

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Do Your Work First

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Well, over the last couple of months, I have received so much encouragement from many of you regarding this plant that we're going to launch in Baltimore starting in 2020. I received cards and emails and just enthusiasm that has just so filled my cup even those of you who listened on line through podcasts have sent me messages from around the world. You have no idea how much that has filled my cup and how inspired I am by that. So I just wanted to take a brief a second to make sure that I had acknowledged that this weekend and say thank you so much for that.

If you have a Bible, will you meet me in Matthew chapter number seven? We'll get there in just a moment.

Richmond Park is a very significant place to me. It's the name of the part of the neighborhood that I grew up in Miami, Florida, a place in South Dade called Richmond Heights. And so at Richmond Park is where I learned how to play football. I learned how to play baseball, played a little basketball and there's one other the thing I learned how to do there as well. We had a pool, a public pool then, so my mom put me in swimming lessons and I learned how to swim. And so I learned things that you should do in and around the pool. And I learned things that you shouldn't do in and around the pool. And I don't know if I learned this at the Richmond pool or not, but I was thinking about something that I learned at some point regarding the pool and that is that you're not supposed to urinate in a pool. You laugh and I think you know that that is something you absolutely should not do. But if I took a poll of those of us who have experienced the pool that had a pool experiences about 99.99 9% of us have urinated in the pool. Thank God for chlorine that cleanses the water and breaks down the chemical bonds of germs and viruses and all those sorts of things we don't want to be involved with. But as I was thinking about this, what if one day you were at the pool or you are in the pool and you somehow saw someone outside the pool urinating in the pool? I imagine that the judgment would be very, very harsh. And I would say you would probably be disgusted, rightfully so.

But now we just said that probably the majority of us have done this at some point or another. We probably urinated in the pool. Here's the thing, but the judgment for the same thing done in a less acceptable way, received much greater criticism and judgment, right? Same issue, both wrong. And I think that this is exactly the way that we tend to legislate morality in our hearts and minds. It's also the way that we tend to elevate or dismiss actions that are maybe done a little bit a or in a way that's unacceptable. And regularly we see these kinds of things or these kinds of judgments play themselves out in our culture all the time. Regularly we're reacting, we're condemning, criticizing people's actions and guess what many of those same things we do. Right? So here's the thing with the aforementioned scenario that I just mentioned it, the problem is not that urinating in the pool is a problem. I mean, it is a problem either way you do it, but that's not really the issue here. The problem is how we look down upon or devalue the character of people who do the same things that we do. And here's the thing, we literally go so far at times to trash people, troll them, throw them away for stuff that we do or that we have the potential to

do. Or maybe because of our maturity and we've gone a little bit, we don't do that, but we used to do them. And we don't have enough humility to realize that we have that same potential, which means that we should be motivated to act in ways of restoration, restoring others or reconciliation. Yet our reactions instead sometimes reflect humiliation and we target people to humiliate them, to let them know how disgusted we are with their actions.

Jesus, I believe touches on this in the Sermon on the Mount. And the Sermon on the Mount which some of you may have heard of it's a compilation of sermons, maybe about five sermons or more. It's basically a homiletical discourse; I believe that's a giving hermeneutical direction or clarity. And all that means is hermeneutics is how we interpret scripture. And as it relates to peacemaking, as we continue our series on Peacemaking in this mission series, I wanted to zoom in on Matthew seven and what I believe that Jesus is trying to illuminate for us in verses one through six. So if you have a Bible, you can follow along, if not, we'll pop it up on the screen. We won't leave you hanging. So here are the words of Jesus in this part of the Sermon on the Mount. He says,

¹ *"Do not judge, so that you won't be judged.*

² *For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use.*

³ *Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye but don't notice the beam of wood in your own eye?*

⁴ *Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' and look, there's a beam of wood in your own eye?*

⁵ *Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.*

⁶ *Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them under their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces."*

For the next few moments I want to just tag this passage that we just read or this message that I want to share with you this weekend by the subject "Do your work first". Now I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to your neighbor. So, I'm going to say it again to your neighbor, do your work first.

I think what we need to understand as it relates to the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus is in this compilation of messages he's really addressing the mindset of the people the incorrect mindsets. And Pastor Mark, our lead pastor, he loves to say that Jesus is not doing an orientation here to help them understand how they should live and how they should interpret scripture, their hermeneutics. He's actually giving them a disorientation and Jesus would say things like, you have heard it said, but I say. And he's really giving them the proper way to interpret how they should live. And I want to, I want to park here for just a moment because I think that there's a truth or a couple of truths here that Jesus is trying to illuminate for us here.

And, I wanna just kind of pull back or pull something from last week's message. My sister Latasha Morrison talked to us about bridge-building and I love what she said. She said, the foundation of peacemaking is truth. And the truth that I believe that Jesus is zooming in on for us to understand this weekend is a little truth about you and me, alright. And here's the thing, if we're going to be effective peacemakers, which is to be actively trying to make peace, we got to keep it 100 with us. We have to keep it all the way real. If we're going to be authentic in this work that we're called to do. So they're just two truths that I want to zoom in on a little bit for us this weekend that I believe that Jesus is illuminating for us.

So if you're taking notes, the first truth has to do with value. So right off the bat, Jesus says, do not judge. If we looked up judge in the American or the source in the English language in its verb tense the very first entry would be related to an opinion, right? And so we understand what it means to be judgmental, that has to do with being opinionated or having an opinion. But, Jesus is actually kind of talking about this a little bit differently. The Greek word here that he's using, *krino*, it means to rank or to select related to value. So this is about value and Jesus is talking to us about how we see each other and how we value one another or how we rank ourselves among one another, how we assign value to each other. This is broader and deeper than just having an opinion. It's when your opinion then has weight and allows you to see a person greater or less than. It's an interpretation of worth and significance.

And then he goes on to say whatever measure or standard you judge, the same measure or standard will be used for you. That Greek word measure or standard is a Greek word *krima* and it's where we get the word crime from. And *krima* means damnation or condemnation. So basically Jesus is saying, hey, the damnation and the condemnation that you are giving or the crime that you are seeing or are you are, you are measuring, hey, it's going to come back to you.

You know, I grew up in a black Baptist church and we used to have mass choirs, you know, so we had the big choirs and they have robes on. I love some of those songs. And so it made me think about this one little line in a song from the Mississippi Mass Choir. The quote was actually attributed to Mahalia Jackson, but it finds its roots in Proverbs 26:27. Mississippi Mass Choir will say, if you dig one ditch, you better dig two. And then Proverbs 26:27 says, *whoever digs a pit will fall into it*. So here's the thing, this whole thing about judging and assigning value to others based off of their actions it's maybe not trying to bury them as this quote that I talked about mentioned, or maybe it's not that serious for us. Although we do see a lot of this stuff going on, particularly in the current political climate I absolutely think people are trying to bury one another. But generally speaking, this is about our biases, whether they're conscious or unconscious. Our opinions, our hatred and even our fears that cause us to have an improper scale of value and worth based off of what someone says or said, what someone does and even how we see ourselves.

Now, I love research and I've cited this research before, but there's research actually to prove that we have a struggle with this that we have a little bit of a problem with this. Cornell psychologist David Dunning, he did a study back in the early two thousands and in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, he wrote a paper called 'Holier Than Thou'. And here's what he said, the average American thinks they're better than the average American. Yep. That's what he said. And he said, most people think they are above average and we consistently ranked ourselves higher in

morality skills and intelligence. He basically concluded that how we value ourselves is just a tad bit off. It's this thing called illusory superiority and it's a condition of cognitive bias where we overestimate our qualities and abilities compared to other people.

Here's the thing, it, we're image bearers; we're all God's children then why would my value be greater than yours? Why would my perspective or what I think be greater than yours? Why would my credentials make me greater than you? Or why would lack of credentials make me less than you. This is problematic when it comes to peacemaking because if we see ourselves or our perspective as superior, then that's a problem. And here's the thing, we don't have to look very far to see that supremacy is an issue in our culture.

Now I know the word supremacy is a little bit problematic for some of us and some of us would attribute it to white supremacy. I'm not talking about any of that. I'm just basically talking about what Miriam Webster says about supremacy, higher ranking and authority and the proclivity that we have to declare ourselves, which is what Jesus is talking about, better or superior, morally, politically, socioeconomically, intellectual, even ethnically. This is the mindset that Jesus says you should not have. Do not judge, do not do it. The challenge for us and the challenge with many of the teachings in scripture, particularly in the Gospels is to judge is socially acceptable. There are shows about it. I mean there are articles, I mean that is just the way of the world is to judge, is to place value. So Jesus is asking us to do, I mean he's really asking us to go against the grain when he says do not judge. So, we have to then figure out how to condition ourselves not to elevate or diminish value when it comes to us and to others. The first truth that Jesus is talking to us about, it has to do with value, when he says "do not judge".

Secondly, I think the truth that he's illuminating to us is about vision. Verses three through five is where he's talking about how can you look at the splinter in your brother's eye or your sister's eye and not take notice of the beam in your eye and you're trying to help them with whatever their issue is. Notice the imagery here is like way over the top. I mean a beam is, I mean infinitely a bigger than a splinter. I mean you can't even really see a splinter. You can definitely see a..., and Jesus is doing this on purpose. He trying to illuminate that, hey listen, the stuff that we're working, like we got some significant stuff that we need to be working on, that we need to be making sure that we see. We need to see ourselves, but guess what is always easier to see the fault in other people, right? It's always easier to correct other people than to correct ourselves. That's why I'm glad at times that we have this thing called the Holy Spirit. I say at times because I don't want to be called out like I don't know anyone who likes to be called out, but one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is to show us. Listen, John 16:3, Jesus says the spirit of truth, which is one of the names of the Holy Spirit, is to lead us and guide us into all truth. And one of the truths that we need to know, we need to know the truth about us. We don't need David Dunning to tell us that we got a little bit of a problem in his area, that's been the case for quite some time.

The other thing that I think that Jesus is saying here is, okay, first you, we need to have this internal perspective. We need to be able to have a self-evaluation and be working on our beam. He says, once we do that and we are removing our beams and we're working on us, then we can have clarity on how to help our brother and our sister.

The Greek word there for clearly is a word that means to recover full vision. It's related to another word in Mark 8:25, when Jesus healed the blind man and when he healed the blind man, it said, and then he recovered full vision. So it's almost as if the beam, I mean, if you had a beam, how can you see? And so this is, this is the imagery here and this is the word that Jesus is using when he's talking about being able to see clearly.

I don't doubt that our intentions sometimes are pure. I don't doubt sometimes that our hearts are altruistic when we're trying to literally help our neighbor, help our brother or really make a situation better. But if we're not working on our beam first then we're not gonna be able to help properly or be as effective. Let me just break it down into like this. If you wear glasses and you're driving me, I need you to wear them. If you don't see well at night and you need corrective lens don't drive me to where I need to go without correct vision or somebody else needs to be driving because you need fullness of vision. You need clarity to be able to help properly. This is huge in relation to peacemaking.

I want to just bring it home a little bit and talk about this personally in my personal journey with where I am right now. And as some of you know that we're launching a plant in Baltimore soon and it's a little bit of a different approach that we're trying to take but part of the approach is actually related to what Jesus is saying in Matthew seven. After spending some time there and developing a couple of key relationships and reading a little bit about the city my wife and I just felt like this is the direction that God was nudging us in and calling us to. But we knew that we needed to have clarity of vision. We knew that we needed, God to show us what to do and part of that meant that we needed to work on our beams. We need to work on the stuff that our ignorance is and the things that are perspective that might not actually be accurate. And oftentimes I've seen this and we didn't want to be these people were where you parachute into a place, into a city or to connect with a people group and you're trying to connect with them and you want to help. And as a matter of fact, the way that you even look at them is through the lens of brokenness. You're not even seeing the beauty within the community. So you characterize them and you base all of what you're doing off of their brokenness. And then you come up with your strategy and you come up with these plans on what to do and you're trying to help. But so many times it actually hurts or is not as effective as it could be.

A good book on that is a book called When Helping Hurts. If you're interested, I want to encourage you to read that but here's the thing. When we haven't worked on our beams and we parachuted in, we don't have clarity of vision, we're not asking questions, we're not listening well. And so these are two of the postures that we wanted to take. And two of the postures that I'm diligently pursuing right now is asking and listening because I don't know this city. I don't know this place. I can't come in like I know the answers to some of the issues that are there. So we believe that God downloaded a three phase plan for us. It's a little bit unconventional, but the first phase is we want to launch a nonprofit within a school to disrupt the school to prison pipeline. There is a whole issue around the school to prison pipeline. And the reason for this is that we don't believe that States should be looking at third grade assessments to determine what their prison bay accounts should be. The church needs to be engaged in that process and we need to be on the front lines of these issues. These kids won't have a shot without some sort of intervention. But here's the thing, even though that's a problem, even though we came up with a plan to launch this nonprofit within the school to address this I wasn't fully confident that I knew

exactly what I was doing so I talked to two principals. One principal was a leader within the Baltimore city public schools. And I asked her, I said, do you think this will work? Do you think that this is a good plan? Shoot holes in it, tell me why it wouldn't work, tell me what I'm missing because I am not an educator. This is not my, this is not my field. Yes, God called me to it, but I needed to remove some beams and makes sure that I can get clarity. We're going to call this nonprofit "Blueprint" and we'll give you a little bit more information about that in just a second.

Second phase is we're gonna launch a discipleship oriented Gospel centered gathering within that same school. So we hope that phase one, as we get into the ethos and the stream of the community and we learn the community and we get to see the faces of the issues and we get to see the beauty of the people we can be informed on how we should gather and how we should love and how we should show up in this community as opposed to doing it the other way around where we parachute in, where we're starting to gather, we invite people to come and they don't even know us.

Third thing is we hope to do a little bit of what NCC has been doing and what we've been doing here. We want to launch profitable business as mission entities and hey, we need opportunities to fund the work that we're doing. We want to be economically sustainable and we want to we want to generate jobs. There is literally no industry in this city.

And so here's the thing about Baltimore if I could just tell you this. When I see Baltimore, I don't see problems, I see potential. I don't see hustlers, I see entrepreneurs who lack access. When I ride through the hood, I see beauty in the people. I see hope, I don't see ruins because that's the way God sees them. And we need God to give us clarity of vision. We got to go through a process to make sure that we can see these things because we don't want to be seeing people and circumstance as projects because that's not who they are. And listen, I see this hope in the city, not because I have the answers, but I know who has the answers and its God and the people who already live there. They have something to teach me and show me.

There are two ways you can jump on board with us. Thank you for this long infomercial. You could join a Baltimore mission team. I'm taking the team there in May; I would love to take as many of you as we can. And then you could sign up to be a part of our launch team. Hey, we need a variety of skills, expertise education, passion to help us pull off this nonprofit in this gathering. So hey, hit us up. You can also follow us on social media as well. I would love to talk to you as many of you as possible about this.

Here's the whole point that I'm making and the reason why I'm bringing this up. Jesus said that it is hypocritical for us. He says, hypocrite, fix your stuff first. It is hypocritical if I think or you think you don't need to work on your beams. If you think you don't have ignorance's, if you don't think you have blind spots, if you don't think you have stuff that you don't know that you need to learn, asking and listening, well. Jesus furthers the point in the last verse in verse six, when he's literally talking about stupidity. He's saying basically, don't be stupid. He's saying,

⁶ Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them under their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.

He's talking about having discernment. He's talking about not wasting your efforts and if you're going to be able to do that, you've got to do some work on the front end.

Let me see if I can land the plane for us this way. I remember when man, I was about seven years old and this passion for playing football had really just began to well up in me. And so, I decided at that same park that I mentioned in Richmond Park, you know, I could see the lights from my neighborhood, I mean from my street and I could hear the whistles and I wanted to play, you know. And I remember going out for about three or four days and then I quit. And I remember my dad coming home and seeing me at home in my room when I should've been at practice. And he said, well, son, what happened? I said, Dad, it was much harder than I anticipated. I mean, the practices involved, things that I felt like were irrelevant. Like, you know, these things, we were just jumping over and tumbling and doing like, what does this have to do with football? I want to run and catch and play games and have fun this is stupid to me. But in my immaturity and my lack of experience, I didn't realize all that it would take. I didn't realize the work that I had to put in. And, I think some of us are approaching peacemaking the same way. We're in love with the idea of what it means to be involved in peacemaking. We're in love with the idea of diversity and inclusion and all of these sorts of things that promote harmony, where it's kinda like the picture that the organization shows of all of these brown and white faces and none of those people are a part of the organization, they're all models. But we're enamored by the picture but we don't want to go through the problems it's gonna cause to make the picture real. We're in love with an idea. We're in love with this aspiration of the picture, but we're unwilling to embrace the perspiration it's going to take to make it real. We love the idea of winning but don't love the idea of wrestling. We don't love the idea of going through things that might be a little bit painful, a little bit stressful, a little bit hard, a little bit exhausting and definitely frustrating. And then when we get to that point, we just want to move on and we want to pretend or we want to dismiss. But here's the thing, wrestling, it grows strength, long suffering, perseverance, clarity, maturity.

And listen, the reason that some of us are tired of the conversation around reconciliation and race and all that, the reason that we're tired is because we are talking about it and we're not being about it. The reason we're sensitive when these issues come up is because we are not committed enough to build durability. I decided the next year to go back and play football again because I loved it too much. So I knew that if I loved it that much, I had to deal with the uncomfortable part of it. So we say we love Jesus and we're going to be Jesus followers and we love him, we gotta be committed to the hard stuff.

It's easier when we hit these tough spots to go run to our tribes and get sympathy because those people think like us. It's easy when we hit these bumps in a road to put labels on them and just kinda move on. It's easier to fear difference as opposed to engaging with difference. But what if all the Jesus followers committed to Matthew seven one through six? What have we committed to this? What if we are committed to doing our work first and not judging, assigning value to others, elevating ourselves above others? What if we worked on the beam in our own eye to gain clarity? And what if we started asking ourselves questions like this? And we're gonna pop them up on the screen for you.

- Why do I believe this to be true or false?
- Where did this belief come from? Is it biblical? Is it cultural?

- In what ways am I intentionally seeking out different perspectives?
- And when I feel hurt or frustrated, how am I processing it in a healthy way?

Listen, the apostle Paul said that Jesus has given us the ministry and the message of reconciliation. You can't cut that part out. He's given it to us, so we got to do this work y'all, and then after we work on the asking questions part because I think that's one of the hardest parts. Then we can do all the other stuff that's mentioned in this next publication. Listening well and then freely disagree and loving regardless. We can get to those other things, but we've got to have enough courage and then we got to condition ourselves to ask questions. We cannot get to that place of clarity that Jesus is talking about without understanding that we need to see each other as equal, as value. And understanding that if we're going to have clarity of vision, we've got to work on our beams, we've got to work on us. And hey, if everybody is working on themselves, I think I'll be all right. I think we can actually make progress, but we gotta be committed to the work that Jesus is calling us to the ministry and the message of reconciliation.

Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for who you are. Thank you that although you called us to this work, you not only have empowered us, you've also given us tools. You've given us the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us into all truth. God help us. Some of us are weary, some of us are frustrated, some of us are like I was when I showed up at Richmond Park at seven year old, like this is not even relevant. And God, I totally get it. I totally get it. But God help us to realize that the love you have for us is so deep and when we look at what you did on the cross, how can we say that it's not worth it? Because the effort you went through to be reconciled to us is the example. And we cannot do this work without experiencing some suffering and some ups and some downs. But because you rose from the grave and defeated death and made it all good, it can be all good for us. These things we ask in your son Jesus name, amen.