

March 20, 2022 – Judgment

**Romans 14:13-14**

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**14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself.**



# Laid At His Feet

## A Lenten Study

*Can we let go of the things that we love that hold us back?*

# Judgment

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Special Music:

“Don’t Judge a Book By its Cover”

Jadyn Rylee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga-izXhLCvU>

## A LESSON FOR PETER

Peter spotted the young man outside the convenience store. It was obvious that the man had not had an opportunity to shower for several days. His worn-out jeans and t-shirt were unkempt and there were holes in the soles of his tennis shoes. He had a small canvas backpack beside him that he protected with his right arm. It looked to Peter like the young man had not eaten in a while either. But the really strange thing was that the man was staring at the sky with a huge smile on his face, like he was keeping some wonderful secret and was just dying to share it with someone.

Peter walked up to the man, intending to give him a couple of dollars to tide him over, but the young man didn't reach out his hand to take it. "Gee, man, I don't want your money," he said.

"I'm sorry if I offended you," Peter replied, "you just looked like you could use a little help." Peter started to turn away.

The man stopped him by saying, "Actually, I'm here to help you."

'Wait a minute,' Peter thought. 'Why would this man who is so obviously down on his luck want to help him? And the bigger question is, what is wrong with me that makes me look like I could use his help?'

"What did you say?" Peter asked.

"Actually, I'm here to help you," the man repeated.

"But I don't need help," Peter replied.

**“Of course, you do,” said the man. “Everyone needs some help. My name is Doug. Why don’t you buy me some lunch and we can talk about it?”**

**Peter found this situation rather intriguing. He decided to learn more about the young man and said, “Alright, there’s a burger place across the street. I will buy you some lunch.” Together, they went across the street and ordered some food. Doug used the men’s room to clean his face and hands. He swapped out his dirty t-shirt for a fresh one from his backpack.**

**When he got back to the table, Peter had already picked up the food from the counter and had it laid out on the table. “You look much better, Doug. I’m Peter, by the way. Why don’t you tell me about yourself? What do you do and where are you going?”**

**“I’m not really going anywhere, Peter. What I do is help people.”**

**“And how do you help people. Doug? Financially, physically? Do you help them solve problems? To be honest, Doug, it kind of looks like you can’t even take care of yourself.”**

**Doug took a big bite of his hamburger, chewed and swallowed before he answered. “I have everything I need, Peter. People like yourself provide me with the essentials, food, water, clothes, and sometimes cash. I’m really very fortunate. Which allows me to help others.”**

**“But if you have nothing, how can you help others?” Peter asked.**

**“Who said I have nothing, Peter? I told you I have everything I need.”**

**“Well, you needed food, didn’t you? Isn’t that why I bought you lunch?”**

**“You, see, that’s the whole point, Peter. I didn’t need food. You saw me and decided that I needed food. I simply let you buy it for me. And please know that I am grateful. But if you had not bought me lunch, God would have fed me some other way.”**

**“Then what is it you need, Doug?”**

**“You just don’t get it do you, Peter. Like I told you, I don’t need anything.”**

**“Okay, Doug, color me lost. I just don’t understand what you are saying.”**

**“Well, that is what I am here for, Peter. I’m here to help get you unlost.”**

**Peter placed his exasperated face in his hands and replied, “And how are you going to do that, Doug?”**

**“I already did it, Peter,” said Doug with a huge smile.**

**“And what did you do, Doug? And please don’t tell me you ripped me off when I wasn’t looking.” Peter felt in his pocket for his wallet and was relieved that it was still there.**

**“Oh, Peter. I teach people to see. I taught you to see. Most people will look right past someone dressed like me. But you saw me. When you agreed to buy me lunch, you acknowledged me. That’s what I do. I teach people to see. How many people do you walk past every day and never even notice? Each one of them is a human being with problems, pain, grief, joy, passion, and a story to tell.**

**Most people never take time to notice. But you did, Peter. You looked me in the eye and saw me. My task is accomplished, and I can move on.”**

**Peter shook his head in disbelief. He looked out the window and noticed a woman trying to change a tire on her car. A toddler sat nearby watching her mother work. The woman had obviously been at it for a while without making much progress. The toddler had kept trying to help, which made the task more difficult. Peter realized that he had not noticed the woman when he came into the restaurant, but he certainly noticed her and her difficulty now. He grinned and felt a peace that comes with understanding. When he turned back to tell Doug that he finally understood, Doug wasn't there. His half-eaten hamburger and fries were still there. But Doug was gone. Peter's eyes quickly scanned the small restaurant, but he didn't see the young man anywhere.**

**“Well, I'll be.” He shook his head as he opened the door and headed towards the woman and her toddler to help them change the tire.**

**I'm not trying to teach you a lesson in existentialism with this story. The Bible has numerous stories of angels interacting with people.**

**Genesis 18 talks about the angels visiting Abraham and Sarah to let them know that Sarah would soon be with child.**

**Genesis 19 talks about the messengers that visit Lot in the city of Sodom to find out if things were as bad as it was said.**

**We talked about the angel visiting Elijah in the desert.**

**An angel visited Zechariah foretelling the birth of John the Baptist.**

**An angel visited Mary to help her understand her role as mother to the Son of God.**

**And we have the extraordinary encounters between Jesus and Mary Magdalene at the tomb and the two men on the road to Emmaus.**

**And that's just a few. We tend to think that such things could never happen outside of the Bible, but I assure you that do. There are things we just can't explain. There are people that enter and leave our lives that seem to have no purpose, but we find out years later they have affected our lives in a most profound way. God will find a way to interact with us in ways that we least expect and through people that we least anticipate.**

**We all know the cliché, "Don't judge a book by its cover." But I suggest that we don't judge the cover by the book either. We all have a tendency to step into that first impression of somebody and we seem to believe that doing so is**

only natural. But is it really? Or have we just trained ourselves to think so? We are told that we need to look sharp for that interview in order to leave a good impression; dress better than we are comfortable with, maybe spend extra time on our appearance. Wear that tie that we got three Christmases ago and have never worn. Wear that blouse that may be a wee bit small but is relatively unstained. Polish the dress shoes that we have had sitting in the closet for eight months. We do all that because we know that the person interviewing us is judging us based on a first impression.

Now, some people do not have the luxury of a pair of good shoes to polish, or a choice between blouses, or several suits to choose from. That really doesn't reflect in their work ethic or how they treat others. Yet, somewhere in time, we developed a need to feel that we should be able to judge others, that maybe it was mandated, our way of keeping society and culture in check. We also learned to accept that we are being judged constantly by the people we meet. Some of that is based in tradition, some of it in a desire to feel superior.

It is too easy to fall into that habit of judging people without knowing their story or their pain. Everyone has a story, and everyone has pain. We want people to understand that when we aren't at our best. The simple truth is that we want people to see us in context, but so often we don't return that same consideration to others. Too often we expect people to handle hardship in the same way that we do, and we use ourselves as a measuring stick.

Isn't that the crux of the problem? When we use our own lives and our own abilities to handle problems, our reference point is based on an inferior

comparison. Not everyone deals with death, divorce, pain, hardship, health issues, and financial woes the same way. And while we may think we have made the best possible decision for ourselves when we faced such things, it does not mean we made the best decision based on the values that we bind ourselves to as Christians.

If we truly want to use a way to deal with judgment properly, we need to look at several things based in scripture:

1. Jesus gives us His perspective on judgment in the first few verses of Matthew 7. In verse 1 & 2, He starts with this:

**“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”**

This verse is not a reference to Exodus 21:24 – “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth”, which Jesus also talks about in Matthew 5:38-39 when He speaks turning the other cheek.

This judgment be referred to in Matthew 7 is referring to how God will judge us. He will judge us with the same measure we used to judge others. If we use ourselves as our measuring stick, then God will use that same measuring stick. If we use Jesus as our measuring stick, well... there is hope in that. Because Jesus did not sit in judgment of us. **“For God sent not His son into the world to condemn the world, but through Him the world may be saved.”**



Using the measuring stick of Jesus, seeing people the way Christ sees them, meeting people where they are with hearts of compassion, allows us to use grace and mercy, rather than beating people over the head with the gavels of our own judgmental values.

2. This is another passage where Jesus talks about judgment and we are all familiar with the scripture, Matthew 7:3-5

**“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”**

We are all familiar with this verse. Even non-Christians often quote this scripture. Remember our story today? Peter assumed that Doug needed to eat. Peter saw Doug as someone down on his luck and in need. While that may have been true, he didn’t take the time to find out from Doug how he could help. He developed his own opinion on what Doug needed and that became his reality when dealing with Doug. While Peter had good intentions, it was judgmental of him to assume the kind of help Doug needed.

I love the TV show New Amsterdam. Dr. Max Goodwin may not always get it right, but he starts in the right place. He is always asking,

**“How can I help?” Sometimes he makes assumptions that he shouldn’t, but somehow it all comes back around to a place of making things better. Maybe, as Christians, that should be our mantra, “How can I help?” rather than “Here’s ten dollars” thinking that will ease our conscience.**

**3. And lastly, I want to look at our target verse today, **Romans 14:13-14:****

**Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.**

**I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself.**

Paul breaks this passage down into two parts to help us understand. He starts with the same emphatic, “Stop judging others. Just stop it. It is not productive, and it hurts people.” But then he turns around and gives us a slightly different approach. A positive approach. “Instead of hurting others by judging them, instead of being a stumbling block in their lives, instead of expecting people to live by our standards, why don’t we just make up our minds to not do that?” Why don’t we examine our core beliefs and change ourselves instead? How about we lay that judgmental attitude that we carry around at the feet of Jesus and just not pick it up again? We don’t need it and it serves no purpose in furthering the Kingdom of God.

Paul goes on to say something extremely important to understanding this problem of judgment. **“I am convinced, being fully**

**persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself.”** Nothing is unclean in itself. What we decide is dirty and broken, what we decide is messy and unusable, what we decide is not pleasing to God... is a personal thing between God and ourselves. What is good for us may not be good for someone else. Those barriers that we build between us and God, don't necessarily create a barrier for someone else. We are each responsible for our own relationship with God. Our purpose is to love and share the good news. It is not our job to build fences in other people's lives. Telling someone to put on a better suit, clean themselves up, get themselves something to eat, does not provide them with a better suit to put on, soap with which to clean themselves, or food to give them nourishment. Judgmental words are often empty. When we start making those decisions for others, we find ourselves sitting in the judge's chair, condemning them for matters that may be out of their control.

You may not want to hear this, but when we take on the mantle of judgment, we are basically telling God that we are better suited for the job than He is. The court of the Kingdom of God belongs to God, not to man. When we decide what people should eat, where people should go, what clothes they should wear, where they should worship, what kind of music they should listen to, and what we think is acceptable to God, we become a stumbling block. When we step into people's lives and deliver our opinions on what is proper, we become stumbling blocks.

**That is not something we are called to do. As a matter of fact, we are explicitly told not to do that.**

**Whenever we talk about these kinds of matters, I like to return us to Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37-40:**

**Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

**If we are ever unsure of our response to another human being, we should always err on the side of love, not judgment. Jesus was constantly explaining that the law was made for man, not man for the law. The guidelines that God gave us were to free us from the chains of sin, not burden us with unreasonable regulations and impossible rules.**

**This week, I would like for us all to think about the shackles that we try to place on others. I pray that we all commit to understanding the people we encounter are not subject to our opinions or biases. We are all children of our heavenly Father, and it is through our relationship with Jesus Christ that we are welcomed as heirs to the Kingdom. Let us put aside our gavels of judgment and follow the example of our Savior. Let us lay those gavels at the feet of Jesus and strive to leave them there so that we don't become stumbling blocks to people we meet.**

**God bless you all. AMEN**

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