

# Jesus' Call to Silence

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There's a wonderful providence that attaches to the systematic preaching of God's word and we accept that today. This is not the text that I would have thought and chosen so much for today, but as we are just continuing along in life and in the ministry of God's word, we come to Matthew 7:6 and we trust that this is precisely the text that would most meet the opportunity of this day as we gather together and most meet that which would be needful for us. The Lord knows his people and he knows what we need and this text in Matthew 7 is what we have before us today.

Now I want to preface by way of introduction with a story that I have told occasionally from my youth. As a young boy, my mother took me to a small country church in Comiskey, Indiana. My grandmother lived just two doors down from this and we walked the road from the church to her home. It brings back memories even as I stand here. The building, the structure was a small wooden frame building that did not even have running water at the time of which I speak. Its small worship center had a few rows of brown wooden seats with curved backs that would never be used in today's Seeker Sensitive environments with their theater seats and padded things.

One Sunday there was a man there who attended when he did not normally attend. He was not a regular attender of the church and he apparently had a point that he wanted to make of some kind. He slouched in his seat and threw his left leg over the seat in front of him and proceeded to light and smoke his pipe in the midst of the service. He was showing contempt for everything that was around him in that time. I remember it quite well. I think I was sitting one row behind him.

The pastor at that time was greatly overmatched by the man and by the moment. He meant well and I'm not critical of him with what I'm about to say, but as he was opening the service, he said, "It's good to have So-and-so here today," greeting the man who was smoking his pipe in the middle of the service and welcoming him in the time. The man in the pew that day was obviously wrong in his whole conduct, the whole spirit in which he came. It would have been far better for him to have remained outside the building than inside it with that attitude and conduct that he brought that day. But he's not the focus. That man is not the focus of my comments here. My focus is on the pastor because the pastor was wrong also in a way that might surprise you and even shock some of you that

are new to the Bible. The pastor never should have catered to a man who was showing such contempt for the things of God and the people of God.

You see, Scripture says that the things of God, the things of the Gospel, the things of Christ, are exceedingly precious and they should be treated with the value that they implicitly contain. In Jeremiah 15:16 the prophet said, "Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts." In Job 23:12, Job said, "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." The Bible says that we as Christians have been redeemed with precious blood, of a Lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. Great value. Exceeding worth to these things that we gather together to celebrate, to honor, and to submit our minds to the instruction of God's word.

These are things of great surpassing value and here's the question, beloved, for today: how do you handle things of great value? What do you do with things of exceedingly high worth? What you do is you preserve their value and you guard the perception of their worth. That is the point that Jesus is making when we come to our verse for this morning in Matthew 7:6. Look at it with me. Matthew 7:6. Jesus said,

6 "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 that is a very stark verse to stand out in light of who we know our Christ to be, and it comes in a context that we have covered in our past three messages, Matthew 7:1-5. I want to reread those verses so that they can kind of give us a launching pad to consider verse 6 in a proper way because Jesus in a broad way is speaking about the same general theme but the context will help us but it's not immediately apparent the first time you read it. You kind of have to think through the passage. Matthew 7:1, Jesus said,

1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 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? 4 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? 5 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."

Now these five verses is what we've been teaching from, for those of you that are visiting or new with us, these five verses are what we have covered in the prior three weeks in our Sunday morning worship. In those five verses, Jesus warned us that there was a coming future accountability for his disciples where they would stand before God and give an account for their lives. This is awaiting each one of us here who are believers in Christ. There is a day coming where God will judge us, where he will reward us according to our

faithfulness, and we will give an account to him of our lives. We are in no danger of being sent to hell at that time, as we've made clear, because Christ has covered our sins. Our sins have been paid for. They have been erased. They have been fully redeemed and covered but that does not mean that we will not have some kind of accountability before God. In the lives that we lived as Christians, what did you do, what are you doing with your life as a believer in Christ? What are you doing to serve the kingdom? How are you serving in faithfulness to God? Those are things that we are going to give an account for one day and if you have questions about that, you can consult any of those three prior messages. There are probably CDs in the lobby that we would love for you to take for free.

That passage, those first five verses are calling us to do this: it is warning us and helping us to understand in light of that future accountability that we all will have before God, it is imperative and essential for us to examine our own lives before we think to critique the lives of others. The reality of the fear of God should so weigh upon us that our primary focus, our first priority, is to deal with our own sins rather than rushing out to point out the sins of others and that's the point of those five verses. Jesus is giving us guidance about the way that we think and the way that we interact with other men as we go through this life on earth. That's his point in the first five verses.

Now, beloved, we are going to pivot into today's verse, verse 6, and here's what I want you to see by way of introduction. You need to understand that Jesus still has that same great theme of directing the way that his disciples deal with others around them as we go into verse 6. That's his overarching theme but now in verse 6, he is going to address a different matter within that greater context. So let's look at verse 6 again when he says, "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, you just read that for the first time, you just read that in the course of your yearly Bible reading plan and read through it, it's not going to be immediately obvious to you what the connection is between those two and you might just say, "I don't know how that fits. How does that build, how does that follow from what he had just previously said?" Now it will surprise you to find that there are published Bible commentators, you can pay \$40-50 for their commentaries, and you will find them saying something like this: some teachers will tell you that verse 6 does not fit with the context at all. One commentator said this in a prominent scholarly commentary series, he said and I quote, "Matthew 7:6 is apparently unrelated to the preceding or following context. It is inserted here for no special reason but only as another saying of Jesus." That is a direct quote from a published Bible commentator who has a lot of lettered degrees after his name.

Now, what can we say to that in deference to the esteemed Doctor who will remain nameless? What do we say to the idea that God's word and God as the Spirit was inspiring his word, just dropped in a saying of Jesus that's unrelated to anything before or anything after? What do we say to that approach to biblical interpretation? Well, with all due respect, that is total foolishness. That is silliness. That is irresponsible for a man to speak of God's word that way. Are we to think as we read through God's word, as we read through the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus just threw words into the air when he

was the most gifted teacher ever on the face of the earth? Are we to think that the Holy Spirit, that blessed third person of the Godhead who inspired the word of God and made sure that the human authors wrote down exactly what God intended, are we to think that the Holy Spirit was just randomly putting words together in a way that had no meaningful connection one to the other? This is insanity. This is the mark of a failed handling of God's word. That cannot possibly be the explanation that this is just a random insertion of words that had nothing to do with the prior or following context. That's nonsense. But it leaves us with the question: why did Jesus say this? And why did he say it here? Why did he say this immediately after warning us about our future accountability and calculating grace into the way that we deal with others?

Well, let me just give you an overview statement and then we'll unpack it in the moments to come. Here's the context. Here's what Jesus is saying. This is the overall thing, how verses 1 through 5 connect with verse 6. He says, "While you are being on your guard against being too judgmental in your dealings," he says, here's the pivot point, "do not give precious truth to people who will abuse it. While you are guarding against being judgmental, don't give precious truth to people who will abuse it." Stated differently, "While you are walking through life in a humble way before men, do not be so foolish and naïve as to treat everybody equally and to give truth to people who are simply going to treat it as though it were common refuse on the street. Don't do that. Remember that the truth that has been given to you as a believer, remember that the salvation that Christ has bestowed upon you, is something of great precious exceeding value, and as a result of that, you make sure that it is handled with care."

You know, think about it in light of the season in which we are living: we can treat all kinds of things with extraordinary care as we mail gifts across the country or we deal with human material temporal things that are destined to perish with the using; we'll treat them with great care and respect and make sure they don't get broken or the packaging doesn't get torn or whatever the case may be. Well, if we're going to treat things of earthly passing significance with that kind of care, shouldn't there be an attitude in our mind, a treating with even greater care the eternal Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? That as we speak about the things of salvation, as we think about the worth of our Lord Jesus, shouldn't we have in our minds this should be handled with care and not treated as though it were something common? That's the point that Jesus is making for us here today.

So in verse 6, let's read it together one more time just to set it clearly in our minds. Jesus says, "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, Jesus here is using a metaphor. He is comparing men, which is his real point, to a metaphor, an illustration of animals because sometimes men act like animals and Jesus is reminding us of this fact, and that when you are dealing with men who behave like animals, you need to have in your mind how it is that you deal with truth before them.

Now, when we talk about dogs in a biblical context, you should not think about dogs in the Bible in the way that you think about, for some of you, your domesticated household pets; you know, and you've got the dogs that you like and give you comfort and give you

companionship and all of that and you like having them around. That's not what Jesus is talking about here. Dogs in biblical times were ugly scavengers. They were half-wild animals that were known for their association with filth. They were dirty animals, not what you think about and say, "Oh, I have a dog." It was something different back then. These were repulsive, half-wild, scavenger beasts of which Jesus spoke. And one better commentator said dogs are generally associated in Scripture with ideas of reproach, contempt, or loathing. Pigs or swine were no better. They were unclean animals to Jews. They were also wild beasts capable of savage action and Jesus joins together two different pictures to make a point about how it is that we are to deal with men in the world around us. These two animals together give a picture of what is vicious, what is unclean, and what is abominable, and these animals, my friends, these animals did not have the capacity to recognize valuable things. They treated valuable things with the same savagery that they did things of filth so that if you threw valuable pearls into the midst of the pig feed, they would think it was common food and treat it just like they did anything else, snorting it up. But when they saw it wasn't, they would trample the pearls and attack the one who gave it to them for playing such a despicable trick on them, to give them what looked like food but then turned out not to be.

So these were animals with no discernment; these were animals of despicable conduct; savage, not worthy of giving before them things that were of value, and here is Jesus' point in what he's saying here: there are men in the world who treat the Gospel like that. When it comes to the Gospel, there are men who treat the Gospel like that. They do not recognize the value of what is being presented to them. They turn and attack the one who gives it to them or they mock the content, they mock the Scriptures, they throw filth on that which is of great value.

Look at verse 6 with me again. Jesus says, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine." Do you see the contrast? That which is holy before a scavenger, that which is of great value, a pearl, given to pigs, those two things don't belong together. And what Jesus is saying here, remembering that pearls were precious and of great value, and in this context as Jesus is soon going to speed into telling people that there is a narrow way to heaven, enter through the narrow gate, wide is the gate that leads to destruction, as Jesus is about to move into those things later in Matthew 7, he is talking about the truths of the Gospel and the kingdom of God. Let me remind you just lest we forget here that there is a broader context to the overall thing. Matthew 5:3 Jesus is speaking about the kingdom of heaven, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In chapter 7, verse 21, he says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven, bookending, if I can use that as a verb, bookending the whole Sermon on the Mount with this concept of the kingdom of heaven. So he's talking about the great worth and the surpassing value of the kingdom of heaven and how his disciples respond to it in the midst of this overall sermon. Listen, beloved, and I'm about to get animated. The things of God and the things of Scripture and the things of the kingdom of heaven are precious, holy, and they are of great value and they should be treated that way. They should be treated with respect. They should be treated with honor. They should be treated with deference and a sense of holy fear.

I can't remember exactly where I saw it this week, there are nativity sets that are out there that bring Joseph and Mary into the modern world. I saw a picture of one online and I'm really angry about it. I'm really upset about it because it shows Joseph being a hipster guy with a cell phone taking a selfie of himself with Mary and the baby in the background, Mary dressed in inappropriate clothing, and this is supposed to be a cool way to contextualize the Gospel and bring it up-to-date and it's supposed to be kind of funny, hip and cool at the same time. If I could find that nativity scene someplace, I would be delighted to grab the table on which it was sitting and turn it upside down because that is not how you treat the holy things of God.

Jesus described the truths of the Gospel and the kingdom of God as a pearl of great price. In Matthew 13:45-46 he said, "the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it." That was so valuable that you give up everything in order to possess it. In an utter denial of self, you take the value of that and you sell all that you have in order to get that one thing. It's kind of a picture of what we do when we come to Christ, we abandon all. We leave everything behind. We sacrifice every single priority and preference and desire for recognition, leave it all behind, so that we can receive Christ in simple, humble, unadorned faith.

Now, beloved, think with me, and I'm speaking knowing that you're a sympathetic audience with what I have to say. I'm not rebuking you in what we have to say. We're talking about people that are outside the walls that view the Gospel and treat it differently. You and I need to stop and think for a moment about the great value of our message. This is that which no earthly price can be set upon, the value of the Gospel. What do we proclaim when we proclaim Christ to sinners? We proclaim to them that there is a promise of eternal life and a promise of full forgiveness of all of their sins through faith in Jesus Christ. We tell them that a holy God will forgive all of their sins if they will come to Christ. We tell them about this blessed Son of God, the second person of the Godhead, who in great humility left the glories of heaven in order to walk on this earth; that he lived a perfect life, a sinless life, and did so so that he might offer that life as a ransom for guilty sinners who would one day believe in him; and the matchless holiness of Christ and the matchless glory of his condescension and his humiliation in coming to earth, the matchless way in which he performed miracles and spoke words of life to those who heard; and in great humility and self-denial, offered that life as a ransom for many; that this great Christ did not come to be served by his creation but came to serve and give his life a ransom for many.

Beloved, there is no value that you can attach to that. We sing in the hymn if the whole realm of nature were mine, that would be a present far too small to give in response to such great love, such great magnanimity, such benevolence at the hands of the one who made us. There is just such a surpassing value to this that the hymn writer rightly says, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my all." That's how valuable it is. It's so valuable that those of us who are truly in Christ have in a very real sense given up our life for it. We have sacrificed our life, our ambitions, our desires, and said, "That is more

valuable than everything else. Lord Jesus, I receive you. I give my life to you. I submit to you. You are now Lord and Master over all." That's what true conversion looks like, not these watered down things of whispering a prayer in a moment of emotional influence under a hymn that's been played 15 times and then going on and living as if nothing had happened. That's not true salvation. That's not Christianity. That's some false imitation.

We're talking about the real thing here today and the real thing is greatly valuable. It is infinitely valuable. The real Gospel, the real Christ, is that which stands between you and eternal destruction in hell as the judgment for your sins, and that which would bring eternal blessing and peace and forgiveness and reconciliation to a holy God to your life. What price would you put on the difference between those two eternal destinations? Well, it's infinite and it should be treated with value.

You see, we testify as Christians, we testify to everyone who will listen the words of Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Here we were in our guilt, our rebellion, our indifference, manifesting our guilt in different ways. Some people manifest their guilt in sinfulness just through utter indifference, through a mocking kind of dismissal without engaging the facts. Others are openly hostile. Others devote their lives like Bill Nye has to just mocking everything that is precious. Others living in the brokenness of sin and drunkenness and other matters of debauchery. All united by a common theme that they are in sin, that sin has taken them captive, that Satan has taken them captive, and they are in darkness and they are hurtling toward eternal judgment. And here we are as Christians who were once like them now saved by grace, we come and we say, "We have the message that can deliver you from all of that, that can break the power of Satan in your life, that can break the power of sin in your life, that can reconcile you to a majestic God."

And here's the thing, beloved, in light of that great surpassing value, here's what you must see: is that those sacred truths are of infinite value. And because – listen to me – because we love the Christ who has done this for us, we realize the great value of the Savior who came and gave his life for us, he loved me and gave himself up for me, and we are so enraptured with the honor that is due to his name, we are so full of gratitude toward the wonder of what he has done to save us when we could not save ourselves, we attach the highest value possible to that. When we realize that, we realize there should be something that starts to click in your mind that says those things should never be treated with contempt. Those things should never be treated as common. Those things should never be mocked. Those things should never be assaulted. And yet we know all too well, don't we, that there are plenty of men in the world, some in our circle of life, who revel in doing just that, who love to blaspheme the name of Christ, who love to mock the Scriptures.

From time to time we are going to encounter people like that and we need to know how to respond to them. Jesus tells us here in verse 6 exactly how we respond to them. When you encounter somebody, and every word I'm saying here I'm speaking with great precision here this morning and I'll try to clarify this at the end so that you don't go astray, but when you encounter someone who repeatedly blasphemes Christ, who again

and again and again mocks the Scripture, you need to know what to do with them and what Jesus is saying here in verse 6 is when that happens, you should go silent. He is calling you to silence, to stay quiet or to walk away. To apply this, don't argue with the angry. Don't pander to the arrogant. Don't fuel the mockers when every word that you say just becomes more reason and more grounds for them to heap more scorn and contempt on the precious message of which you speak.

Now, I realize for some people this is really hard to understand and even hard to receive and accept because you've been conditioned over time to think that we just need to be kind and loving to absolutely everybody without any exception whatsoever and that you should never draw lines of distinction around the Gospel. So that's the kind of mindset that the pastor in my small town church had. You know, we're just going to be kind to everybody. Well, Jesus calls us to a higher level of discrimination and discernment than that and there are some people where the words of Christ should go silent until they change their approach, until they change their mind. We're going to see illustrations of this from Scripture. When there is such hostility and such contempt to the Gospel, there comes a time where you go silent. You walk away. You leave them to the judgment and the providence of God rather than subjecting that which is precious to being treated by scavengers with contempt.

Look at Matthew 10:14. I realize I've stated that very strongly and it would help you to see that Scripture illustrates this for us. In Matthew 10:13, Jesus said, we'll go to verse 12, "As you enter the house, give it your greeting. If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace. Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet." Disassociate yourself from the contempt that has been shown to the message of the Gospel of Christ. He says in 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."

The apostles in the book of Acts help us understand what Jesus was describing. Turn to the book of Acts 13. As you're turning there, what we see, this is so hard for people to understand because somewhere along the line we got a really distorted view of what it meant to be a Christian but it should always be clear in your mind that loyalty to Christ is a greater price and is a greater priority than loyalty to men. The approval of Christ is far more important than the approval of men. That has to be clear in your mind, beloved. It has to be clear in your mind where your loyalties lie.

In Acts 13:44 as we read about the ministry of the Apostle Paul, it says, "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 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.'" They left them behind. In the face of the blasphemy and the mocking and the contradiction repeatedly to the message preached, Paul said, "We're going to leave you behind. We'll go to the Gentiles. They'll listen."

Verse 47, "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'" Verse 48, "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." In response, there came a point in the midst of the hostility and the rejection where they said, "We're walking away." They were obeying what Jesus said earlier in Matthew 7:6. "You are acting like dogs. You are acting like pigs. As I put these things of great value before you, you have judged yourself unworthy of them therefore I will withdraw. I will go someplace else. I will speak to those who will listen."

This isn't the only time it happened in the book of Acts. Look at Acts 18:5, "But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'" Once again you see, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, he left them behind. Their hostile response produced a reaction which said, "I will not continue on giving you that simply so that you can blaspheme against it." There comes a point, my friends, where that which we hold so dear, so precious, of such high value, that matters to us, that is more precious to us than life itself, we love that message and we love our Christ so much that we play our small part in protecting them from unmitigated vulgar attacks. That's what Jesus is speaking of. Here in these two passages in Acts, the Jews turned upon the ones who had brought them holy truth. What do you do when that happens? You show discretion and you turn away. You regard the Gospel and the name of Christ as more important than the men who trample it under their feet.

Now having said that, we need to be precise here because we are on a narrow balance beam that we need to walk carefully on lest I be misunderstood, lest we go astray in either direction. Listen to me carefully. Listen to me very carefully: simply because a man is an unbeliever does not mean that he is a dog or a hog as Jesus is describing it here in Matthew 7. The mere fact that someone is an unbeliever doesn't mean that you never share the Gospel with them. That would be foolish, wouldn't it? That's the whole reason that we are left here is to take the message out to go and make disciples. How can you make disciples unless you talk to unbelievers? It's not simply a category of unbelief of which Jesus speaks, but part of our duty is to protect the truth from those who would treat it badly. Charles Spurgeon said this, he said, "Do not consider men to be dogs or swine," in other words, don't make that your default assumption about someone, "but when they show themselves to be such, do not put occasions in their way for displaying their evil character. Saints are not to be simpletons. They are not to be judges but they are also known to be fools."

So here's the thing: when someone has established the fact that whenever the Gospel is put in front of them they are going to mock it, to denigrate it, to criticize it, and to treat it with vulgarity and that's obvious, it wasn't just a one-time bad thing but somehow it's been established over time, that's the kind of person where you stop talking to them. You do not give them conversations for them to continually display their evil character. How do you know when a person has crossed that line? Well, let me give you some practical ways to respond to this truth. There are three things here this morning by way of application, and for some of you this will be very liberating and I don't mind telling you this first point that I'm about to give you, this may help you understand a lot of things over time because this is the way I do ministry.

Point 1: concentrate your efforts on those who are receptive to you. Concentrate your efforts on those who are receptive to you. Now this principle is subject to exceptions but when it comes to ministry, when it comes to your life, beloved, beware of the people that prove to be a distraction to your life because they are so hard to the Gospel. Every point is a matter of contention. Everything becomes a joke, treated lightly, or treated with contempt. There is no genuine receptivity and it's been proven over time, they prefer to be a hard concrete block wall to your words rather than someone who is willing to engage them as an intelligent man receptive to the truth. Beloved, if you have someone in your life that will hear you and you have someone different who won't and who argues and disputes again and again and again, pour your life into the person who listens, that's where the fruitful ground is, rather than giving it to dogs to tear and to destroy. Spend your time with those who are tenderhearted and believe that those other ones that God has brought into your life by his providence that you might be an instrument of grace to help them grow or to lead them to Christ. That's a proper application of this text.

Now secondly, kind of coming at it from the other side of the balance beam. Beloved, be very slow to judge someone as a dog in the context of which we have been speaking here. Don't rush to that conclusion. Go back to Matthew 5. I just want you to see something physically on the page. In Matthew 7, Jesus devotes five verses, as we have it now, to warning us against harsh and critical judgments against others, and you can kind of put your fingers and bracket it around the text or on your screen of your device and see the comparative emphasis that he has made on that point, and notice by comparison that in verse 6 there is a much smaller treatment, there is a shorter treatment given to this issue. D. A. Carson says this about that and makes a very pertinent observation: that ratio, five to one, five verses, one verse, that ratio reflects an accurate assessment of where the greater danger lies. Beloved, your greater danger is going to be in harshly judging someone critically and that's why Jesus gives more attention to that than he does to this issue of those treating the Gospel with contempt. You need to be aware of both but you need to realize that the greater danger in your heart is going to be to be too quick to harshly judge and you guard yourself against that while not forgetting this shorter admonition to protect the purity of the Gospel in the way that you deal with things.

So just taking this another step and applying this point a little bit further, beloved, think with me and I say this sympathetically, I realize that as we embark on the Christmas season, that a lot of you will be spending time with family that's difficult to deal with,

that is resistant to the Gospel, but let me remind you of something: at a human level, a family member or a coworker, they may reject the Gospel but you can still engage them on a human level; you can still show kindness to them just on a purely human level even if you're not speaking the Gospel to them because they get angry and derisive in response to it. That doesn't mean that you just declare them anathema. You don't have to do that. You can still show them kindness even if you remove the Gospel from the discussion because of the nature of their response.

Also remember this, beloved, and some of you could speak about this autobiographically as I can. For some of you, wasn't there a time in your prior life where you too were a mocker and a blasphemer of Christ? Wasn't there a time in your past where you mocked those who brought the Gospel to you and they showed kindness to you? They told you, "Oh, I'm praying for you," and you dismissed them with a wave of the hand? And yet here you are after time, God did a work in your heart, God did save you, and now you realize you are grateful for those people that you once mocked and despised. Well, beloved, never forget that it's possible for God to change that hardened person over time as well.

So don't write people off. Just be discerning in the context of which you make the Gospel available. There is always room even when you say, "They are so hard and blasphemous, I cannot share with them. I cannot share Christ with them on a human level because I know what they're going to do and horizontally I'm going to keep my mouth shut. But I'll tell you what I will do, I'll lift my lips up vertically, 'God, have mercy on this blasphemer. Have mercy on this one who is so hard. Do a work in their hearts, Father. Somehow maybe it's something in me and the way that I do it, Lord, that promotes such a negative reaction. Bring someone else to them. Work in their heart. Don't abandon them, Lord, even while I realize, Lord, I can't continue to speak and let them curse the name of my Beloved to my face. I can't do that, Lord. Lord, do a work.'" So the point being you don't simply write people off. You can still pray to God about their souls and you should. It's all a matter of how you handle the Gospel before men.

So the fact that you have a family member or a loved one or a friend or a coworker who has rejected the Gospel, it doesn't mean that you give up. Beloved, don't think that way. Has the arm of the Lord suddenly become shortened so that it's not long enough to save? Has the power of God been diminished through overuse so that he no longer has the heart to turn a heart toward Christ? No. No. We don't make final judgments about their eternal destiny, we just limit it and say, "I cannot expose the Gospel to this kind of ridicule but my heart, Lord, is still for their salvation. Do a work even if it's apart from me."

So you continue to pray and where you can, you engage them on a human level. I realize I have people in my life like this where they don't want anything to do with me and I realize for some of you it will be that way, but we don't glory in saying, "Oh, that's a dog. Ha, ha." We recognize it with a grieved heart, with sorrow that they are so hard and resistant to that which alone can save their souls. Do you see the balance of which the Scriptures would produce a heart that is balanced in this perspective? "I'm going to

protect the Gospel. I'm not going to let people mock it but I'm also not going to turn into an enemy of their souls. Lord, if they won't listen to me, make them listen to your Spirit."

Which kind of brings us to the third point overlapping here as we talk about this. The first point of application from this text was concentrate your efforts on those who are receptive to you. Those of you that have designs for ministry, this is the way to go. It is very easy to give 90% of your time to people who are never going to respond, to people who are just going to be contentious and divisive, and you come to the end of your ministry and find that all you did was fight battles that were obviously never going to be won. Don't give your life over to that. Look at this room around you. There are hundreds of people that desire the word of God, that want to hear it, that want to respond, that want to treat these things as holy. Let that be the focus of where you put your attention. Secondly, be slow to judge someone. Thirdly, the positive side of that is to give people room to change. Give people room to change. Maybe they are hostile now and you can't talk to them right now because of their attitude, but maybe something comes along in their lives and they have a new softness; maybe a sorrow or a trial hits them hard and breaks them and now they need someone whereas before they were dogs gnarling their teeth at the Gospel, now they are saying, "What must I do to be saved?" You go and you speak in renewed circumstances and you share Christ with them. Remember that some people change over time. The person who scorns the Gospel today may be the person who is open tomorrow if the Spirit works. So keep your balance there. As I said earlier, the thief on the cross insulted Christ at the beginning of the day but by the end of the day he was asking Jesus to remember him in paradise.

Now, these are things that are difficult to implement. It's hard to know exactly, you know, sometimes it's hard to have discernment where which is which. Charles Spurgeon, again said, and he closed his comments with a word of prayer, "Great King, how much wisdom your precepts require. I need thee not only to open my mouth but also at times to keep it shut." May God give us grace to proclaim the Gospel to everyone who will listen and to keep it from scorn from those men who only want to blaspheme the fair name by which we have been called.

Let's bow together in prayer.

*Father, we thank you for the precious value of the Gospel by which we have been saved. We thank you for the wonderful grace of our loving Lord, grace that is greater than our sins. We ask you to make us ever more willing and ever more effective in proclaiming that sweet Gospel to anyone who will listen. From time to time, Lord, there will be those who are just so arrogant and hard in their response where we need to step back. Some of us perhaps have people like that in our lives right now. Give us a humble spirit that thinks not too highly of ourselves in such things, and give us a proper sense of discernment to know when that time has arrived with each one. And for those that are hard and blasphemous, Father, we think of the atheistic man I mentioned earlier, we pray for a man like Bill Nye and pray for his repentance. Father, we pray that by the power of your Spirit you would work in his heart and millions more like him, Lord, that a great work of your Spirit would go on those who presently are so hard and that by your*

*irresistible grace, you would open their eyes, open their blind eyes, unloose their mute tongues, open their deaf ears, remove that heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh, Father, that they might believe in Christ and be saved.*

*So Father, in all things we ask that you would guard the glory of Christ. Guard it among men. Let your name be hallowed. Let your kingdom come. Guard it in our own hearts, Father, that we would ever love with the greatest surpassing love of our deepest affections, the name of our lovely Lord Jesus Christ. Lead all men to him, Father, that are under the sound of this voice that we might rejoice together in heaven one day around the throne, redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb. It's in his name that we pray. Amen.*

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