glory and the good of his people.

And rather than a simple equation, often hidden in a cloud of mystery and glory.

And if you follow me, and believe in my grace, and learn to love people—  
then you will sometimes get to see God work.

There is enabling power in the words of Christ, if you believe them.

After the resurrection and ascension of Christ, Acts 3 tells us Peter and John were going into the Temple to pray and there was a man crippled from birth.

What happened? Do you remember?

Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

These were the same disciples who judged the blind man, didn't see him, would have passed him by. But now, by the enabling power of Christ they see this man, just like Jesus, and they gave him hope in same Jesus. The power comes from believing the Lord.

### **3. We overcome our judgmental hearts by Jesus' sober warning**

It's his warning to the Pharisees:

For judgment I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.

We don't have time to delve into this—but it's a warning that if they don't repent of their god-like stance and humbly embrace Christ, they will be judged.

Judge not, that you be not judged.

A heart that persistently refuses to recognize God's mercy and grace and sets itself above other people, will, in the end, be judged and found guilty.

We don't want that to be true of us.

I realize there are still lots of unanswered questions.

What about this situation or that one. What about this person in my life.

Am I loving or judging.

But we can trust him to guide us.

Let's make it our goal, more and more, to learn to love like Jesus.