

Title: Principles for Changing the World – Where to Start
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
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Introduction

I grew up in America in the 1960s. At that time, America was thought to be a simpler place. Maybe it was - Maybe it wasn't. But that's what many think.

For example, the average person got along authority. There's a famous painting by Norman Rockwell of a young boy who decided to run away from home. He winds up in a local diner where he meets a police officer. They start talking. If you close your eyes and imagine, you can picture the police officer listening thoughtfully to the little boy. You can imagine the little boy looking up to the police officer. And then, the officer says, “Hey why don't you let me take you home.” Most people respected the police. Many young boys in fact would love to grow up to be a police officer.



When I graduated High School in 1977, I was a product of that America. I was what some people would call a “good” (note the quotes) kid. “Good” kids respected authority. In the 1970's, “good kids” had short hair. So, I had short hair. “Good young men” didn't grow facial hair. So, I didn't have any facial hair. The list goes on.

After high school I attended a college where I double majored in music and drama. The idea was eventually to be dancing around Broadway or even Hollywood. Now, in order to pursue a college major that includes drama, you have to perform in student productions of various plays. And to get into those productions, you have to audition.

One day, I saw that a group was putting on a play - In fact, a musical. That was exactly what I wanted to build my resume, so I went to the audition. The show was a local production of a play that ran on Broadway in the 1960s. It was the Broadway musical, “Hair”. After the audition, I was accepted into the cast.

This play represented changing times in America. In the 1960s, people began to question authority. Prior to that time, if the Government got our country involved in a war, it must have been for a good reason. Good men lined up to volunteer for service in the military. But, then came the Vietnam War. Many questioned whether involvement in that war was justified.

Prior to that time, if the police arrested someone, it had to be for a good reason. But then some people began to question. Maybe the police had become corrupt?

Prior to that time, factories sprang up all over our country. They made our automobiles and television sets. They made the weapons that we used to win wars. When people saw smokestacks from the factories, those smokestacks were a sign of progress. But one day, we noticed that those smokestacks were putting things into the air that were bad for our health. We began to worry about pollution.

Lots of things that were thought to be good in previous years now came into question. What do you do when you see systems that you used to trust go bad? What do you do in the face of alleged corruption?

Well, many began to protest. The ways that they protested were celebrated in the musical, "Hair". I was influenced by being in that play, so I bought into a lot of what it presented. Some protested by rejecting authority. That meant breaking standards. For example: Good young men had short hair. Protestors grew long hair. Since I bought into all this, I grew my hair down to my shoulder blades and added a beard. Some protested by going to rallies and holding signs and chanting chants and singing songs. Since I bought into all this, I did that, too.

Today, a lot of young people follow the pattern that I went through. They grow up in normal homes. They live normal lives. Then, they go away to school, or they start hanging around with a different crowd. At some point, they meet people who are unhappy with the world. And so, they start on the path to becoming protesters.

All protesters have something in common: ***They want to change their world.***

We're in a section of Matthew, chapters five through seven, that we're calling "The Christian Manifesto". This section of Matthew breaks down into several sub-parts, so we haven't focused on the main idea for a while now. We haven't talked about a "Manifesto".

We've learned that there are people in the world who are blessed. We learned that there are important things that matter to the master. Those things tell us what the world should look like. We just learned about best practices for followers of Jesus. Those things tell us how to be effective. But now, it's time to get back to the Manifesto.

Any good manifesto teaches people how to change the world. So, today we begin the final section of the Christian Manifesto. Jesus teaches us "Principles for Changing the World."

In the coming weeks, we'll learn what they are. Today, we're going to learn the first principle for changing the world: We're going to learn where to start. Let's learn about the first principle by reading from Matthew, chapter 7.

Matthew 7:1-5

7 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 "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? 4 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? 5 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, Jesus teaches us the first principle for changing the world. Where to you start? Answer: You start with yourself.

Let's take this apart.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. (7:1)"

Jesus tells us to avoid judging others. What does he mean by that? If this were the only statement in the Bible, we would take it as meaning that we should spend our lives sitting passively when other people do things that we believe are wrong. However, it's not the only statement in the Bible. Let's look at some others.

We'll start by learning something about one of the greatest men in the Bible – Moses.

The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. (Exodus 18:13)

So, we see here that Moses, one of the greatest men in the Bible, was a Judge. It says here he "...sat to judge the people." It turns out that there were a number of people in the Old Testament who were judges. There's even a book in the Bible with that title. Are there other places in the Bible that talk about judging? How about the New Testament?

2 ...do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we are to judge angels? (I Corinthians 6:2-3)

Look at that: "The saints will judge the world", and, "...we are to judge angels." That sure sounds like judging. In fact, "the saints", people who make up the church of Jesus Christ, are supposed to do it one day.

In some places in the Bible, righteous people are involved in judging. Some are in the past. Some are in the future. So, when Jesus says not to judge, what is he referring to?

I think he's referring to two things. First is the type of judging. Next is the time of judging. Let's look first at the type of judging. We mentioned that Moses was a judge. How did he do it?

We only read one sentence about the kind of judging that Moses did. Let's read more.

13 The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. 14 When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?" 15 And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God; 16 when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." (Exodus 18:13-16)

Look at the main point of what Moses did: "...I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." Various situations were brought before Moses. He met those situations by applying the laws of God.

This started the process of "civil law". There were times when people had disputes. There were times when people committed crimes. Those situations were brought before a recognized governmental official. That official had two main requirements. The first is mentioned here: ***It was someone who knew the laws of God well.***

There was a second requirement: That individual was to conduct thorough investigations.

The judges shall inquire diligently. (Deuteronomy 19:18)

A judge was to listen. They were to examine evidence. They were to see for themselves whether something was true.

It's interesting, God modelled this himself. In the book of Genesis, God meets with Abraham. God announces that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah have fallen into sin. In this conversation, God says the following to Abraham:

Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." (Genesis 18:20-21)

What's God doing here? God is all-present and all-knowing. He didn't have to physically go down to the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. But to make the point, to set the example, he's saying, "I will thoroughly investigate." That's the model.

Here are two important points: If we want to talk about changing the world, we have to know what the world should look like. For that to happen, we need to know God's word. And we must know it well. Next, we must be willing to do the hard work of investigating. We need to ask questions. We need to look. We need to listen.

To understand this, we have to remember the world that Jesus was speaking to. Recall the religious leaders had largely corrupted the study of God's word. They picked the parts they like and ignored the parts they didn't like. The parts they liked were the parts that made them look good - The parts that were easy for them to do. They ignored the parts that identified their sin. This resulted in people who felt superior to everyone around them. People who get into this state have a funny way spending their time: They like to judge people. But, they don't judge the way great leaders like Moses judged.

Here's an example of how the religious leaders acted.

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. (Luke 18:9-14) 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Here's a religious leader, a Pharisee. Does he understand the Scriptures? He's supposed to. But somehow, he thinks the whole law of Moses boils down to just a few sentences. He thinks as long as he doesn't steal or commit adultery, he's fine. He thinks all he has to do is fast and tithe. Now, stealing and adultery are bad. Tithing and fasting are good. It's just that there's a whole lot more involved in righteous living.

To further bolster himself, he looks over at someone else and immediately starts to judge them. He has not been asked to. He has not been invited. He just does it. Does he take the time to investigate? Does he talk to the tax gatherer? No, he just makes a snap judgement and assumes instant guilt.

Now, notice the tax gatherer. This is interesting: Do you know what he's doing? He's judging, too. And, he's being very harsh. But you know what? He's judging himself. He's starting with himself. In the end, Jesus says the Tax collector, considered low life by the religious leaders, will be better off than the Pharisee.

So, Jesus is warning us about the type of Judgement that we employ. There is good judgement. It's based on the Scripture. It does the hard work of investigating. So, Jesus isn't contradicting the rest of Scripture. He's not saying that there should never be judgement. He's saying be careful.

This is not unlike other things that Jesus has said recently. Recall, Jesus said that it would be better to cut off your hand than to sin. When we studied that, we reminded everyone that none of the Apostles felt led to cut off their hands. Jesus was using hyperbole, colorful images, to make his point. The same is true here. Jesus is saying that it would be better to avoid judging all together than to fall into the trap of the religious leaders.

He explains further:

“For in the same way you judge other, you will be judged. “

If for some reason the time comes for you to be judged, how would you like to be judged? Would you like to be judged by some solid, regular standard? Or would you like to be judged by whatever some random person thinks is important, based on what they're good at?

If you were to be judged, would you like a fair investigation? Would you like people to work hard to listen to you? Would you like the investigators to carefully review evidence that may prove your innocence? Or would you like uncaring people to make a snap judgement and ignore you?

Jesus goes on:

...and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Do we need to take a lot of time explaining that? Some of the illustrations Jesus used 2,000 years ago work just fine today. Today we might say, “Whatever you dish out is coming right back at you.”

A further thought: If I were to ask, “Would you like to be judged by the perfect Word of God after a full and fair investigation?”, how would you respond? You might want to give it some thought!

Do you know how the tax collector answered that question? When he started with himself and considered his own sin, he responded by saying, “I don’t want justice.” This man judged himself. He found himself guilty. So, he didn’t ask for justice. *He begged for mercy.* He didn’t have time to look around at others. He was in too much need of God’s grace. And in the end, he was better off than the Pharisee.

This brings us back to our original thought: This is the Christian Manifesto. Jesus is giving us principles to change our world. So, Jesus goes on:

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. (3-5)

Again, do I need to spend a lot of time explaining? This is yet another illustration that has stood up through the centuries. Jesus is a carpenter, so he uses a woodshop illustration. One person gets a little speck of something in his eye. Maybe some sawdust? It’s amazing how one small speck can slow somebody down. This person has stopped everything to work on this speck.

Then, someone else comes along. He’s got a plank in his eye. Some translations say a log. Whereas a speck will slow you down, a plank makes you totally blind. Imagine someone with a big plank sticking out of their eye socket offering to help anyone else with anything. This is comical! This belongs on Saturday Night Live or Monty Python. Anyone foolish enough to allow this person to help is going to wind up in much worse shape than when they started.

And that’s what many people in the days of Jesus were doing. They were blinded by their sin and ignorance. But they offered to help others. They wanted to change their world, but they were blind.

Jesus makes it clear: If you want to change the world, start with yourself.

Here’s where things get hard. No one can change themselves. You must ask God for help. There is a very simple pattern that Jesus offers to any who will follow him. Admit that you’re a sinner. Ask him to help. He will happily save you from your sin. Then, he will give you his Holy Spirit to guide you. You will begin a lifelong journey. You must study God’s word. You must learn it well. This is important: God’s Holy Spirit will help you to apply it first to yourself. You will certainly discover that there is far more sin in your life than you first thought. You will discover that without God’s ongoing help, you can never change.

We just talked about the type of Judgement. Let's talk now about the time of judgement. We'll read two verses. The first is from John's Gospel:

If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. (John 12:47)

Let's read now something that the Apostle Paul said to his friends in the city of Corinth:

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (II Corinthians 5:10)

In the first verse we read from the book of John, we're told that Jesus did not come to judge the world. Rather, his focus was to save the world.

However, there will come a day when Jesus will judge. He will sit on a throne. It's referred to as "the judgement seat of Christ". On that day, he will very much act as a judge. And we read earlier, *we will be helping him*.

So, our focus now, in this age, like Jesus, is to help people to be saved. Once we have invited Jesus to give us his Holy Spirit, we can encourage others to do the same. The Holy Spirit will help people to see their sin so that they can repent and be saved. We can help by understanding God's Word. That way, we can help people by answering questions and offering encouragement. ***But only after we've begun the process of being changed ourselves.***

What does this mean for us today?

Before we close, let's ask an important question: What does this mean for us today?

Let's look at this first on a personal level. We said that in Jesus' day, the Pharisees had a standard of rules that didn't comply with the Scripture. Those people looked down on everyone else - Just like the Pharisee in the story that we read a few moments ago.

Do we do that? Do we have rules that we've selected? Some of them are Scriptural. But, we've picked rules that we like – rules that are easy for us. Some of our rules, perhaps, are not Scriptural. Do we sometimes give in to the temptation to look down on others who don't comply with our rules? Jesus warns his followers to be careful.

Having said that, let's consider this now on a higher level. We started today by saying that lots of people look at their world, and they see things that are wrong. So, they go out and protest. Those are the energetic ones. Some folks stay home and protest. They look at current events on the TV and shake their fists.

Many things that are thought to be wrong are legitimate - Very legitimate.

- The environment.
- Race relations.
- Poverty.
- War.
- Justice.

These are all legitimate concerns.

But, sometimes I wonder. As serious and real as these concerns are, do they sometimes take our attention away from the command of our Lord: To look first at ourselves.

The ancient Pharisee looked to heaven and said, "Thank you Lord, that I'm not like that man over there." Then, he elaborated why he felt he was a wonderful person.

Today, I believe there are some who look into heaven and say, "Thank you Lord, that I'm not like 'those other people'. I care about the environment - I drive a hybrid car. I'm not a racist - I have a friend who's not my people group. I care about injustice - I shake my fist at the TV every time I see it in the news."

Again, things like the environment and poverty and justice are all important. But Jesus warns us: We are to look first at ourselves, no matter how noble the causes that surround us.

Most important: We are to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is evil in our world because our world is filled with sinful and evil people - And you and I are among them. As long as that's true, the world will never be fundamentally changed.

Let's pull all this together.

Conclusion

As we approach the end of the Christian Manifesto, it's time for us to learn principles for changing the world. We learned the first one today: Start with yourself.

We are to be careful about rendering judgement. There will come a time when we judge. When we do, we need to make sure we understand the principles taught in God's word. We are not to judge based on our own preferences, or only on those parts of God's word that we like. We need to carefully investigate. We need to take time to listen to people. We need to understand that whatever we dish out may come back to us someday. We must take the plank out of our own eye before we try to take the speck out of someone else's. Finally, we need to invite Jesus into our life so that his Holy Spirit can teach us.

Once we do these things, then, and only then, can we begin to apply the things we've been learning.

Then we can go out and change the world.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church

www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site

PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net
