

**SERMON:** Questions Jesus asked 9: **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?**

This morning I've a couple of short videos to show as part of the sermon. Both are from comedy shows. The first is from current comedy show *Young Sheldon* and the second which I'll show a bit later is from *Keeping Up Appearances* which ran on BBC 1 from 1990-1995 and featured Hyacinth...Bouquet which was spelt... B-U-C-K-E-T!

The reason I'm showing the comedy clips is because in today's Bible passage Jesus uses comedy to great effect. Comedy and satire are wonderful tools in the right hands. The first clip as well as being lovely also helps us to see that asking questions (even hard ones) is better than sitting on them or pretending they are not there.

**VIDEO:** Young Sheldon helping his mum with God & asking hard questions in church  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxIY0iHaVXU>

Questions are good! That's what we've been saying each week in our current sermon series – *Questions that Jesus asked*. Jesus/God is revealed to be pro-questions. In the Gospels, Jesus is recorded being asked 183 questions, asking 307, and answering only 3 directly...instead, preferring to respond to people with quotes and stories from the Old Testament and with metaphors and analogies, parables and questions!

In Scripture, Jesus is revealed to be less interested in superficial pat answers and pronouncements of 'the right' answer and much more interested in getting past the superficial, to the heart of the matter and the inner workings of our heart.

The first question we considered was God's **Where are you?** to Adam and Eve recorded in Genesis 3:9. We thought about the difference between God asking... **Where are you?** In a *wait till I get my hands on you* kind of a way.

And asking...

**Where are you?** In an *I'm drawing near to you will you draw near to me and come clean?* kind of a way.

We thought about how in Christ, God draws near to us and that Genesis and this question sets the scene for the rest of the Bible and the rest of the questions.

So, that was the first question. Here are the others Jesus questions we've covered so far...

Q2. 12-year-old Jesus in the temple asking him mum and still alive stepdad Joseph **Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I would be in my father's house?** Luke (2:49)

Q3. Grown up Jesus asking fishermen Andrew (Simon Peter's brother) and friend **What do you want?** What do you really want? What are you really deep down looking for? (John 1:38)

Q4. Jesus is at a wedding with his mum but no dad anymore. During this wedding at Cana, Jesus is thinking forward to his wedding day - the joy of being united to his bride (the church) and the pain he will need to endure and go through to make that happen. When his mum asks him to help when the wine runs out to spare the bride and bridegroom from being humiliated, Jesus shares her concern and acknowledges her appeal to his character and nature by asking **Woman why do you involve me?** (John 2:4)

Q5. Jesus asks the right reverend religious Nicodemus **Do you not understand these things?** By these things he means the need for all of us to be born again – God's Spirit coming together with our spirit to give new life. Included in these things are the wonderful words about for God so loving the world that he sent his only son to save it. (John 3:10 & 3:16)

Q7. Jesus asking his followers and us a most challenging question **If you [just] love those who love you, what reward will you get?** (Matthew 5:36)

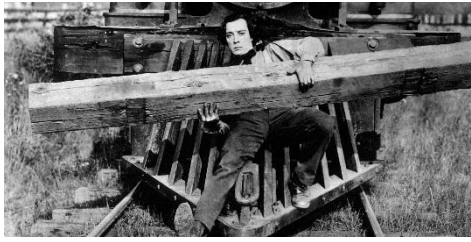
Q8. Jesus reaching across social and cultural divides and lovingly coming to save and befriend the Samaritan, 'unclean', outcast woman, by showing us his divinity and humanity by asking **Will you give me a drink?** (John 4:7)

Q9. And then there was the question from John 5:6 where Jesus asked the invalid at the pool of Bethesda **Do you want to get well?** before healing him. Which stirs up all kinds of questions and which Cat helped us to consider last week. If you missed that well worth a watch online.

This leads us to today's passage from Matthew chapter 7 and Jesus' question in verse 3. **Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eyes and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?**

Before we read the whole passage I want to show you this picture.

Q. Can anyone tell me who this is? It's silent movie slapstick comedy star Buster



Keaton. His films came to the fore in the 1920s.

Q. What is he holding? It's a wooden plank or beam.

Buster was the master of slapstick comedy who used props, ridiculous imagery and scenarios. He

particularly liked using props, slapstick and ridiculous

imagery to poke fun at people who were shown to be ridiculously pompous.

Comedy and satire and pointing out the ridiculous is a wonderful tool in the right hands. Jesus in this passage, using ridiculous imagery involving a log/plank, does so to dig down into the inner working of the human heart – exposing and addressing judgementalism. This is Matthew 7:1-5. These are Jesus words.

**7 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.**

**<sup>3</sup> '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? <sup>4</sup> 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? <sup>5</sup> 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**

So, here's Jesus painting the most vivid and ridiculous picture of what being judgemental is like. It's like a man strutting about, muttering and tutting, looking down on his brother (or fellow follower in the ancient Greek) pointing out their faults, failures and shortcomings, totally oblivious to...his own glaringly obvious ones.

I'm not sure there is anyone who has better captures this than the character Hyacinth Bucket in *Keeping up Appearances*. In this clip she is in church at her judgemental worst!

**Video:** Hyacinth Bucket *Keeping Up Appearances* 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZIIMDh9RpU> 1m35s – 2m56s

And here's a 10 second clip that lets us in the inner workings of her head and heart.

**Video:** Hyacinth Bucket *Keeping Up Appearances* 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjkFKY2pddc> start – 13s

*"There's one thing I can't stand its snobbery and one-up-ness. People [who]try to pretend they're superior makes it so much harder for those of us who really!"*

I am so glad that I am nothing like Hyacinth!

Aren't you glad that you're nothing like Hyacinth?

**Story:** Me and my flat tyre (Here's a story worth repeating).

One day (and I was a fairly new Christian at the time) I was driving through Glasgow city centre, and I spotted a car in front of me with its exhaust hanging off – sparks coming off it. I shook my head, rolled my eyes, tutted, and thought to myself – *Deary me! Imagine driving around in a car like that! What kind of a driver drives around like that putting themselves and others at risk and damaging their car even further. I'm glad I'm not like that!*

I prepared myself to pull up to the car at the next set of lights and let them know. So, at the lights I was just about to pull up to the broken exhaust driver when a driver pulled up beside me and motioned to put down my window. When I did he said, *"Here Pal your back tyre is totally flat you shouldn't be driving on that!"*

In that moment Jesus' story about judging and speck of dust and plank of wood loomed large in my mind. And I was cut to the core. I felt God saying to me, *"Dan you are so quick to see other people's faults and blind to your own."* Ouch! And...

...at the same time, I burst out laughing because the situation was so funny. God was using humour to show the ridiculousness of my pride and how ridiculous my judgementalism was just as he had in the speck of dust/plank of wood parable. I thought wow – what a kind, patient, loving, gracious and personal God you are bursting my over inflated ego like that. I'm pretty sure the man in the car next to me thought I was mad.

And since then, I'm pleased to report that judgementalism withered and died and has never reared its ugly head. Do you think that is true? It is not. The roots run deep. The truth is I am much prouder and judgemental than I care to admit. The truth is that we are all more like Hyacinth Bucket than we care to admit. And the truth is judgementalism and its effect is more serious than we care to admit.

This judgementalism is not just found within the church and religious people, it's found as Hyacinth demonstrates – everywhere because it is found in every human heart, it's part of the human condition the Bible calls sin.

Here's one way of examining this (we've thought about this before)...every human has a world view, a sacred story they hold that helps them frame and navigate life.

That's true for the religious, irreligious, agnostic, atheist, conservative, liberal, traditionalist and progressive. Here's how it goes...

With our world view, within our sacred story...

...Membership rules are worked out.

...Converts are sought.

...Absolute truth claims are made.

...Statement of faiths are drawn up and dogmatically defended.

Some who object to absolute truth claims say...*No one has the right to say their way is the only way!* Not realising they are doing the very thing they are objecting to.

...Orthodoxies and heresies are defined.

...Those that make the grade are 'in' and those who don't are 'out'...

*You are not conservative enough...you are not liberal enough...you are not traditional enough...you are not progressive enough...I am the enlightened 'goody' you're the uneducated 'baddy', I am one of the elect and you are not, I am righteous...you are unrighteous, and we deserve to be treated accordingly.*

...Signs and symbols are claimed and paraded.

...Virtue signalling abounds - *I'm not just this kind of Christian, Muslim, Buddhist Atheist, Progressive, Traditionalist, Activist - I am this kind!*

...Rituals and rites are adopted - *I don't just do that, I do this! This often and to this degree!*

...Selected texts and teachers are pointed to.

Versions of the sacred story are fought over...*No, no, no! Not 'that' version or 'that' edition or 'that' translation. The one that I make sure people know I hold, is the superior translation and interpretation!*

Exemplars are looked to...George Best, Hugh Heffner, Che Guevara, Kim Kardashian, Richard Dawkins, Plato, Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Greta Thunberg. Their biographies are read, their stories are re-told and their quotes are quoted.

Gurus and their ways and their channels are liked and subscribed to. As we subscribe and make our thoughts and our stance public, we seek 'likes' and people to validate us.

Pilgrimages to holy places and Head Quarters are made, where wonders are beheld and time and money sacrifices are made...from the Apple store and Silicon Valley, to Mecca, to Malls.

Lines are drawn as to what are primary and secondary matters. With the lines come tribalism, polarisation and division. Tribal groups tend to dismiss, dehumanise, denigrate and demonise others who are different to or disagree with them and keep them at an arm's length. *Who wants to get up close and personal with them!*

All of this happened in Jesus' day in the 'pagan' Greco-Roman world between the classes and tribes and within Judaism between Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Zealots. (More on that another time). Judgmentalism is a human condition.

Let's dig into this some more...

Followers claiming to follow the God of grace can be incredibly selective in how and who His grace extends to.

Champions of tolerance can be just as selective when it comes to who tolerance is extended to.

As Apostle James insightfully tells us (3:9) **Those who bless God, with the same tongue, curse those who have been made in His image...This should not be!**

Those who celebrate their open mindedness can be so closed to those who think differently. This should not be!

Those feeling shamed, shunned, condemned and humiliated and who object to people being treated in such a way, drag people into the public arena to do the very thing they are taking a stand against.

Pro-life champions railing against those who are pro-choice do so with life-taking guns in their hands.

Environmental and human right activists, screaming for change do so by posting messages online, on the phone that is renewed every year, powered by cobalt and lithium that Amnesty International warn has been dug out of the ground by the slave labour of children. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/child-labour-behind-smart-phone-and-electric-car-batteries/#:~:text=The%20report%2C%20This%20is%20what,adults%20work%20in%20perilous%20conditions.>

We are all so inconsistent and compromised when it comes to justice.

**<sup>3</sup> ‘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? <sup>4</sup> 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? <sup>5</sup> 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.**

Let’s dig some more and think about when we are wronged.

For example, when we hear that someone has been saying things about us they shouldn’t have, we can cry...*judgment, punishment, may this guilt be exposed, may they reap what they sow, I would never do that, I know their sort, I know all that I need to know, inexcusable, no mercy!*

But when we wrong someone, for example, by saying something we shouldn’t have and we’re found out we can cry...*mercy, mercy, leniency, I didn’t know the whole story, I got the wrong end of the stick, I was having an off day...they should try walking in my shoes...extenuating circumstances. That’s not the real me. Mercy.*

The level of double standard and hypocrisy is...ridiculous! The standards we are willing to hold others to but let ourselves off with is ridiculous. With the slapstick imagery comes the sobering reality check. Jesus gives us this sobering reality check because judgementalism’s withering effects are more serious than we care to admit.

**7 ‘Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.**

*Jesus is saying I want you to imagine for a moment being held to the standards you demand of others. You’re in court, you’re in the dock, and the judge facing you, is you! How would that go? If your standards were to be applied consistently to yourself where would that leave you? Ouch!*

Jesus here is not even talking about us standing before him when our time comes – standing before the holy and perfect God to give an account and enter our plea.

So, what are we to do?

Jesus calls us to honesty. Jesus calls us to Him.

Jesus says.. **<sup>5</sup> 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.**

The original audience, hearing the word *hypocrite*, would have thought of actors and masks. The ancient Greek word ὑποκριτής, hupokrités (hoop-ok-ree-tace') meant performer acting under a mask. The picture is two faces – fake and real.

Jesus is asking us to take off and put down the mask, to stop the pretending and to end the show. This is not for his sake – it’s for ours and humanity’s.

The truth is Jesus sees and sees it all, and us all. He sees not just what we do but why we do what we do for good and ill. He knows that we, like Apostle Paul wrestle with - doing what we don’t want to do and not doing what we do want to do. He knows our conflict within.

He knows when we do something good...

...for the joy of doing something good.

... to look virtuous and better than ‘them!’ and receive the acclaim!

God knows when we...

...work hard at something and can take good and the healthy kind of pride in our achievements.

...use our achievements to put on display to prove that we are more worthy than others.

God knows how much we crave approval and what we are willing to do for good and ill to get it and so we can belong.

He knows how strong we can be and how much we care.

He knows how self-centred and insecure and hurt and weak we are.

God knows the inner workings of our heart.

He calls us to be honest with ourselves, with each other and with Him.

The things with taking off the masks is that you can see better, especially faces.

Having someone look you full in the face and them knowing not just your highlights and what you're pleased to make public, but also your faults and failings and insecurities and shames and them not turning tail and running but actually holding your gaze and drawing near and telling you they love you is an incredible thing. That's just on a human level.

The Lord God Almighty, our Maker that we will all have to stand before when we die to give account and enter our plea, does that on a divine level in Christ.

This is good news. In Christ, God draws near.

In Christ, the face of God is revealed.

In Christ, God comes to look us in the face.

On the Cross we find a God dying for us to take down the mask.

On the Cross we find a God dying us to come clean.

On the Cross we find a God dying for us to come home.

On the Cross we find a God dying for us so we would know His approval and welcome and affection and love and our true worth.

Who says, *"I lived the life you cannot live  
My life I gave, my love I give and give and give.  
Take heart, for my saving work is complete,  
It cannot be added to by mighty feat,  
Nor improved upon by your prevailing,  
Nor undone by human frailty or failing.  
How else can you come but just as you are?  
I know you and that you bear sin and scar.  
Your strivings are not what bring my embrace.  
My beloved, I am the God of grace.*

Knowing that we are saved by grace and not by our 'mighty feats' or status makes boasting really hard.

It is the antidote to the poison of judgementalism.

It also means we can be honest without fear of rejection by God.

Knowing that we are loved with a steadfast love helps us to take off the masks.

Knowing that we are loved just as we are helps us to stop impressing.

We can drop the Bouquet act and embrace our beloved Bucket-ness.

## **PRAY**

Father God, sorry for my and our judgmentalism.

Jesus, help me and us to take off our masks.

Holy Spirit, help us to see that we are more judgemental than we care to think.

Holy Spirit reveal where those deadly roots still grow and root them out.

Lord, we don't know what its like to walk in other people's shoes.

Help us to remember that.

Help us to be like you slow to anger and rich in love.

Help us to remember how you demonstrated your love in life and in your death.

Holy Spirit, help us to see that in You we are more loved than we dare to hope.

Help us to extend the grace you show to us to others.

Help us to minister justice well and wisely and fairly.

Help us with the daily judgement calls we all have to make.

Help us to see Your face. Help us to see each other's faces.

Where we've been on the receiving end of withering judgementalism, come and minister to us.

Thank you that we have a God who has walked in our shoes and felt our pain.

Thank you that You know the whole story.

Thank you risen Jesus that you are the ultimate and best Judge.

Thank you that you are both Just and One who justifies.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.