

# THE PARABLE OF THE SPECK

Week #1 of a 3-Week Series, "Parables of the Bible"

Sunday, October 29, 2023

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Good morning! So, as you can see, I'm not Richard Maraj. [Congregation laughs] I'm a little surprised at that, because I had no intention of being here standing in this spot this morning. So anyway, I'm going to be filling in for him this morning, and I'll be sharing with you my version of the topic that he had chosen for today, because I didn't know I was going to be here in time enough to come up with my own topic. [Congregation laughs]

So today's topic is about "The Parable of the Speck." And the Parable of the Speck is found in the Gospel of Matthew. It's the 7th chapter, and it's verses 3-5.

And I have a name for this parable, because I've read it numerous times; I call it the "Zip Your Lip Parable." [Laughs with congregation] The parable is directly related to Matthew's teachings on judgement and the idea, "*Judge not, lest you be judged.*" And it's actually a continuation of the entire judgement concept; there's actually a whole list of writings on judgement.

But this particular topic relates specifically to the power of the spoken word and the power behind the spoken word. Because, you see, thinking something has what we might call minute power. But when we speak it, it increases the power. A thought: We have those continuously, so they can always be released or they can be denied or they can even be refuted. But once something is spoken, it kind of takes on a life of its own. And each hearer who hears what is spoken, or hears the word, has a tendency to infuse it with their own interpretations, their own beliefs, or their own disbelief. Or their own version of the essence of what has been spoken.

And so, in one sense of the word, this is powerful stuff. So here's the parable. I quote:

***"Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye' while the log is still in your own eye? And then (by implication suggesting that you can see more clearly than him), you hypocrite!"***

[Laughs] So, you know, I'm a pretty decent Bible scholar, and every time I read the Gospels, I'm always kind of amused. Because the Master has gotten great credit for being a gentle guy, and then he calls his buddies "*hypocrites.*" And he says to them, "*First take the log out of your own eye, so then you'll be able to see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.*" Which is probably true!

But I also have to suggest that all of us have specks or logs in our eyes, and he's talking about the metaphorical process that we go through when we think somebody else's behavior or their opinions are not valid because they don't mesh with our own. And, God knows, in the crazy, mixed-up world that we live in, we get more than ample opportunity to deal with this kind of stuff.

And so it's just, in my mind, a gentle reminder for us to think before we speak ... something my grandmother was always telling me, because I was always spouting out of the mouth, thinking I knew everything. And she would remind me to think before I speak. And I generally try to do that; I am much more of a thinker than I am a talker or a speaker. And so I'm often quiet and listening. But that doesn't mean that my mind isn't churning, and that I already haven't formulated an opinion in my mind about what somebody is talking about, or what their intentions are. And so this parable is a good reminder for me to get myself in shape. And it's a good reminder for all of us to think before we speak.

And interestingly, after this parable in the Scriptures, it is followed by what we now call the Lord's Prayer. So the teachings that came out of this were on divorce; they were on learning how to get along with people, particularly people that we disagree with .. our so-called enemies. And it followed the teachings about the difference between religiosity and piety.

And so we have to keep in mind here that, at this particular time in history, there were all kinds of public displays of religion. There were often people wallowing in self-pity in the streets. There were actually instances of people self-flagellating to show how pious and how pure and how religious they were. There were situations where people would actually be lying in the streets moaning to prove their self-piety. And when we think about all of this today in terms of our personal history and our religious history, this is deep stuff. Because, even as we examine it today -- psychologically or emotionally or spiritually or metaphorically, etc. -- many of these processes that are still embedded in our collective psyche and our everyday living experience are still in existence. So we judge others and they, in turn, judge us. And the cycle continues; it's kind of like being on a merry-go-round.

There's an interesting point in history where, after Milton had written *Paradise Lost*, and William Blake argued that Milton was "*a member of the devil's party*" because he didn't agree with what he had written. And without knowing it, Milton wrote in *Paradise Lost* these words. He said, "*The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven.*"

So, you see, these two intellectual giants, often in disagreements about theology and philosophy and life itself, had their own particular opinions. Both of them had specks or logs in their mind that they couldn't see around.

And these impediments get in the way of our well-being. They get in the way of our spiritual growth. They get in the way of our sense of self. It's just something for us to continually be aware of. In the same time that we are aware of them, I don't think it's something that we should try to establish perfection around. Because a large part of being human is the thought process. Without that thought process, we wouldn't be able to create what we create; we wouldn't be able to accomplish what we accomplish. We wouldn't have any of the inventions that we now have in our world to make our lives better. We wouldn't even have the internal judgement to want to make our lives better.

So to be human is not a bad thing. The point is, for me, I think ... is that we just have to remain positive, and to be as constructive as we can in all ways of our lives.

Thinking is difficult, and that's probably why most of us judge. Because we don't want to have to take the time to think deeply, and to think clearly, and to think without bias. But if this is true, and I know it is for me, it also makes judging easier for us. Because we don't have to reason. We don't have to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. That way we don't have to feel their pain. And so finding that balance is one of the things that this parable is about.

We don't have to try to understand everything, but what we can do is have patience. And if we don't have patience, we can develop patience. And we don't have to develop compassion or an open mind. But we should! And also what we can do is make our home -- to use a metaphor -- in what Dr. John DeMartini calls, and I quote, "*our self-righteousness and self-wrongness.*" And when we understand both sides of that in ourselves, we can understand both sides in everybody we come in contact with.

Oscar Wilde said, "*It's not whether you win or lose in this life; it's how you place the blame.*" [Laughs with congregation] And the truth is: There is enough blame to go around, as the saying goes.

So the Parable of the Speck was a challenge to the disciples to literally rise to a higher standard of being, if you will. And, if you've studied the Bible, you will find a few instances of Jesus, himself, having to rise to a higher level ... which, if history is correct, he did.

So one of my favorite lines from Jesus is this. He says, *"My Father worketh even as I work."* My Father worketh even as I work. Now, as I understand that, that's a direction to me to continue to do my work and God is automatically doing His work with me, in me, around me. And I've got enough faith in that principle, then I'm automatically making the best contribution I can to myself, to my friends, to my family, to those around me. And it's also challenging me at every instance to be better and to do better. And even when I'm doing my best, to be open to meeting the challenges as they come to me.

So I'm coming to a point where these Scriptures have taken on life in me. And what I want to say to you is: All that you've been taught probably has put an itch in your soul, as well. And if we want to make our world better, if we are all willing to take what we've learned and utilize it to the best of our ability, I don't see any way for that not to happen ... And I think of myself still as fairly a young person at 81 years of age. I think I've learned a lot, but I also see so much more for me to learn. So many more opportunities for me to grow. So many more opportunities to expand my vision and my consciousness and my willingness to be a blessing to myself; to my family; and to my world.

And the Parable of the Speck is a powerful piece of Scripture. But the truth is: Whatever is in our eye and our consciousness and our sight and our vision -- whether it's a speck or a log -- either one of them can become annoying. Because inherently, we know we can always do better and be better. But knowing is just the beginning. Doing has to become a part of our ongoing discipline. And I think that's the stretch that Jesus was encouraging his disciples to reach -- is to come to that understanding that they had to develop an ongoing discipline. In other words, if we have to be more prayerful; if we have to be more loving; if we have to be more kind; if we have to open up our level of interaction with others ...

That's why our Circle Groups are creating an incredible experience in our ministry. That builds a sense of oneness; a sense of community; a sense of wholeness that not only helps us as individuals, but it helps the broader Circles, as well.

So I don't have a lot more on this Parable of the Speck. What I want to do with you is share something that I got this week from some of the Circle Groups that are meeting here and that are dealing with some of these issues in those meetings. And I just want to share a few jewels that came out of their meetings to validate what I've said here this morning.

***"In a spirit of gratitude, we will become each others' best friends."*** That came out of a group of strangers meeting together for one or two times. This is an affirmation they developed: In a spirit of gratitude, we will become each others' best friends. We will do this by developing a sense of community through respectively sharing and learning from each other while, at the same time, unconditionally accepting each other for who they are." Do you hear that? I mean, that's self-respect; that's also loving thy neighbor as thyself.

Another Circle intention: ***"We are here to build community and support while sharing at a spiritual level."*** That's what we're doing sitting right here in this Sanctuary. I'm the only one running his mouth, but right now -- in your mind; in your heart -- you're affirming what is true for you and what you believe to be true for yourself. And what you don't believe! Our Circle intention is to build community and support while sharing at a spiritual level. That's what these services are about.

Another intention they had: ***"Our intent is to be grounded in love; to raise our vibration; and to be true to our word in mind, body and spirit so that, in return, we can expand in gratitude."*** In turn, we can grow in gratitude. In turn we can build a new life for ourselves. In turn, we can expand our knowledge, expand our love, expand our friendship. To do this -- to be true to our word in mind, body and spirit.

Another one: ***"During these 40 days of gratitude, we give thanks for our spiritual community, serving as an expansive beacon of universal energy for all who are looking for a sanctuary filled with love, connection and abundance."*** That's what we're all about! And, to be frank, that's what our world is about. We just get caught up in our own confusion and our log in our eye doesn't allow us to see the vision all the time.

Number six: ***"Our group intention is to be open to what wants to emerge within us by focusing our daily practice, enabling us to discover within ourselves our identity without judgement of ourselves or others."*** Judgement; important word! Because the reason we get lost is because our judgement implies to us that we know the truth and others do not. And we have to move beyond that if we want to create peace; if we want to have love; if we want to have harmony; if we want to have abundance. We have to move beyond our personal judgement and expand our consciousness.

Another thing that came out of this. I love this one! Short and to the point! It says, ***"Embrace change with a spirit of gratitude and create a supportive relationship with each other."*** Embrace change with a spirit of gratitude! One of the challenges Jesus had with these 12 incredible disciples who joined him on his journey was they were so diverse -- came from so many different backgrounds -- that they had lived their lives in their own truth without considering the possibility of a universal truth and being grounded in that. And thereby being able to harmonize their individual truths with each other.

Another one: ***"To be open to what wants to emerge from within us."*** Let me ask you a question: On your day-to-day journey, how many times do you find yourself at odds with what wants to emerge from within you? If you don't have any of those experiences, you're a much better person than I am. Because every day, I find myself at odds with myself. When somebody cuts me off at traffic, I'm at odds with myself, because I think the idiot should know what they're doing. [Congregation laughs] But the truth is: They could be on their way to the hospital. They could have any number of things going on in their mind and in their world. And my job is to drive safely; to be aware of what's going on around me; and to be in the best mode that I can be.

Number nine: short and sweet. ***"Embrace change in a spirit of gratitude and create a supportive attitude that works for all."*** Now I ask you: How profound is that? We are all on the same track. We're all trying to understand the reality of this incredible world we live in. And there are some things that need to be worked at -- that we need to chisel away at, to chip away at -- that are logs, obstacles to keep us from being fully engaged in the world in the way that we want to be engaged in it. And a lot of that comes from within us, and some of it comes from outside of us. And we have to learn how to negotiate.

In the simplistic words of Jimmie Scott, ***"Let's get 'er done!"*** [Laughs]

That's all I can say! Because it's up to us. So let's get 'er done!

God bless!

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