

# Do-Gooder Or Think-Betterer

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[0:00] Well, this morning I want us to turn back to Luke 7 and let me read again from verse 33. For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say he has a demon.

The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.

And it's really those words at the very end that we're going to be focusing on in particular. However, for many years and in many parts of the world, the big challenge for the church is that the gospel is unknown.

People need to hear about Jesus, and the church has been commissioned to go to all nations and to tell the good news of what he's done. So we as part of that church, we're on a mission to reach the ends of the earth with the good news of the gospel.

And that has happened in so many ways, and the gospel has spread in amazing ways. But still, for many people throughout the world, the gospel is unknown, and those people who don't know about Jesus absolutely need to hear about him.

[1:10] But here in Scotland, and especially here in Lewis, and in our community, very often we are facing a different problem. The problem is not that the gospel is unknown.

The problem is that the gospel is misunderstood. And that can happen in lots and lots of ways and for lots of reasons. So there are some people who need to learn all about the gospel because they've not heard it.

But there are other people who need to unlearn things that they've maybe thought that actually are not the gospel at all. And as I say, that applies in loads of different ways.

One of the big misunderstandings of the gospel is the idea that becoming a Christian is basically about being a do-gooder. And so that's the idea that, you know, well, if you want to be a Christian, you've got to be a good person.

And if you're a good person, you'll get to heaven. And it's like a kind of bank account. You need to make sure that your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds. And if you're going to become a Christian, then you absolutely need to become a better person.

[2:16] And that's a mindset that I've come across many, many times. People will think, if I'm going to be a follower of Jesus, I need to be a better person. And lots of people think like that.

And it manifests itself in the mindset that says, well, I can't be a Christian because I'm not good enough. Or it can actually manifest itself even in those who are Christians but who maybe still have that kind of do-gooder mindset.

And they think, well, you know, actually, I'm a follower of Jesus. That makes me a wee bit better than other people. And sometimes we can fall into the trap as Christians and as a church of having the posture where we're looking down on other people.

And all of that comes from the kind of mindset that being a Christian is about being a do-gooder. And the technical term that we use for that is legalism. The idea that you do stuff in order to earn favor with God.

That whole conception of the gospel is wrong. It's completely wrong. We do not become Christians by just doing good stuff and by being better people.

[3:24] And the gospel never says you have to make yourself good enough if you're going to be a disciple of Jesus. In the gospel, being saved is not a consequence of doing good.

The truth is the other way around. Doing good and transformed lives are a consequence of being saved. And all of it is by grace.

Grace is the big word that lies across the whole gospel. We are saved by grace. Trusting in Jesus and relying on everything that he has done.

And then as we follow him, we are transformed by his grace. He helps us to grow in faith and to follow him and to apply his word to our lives.

And the fact that it's all about grace means that the posture of the Christian should never, ever be one whereby we look down on other people. Because we are totally and completely dependent on Jesus at every step we take.

[ 4 : 30 ] So, please don't think that being a Christian is all about being a do-gooder. Instead, what I want us to think about today is that in many ways, being a Christian is much more about being a think-betterer.

So, that's our title. Do-gooder or think-betterer. The biblical pattern that's emphasized again and again is that the way we think is going to shape the way that we behave outwardly.

In other words, what that means is that the gospel works from the inside out. The change starts in our hearts. And as the Holy Spirit works in us, our eyes are opened, our desires start to change, our minds are renewed, and we find ourselves starting to think in a completely new and better way.

Now, that's a very gradual process. It's a process that's initiated by God. It's a process that's always done by grace. But that's what lies at the heart of conversion, where we repent and believe.

Repenting means to change the way we're thinking. We turn away from sin. We turn to Jesus. We trust in Him. And we follow Him. And that inward renewal has a tangible effect on how we live out our lives.

[ 5 : 49 ] And we go on that path of sanctification, of growth, where by God's grace, we become more and more like Jesus. All of that's gradual, but all of it starts from the inside and works its way out into our lives.

That means that the gospel is not calling us to be do-gooders. It's calling us to be think-betterers.

And at the heart of what I mean by those terms is that a do-gooder is somebody who's putting on an outward impression that is actually going to feed a whole ton of unhealthy thoughts.

And so that outward impression where we're, you know, ticking the right boxes, putting on the right show, conforming to the right expectations, that fuels a mindset of pride because we actually think, I'm sorted and I'm actually doing a lot better than other people.

It fuels arrogance. It fuels judgment. It creates all sorts of unhealthy things on the inside. The gospel works the other way around. A think-betterer is going to have their heart and their mind remolded by the gospel so that they think in a new way and then that shapes every part of their lives.

Because we read a brilliant example of that just at the end of the passage. It's not what we're going to focus on. But the woman who came and anointed Jesus' feet, she did lots of beautiful things. She anointed his feet.

[ 7 : 10 ] She wiped it with her hair. She wept. She was showing all sorts of beautiful outward actions. But Jesus makes it crystal clear all of that is coming from her heart.

It's from her love and her faith. Something has changed on the inside. And that's what's manifesting itself outwardly. So the gospel is always about being a think-betterer.

Now, you may be amazed to know that that's not actually a real word. And the proper biblical term is the term wisdom. And wisdom is a massive topic in the Bible.

It actually runs right through the whole of scriptures. It's a huge biblical theme. Meaning massive chunks of the Old Testament are devoted to discussing it. So books like Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Song of Songs.

These are what we call wisdom literature. And so much of it is about being wise. And then you come into the New Testament. The same emphasis appears again and again. Wisdom is a massive theme in the Bible.

[ 8 : 14 ] And yet it's so easy to neglect it. And ironically, it's so easy not to think about the way that we think. All of this means that for all of us today, a key part of our growth as Christians, whether you're taking the first step as a Christian today or whether you're taking the next step after following Jesus for many years, all of us need to be growing in wisdom.

That's a key part of growth as a Christian. If you're following Jesus already, if you start following him today, then every week we want to be thinking, how can I be wise this week?

So I guess we're starting with a big point that Christianity is not about being a do-gooder, putting on this outward impression, making us superior to others. Instead, it's much more about being a think-bearer, whereby our lives are shaped by a mindset that conforms more and more to biblical wisdom.

And in verse 37, sorry, verse 35, Jesus is highlighting that our behavior is going to actually reveal what our mindset is like.

He uses this phrase, wisdom is justified by all her children. And what we need to recognize here is that the Pharisees who are around him, as he says these words, they were the ultimate do-gooders.

[ 9 : 36 ] And they wanted to have all these outward expectations that looked like they were the bee's knees religiously. And yet all of it was just feeding mindsets that were so unhealthy.

And so, as you look at the Pharisees in this chapter, and as you look at them throughout the Gospels, you'll see that their outward do-gooderness is actually cultivating a whole pile of negative mindsets that Jesus constantly challenges.

And he does that because unwise thinking will give birth to all sorts of attitudes and behaviors that will damage ourselves and that will hurt other people.

Whereas wisdom, better thinking, is going to produce fruit, is going to glorify Jesus, and he's the one who reveals the wisdom of God perfectly.

So we want to think about thinking better. We want to think about wisdom. All of that raises the big question, what does wisdom actually look like? What does biblical wisdom look like?

[ 10 : 40 ] Well, there is loads that we could say. And as I said, the Bible has got a ton to teach us about wisdom. I want us just to look at this passage and focus on three things, and we're going to have to go super fast through them.

Biblical wisdom will, number one, respond appropriately to circumstances. It will receive bilateral criticism. It will rest confidently on simplicity.

So let's go through these together, starting here. Luke 7 comes at a time when controversy about Jesus is rising. His fame is increasing. We didn't read it, but at the start of this chapter, he healed a centurion's servant.

He raised the son of a widow. And so people are hearing more and more about him. John the Baptist and his followers are getting reports, and they want to find out more about what Jesus is doing as well.

And some people are rejoicing that Jesus has come, and other people, the religious leaders, are getting increasingly unhappy. They are rejecting what Jesus is saying.

[ 11 : 43 ] And in response to all this, Jesus gives the fascinating illustration in verses 31 to 32. He says, To what then shall I compare this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another.

We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. We sang a dirge, and you did not weep. Now, this might be a wee bit of a strange illustration for us to understand.

But I think one of the big points that Jesus is making here is that the people around him, especially the Pharisees, are refusing to respond appropriately to the circumstances that's before them.

So in other words, when there's reason to dance, they don't want to. And when there's reason to weep, they refuse to do it. And that's actually a very common mindset that people can have, whereby we are confronted with circumstances in our lives, and we actually refuse to respond appropriately to what's going on around us.

It can happen. Let me give you a couple of examples. One is that sometimes there's the refusal to recognize things that are good. In other words, we can be cynical. And so that can be about people.

[ 12 : 57 ] Something good happens to somebody, but we don't really want to be happy about that. And we look for something negative about it. And sometimes that can be fueled by jealousy or resentment or whatever it might be.

But you're like, oh, you don't want to be happy about that. It can apply with churches. And so we might hear of a church that's different from us, that's growing, and that wonderful things are happening.

Instead of dancing, we're like scowling. And thinking, they must be doing something wrong. There must be something dodgy going on. But probably most seriously, we can be cynical about ourselves. And there are, I have no doubt that there are many people in here who have done so many good and wonderful and beautiful things in your life.

And yet you think that you're a waste of space. It's so easy to actually respond very inappropriately to what's going on.

But it can happen in the opposite direction. Sometimes there's a resistance to being affected by things that are bad. So there's a reason to weep here, but they don't want to do it.

[14:08] And instead, we want to be stoic, strong, and we don't want to show any weakness at all. So something goes wrong, we pretend it's fine. We get hurt. We try to hide it.

Something bad happens. And we just want to pick up our phones and be distracted. And so this week, there will, I have absolutely no doubt, be many reasons for all of us to dance with joy. But we'll probably miss them. And this week, there may well be many reasons to grieve. But we'll probably try to block them out. The mindset of the Pharisees is a mindset that's really easy to fall into.

Biblical wisdom makes neither of these mistakes. And it's reminding us that God wants our mindset to be such that when there is a moment to dance for joy, God wants us to take it.

There are many wonderful things in our lives. Many wonderful moments. Many wonderful experiences. Many wonderful people. Many, many reasons to dance for joy. We honor God by taking those moments and delighting in his blessings.

[15:17] But when there's a reason to grieve, God wants us to acknowledge it. And so we rejoice together. We suffer together. And when there are times of sadness and sorrow in our lives, God does not say to you, pretend you're fine.

Get over it. He's saying, weep as much as you need to weep. Biblical wisdom balances these two things beautifully. Biblical wisdom will also receive bilateral criticism.

Now, what do I mean by this? I forgot to put that slide in, so I'll have to go back one. There it is. This takes us to verse 33, where Jesus says, John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine.

And you say, he has a demon. Son of man has come eating and drinking. And you say, look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Here's an example of criticism coming from all angles.

So John the Baptist was known for his abstinence. And they said, he's demon possessed. He's a madman. Jesus was known for being sociable. And we see that again in this chapter, just the very next paragraph.

[16:27] He's having a meal at the Pharisee's house. And they said he was a glutton and a drunkard and that he hung out with all the wrong people. And I love that these verses are in the Gospels.

Because so often this is the experience that we will have as Christians. So you'll be criticized for being too strict. And then you'll be criticized for not being strict enough.

You'll be criticized for being too serious. Or you'll be criticized for being too cheerful. You'll be criticized for being too formal. Or you'll be criticized for being too informal.

And the big point in all of that is that in general terms, and I know that there's exceptions to this, but in general terms, it's important to recognize that Christ-like wisdom means that you are very likely to end up getting criticized bilaterally.

What I mean by that is that people will judge you from both sides. And so there'll be those who'll see, you know, the way you are as a Christian, the way we are as a church, too formal, too old-fashioned, too restrictive.

[17:34] And usually those people will have no interest in religion. They look at church and they think, it's weird that you gather on a Sunday. It's weird that you sing. And listening to a guy talk for half an hour, that's just really weird.

And so people who have very little interest in religion think that we're formal, we're archaic, and, you know, will criticize us in that way. But then there'll be other people who will see us, and I just mean the church in general.

I don't just mean specifically us, but it does apply to us. Others who will see us as being far too lax, or far too generous, or far too cheerful. And usually these are people who are highly religious.

And they've got an extremely intricate set of expectations for what being a Christian should look like. They've got a bar that's here, and most other people don't reach it.

And just as a wee aside there, you know, that's a reminder. The fact that that mindset can often come from people who are hugely interested in religion means that there's a searching question for any Christian, which is, am I being criticized, or am I being the criticizer?

[18:47] And that's a question we always, always have to be ready to ask ourselves. And the point I want to make is that biblical wisdom is so often about just maintaining a balance in the midst of complex and difficult situations.

And when you do that, when you strike that balance that will come in the grayness and the complexity of life, what will happen? It will offend people in opposite directions. And that's really because, in many ways, if we depart from biblical wisdom, we will very often find ourselves at extremes.

So, for example, a good example is money. Biblical wisdom wants us to be responsible and generous. Responsible and generous. And if you depart from that, you'll end up at one of two extremes.

You'll end up reckless with your money, or you'll end up stingy and unwilling to share. Same with work and rest. Biblical wisdom wants us to work hard and rest appropriately.

Work hard, rest appropriately. That's the biblical balance. You depart from that, you're either going to end up burnt out or lazy. Biblical wisdom is so often calling us back to a healthy balance.

[ 20 : 04 ] And that's where it's important, I think, and helpful to recognize this concept of bilateral criticism. If you are only being criticized from one direction, then maybe you're not in the right place.

But if you're getting criticized, if it feels like you're being criticized on both sides, then you're probably closer to biblical wisdom. That's definitely what Jesus and his followers experienced. And then thirdly, we're seeing here that biblical wisdom will rest confidently on simplicity. A final characteristic of the Pharisees in this passage, and again throughout the Gospels, is that they kind of saw themselves as having this sophisticated understanding of everything.

And they would gravitate towards a mindset that was intricate and complex and difficult. And you see a really good example of this in verse 39 of the chapter in that incident when a woman came and anointed Jesus' feet as he ate with the Pharisee.

Simon the Pharisee, who's hosting Jesus in this moment, has this kind of complex, intricate framework for viewing the world around him.

[ 21 : 25 ] And he reasons that Jesus obviously is not as sophisticated as he is in his thinking. And he says, Jesus clearly doesn't know what kind of woman this is, is what you have in verse 39 here.

Because if he was a prophet, he would realize what kind of a woman it was that was touching him, that she's got a terrible reputation, and that she shouldn't be coming near him. And behind what Simon says lies this complex set of prejudices against people who he would regard as sinners. He's got this set of expectations about what a prophet should or should not do. And he's got this framework that has this complicated requirement of evidence about whether or not a prophet like Jesus is actually genuine.

So Simon's thinking is full of all this complex, intricate baggage, and it's making him blind. And Jesus responds to that intricate foolishness with beautiful, simple wisdom.

But she is so sorry, and she's so thankful that Jesus has given her hope. The tax collectors and sinners that Jesus ate with had gone wrong in so many ways, but they could still be his friends.

[ 22 : 47 ] And the same principle actually applies to John the Baptist. He's starting to get overly complex in his thinking. He's thinking, you know, Jesus, are you the one that was to come? He wasn't sure. Let's find out, or should we wait for somebody else?

Jesus gives them a simple answer. He says to John's disciples, go and tell them what you've seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them.

In all of Jesus' interactions in this chapter, he displays a beautiful simplicity. So should John the Baptist stop searching?

Yes. Can sinners and tax collectors be friends with the Messiah? Yes. Can this woman who has messed up badly been forgiven? Yes.

Can Jesus quench your deepest thirst? And can he fill your heart with joy?

[ 23 : 48 ] And can he transform your life and your eternity and heal you from all the bruises that life has given you? Yes. Yes.

He absolutely can. We must never forget that the gospel is astoundingly profound in its depth and detail.

But the entry point is always simple. The gospel is a wee bit like a library.

A library is full of just masses of information. I don't know if any of you have been to one of the massive libraries in Edinburgh or London. You go in and there's just endless amounts of information to discover and delve into.

A library is extraordinary in its depth and detail. How do you get into a library? You just walk through a door.

[ 24 : 57 ] The entry point to a library is so simple. And that's exactly what the gospel is like. And biblical wisdom just rests on that simplicity.

And so the gospel is calling us to be wise. It's calling us to be think betterers. It's calling us to think in a new and better way.

That's why I wanted to read from Romans 12 at the very start of our service. Paul writes there, don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. And we're being taught in Luke 7 that biblical wisdom will respond appropriately to circumstances.

It will receive bilateral criticism. It will rest confidently in simplicity. And I've just touched on those things so briefly, so please just fill out application points for all of these things more.

As we conclude, I just want to highlight two crucial lessons. One is that most people around us don't want to think like this.

[ 26 : 03 ] And so for many people, accepting your circumstances is not acceptable. Instead, people want to dictate their circumstances. They want to decide what can and can't happen to them. And most of all, they want to set the terms of what our relationship with God might be like.

Biblical wisdom doesn't do that. Biblical wisdom trusts God and rests on him throughout whatever circumstances life will bring.

For people around us, criticism is actually very appealing. and respect for other people is not that respectable. People are so quick to criticize. People want to magnify the mistakes of others.

And we feel a pressure to join in. And that's true, isn't it? Whether you're at school, whether it's at work, or maybe it's something in the community.

Everybody around you starts to, the kind of simmering criticisms of people start to build. You hear people saying this, that, and that, and the next thing.

[ 27 : 07 ] And what do we feel? We feel massive pressure to join in. Biblical wisdom doesn't do that. And for many people, simplicity is not sufficient.

For so many people, when it comes to the gospel, simple is not enough. We feel that we need to know more. We feel that we need to improve more.

And perhaps maybe for many people, you feel you need to experience more. And usually that involves something spectacular. You think, I need to experience something spectacular. If I'm ever going to know if I'm a Christian or not.

It's not true. In the better thinking of the gospel, simplicity is always enough. You see that with this woman.

Another great example is in Acts 16. The jailer says, what do I need to do to be saved? The apostle said, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.

[ 28 : 09 ] The gospel is not about being a do-gooder. It's about being a think-betterer. And the very last thing I want to say is really the most important point of all. The reason we can say all this is because the ultimate think-betterer is Jesus.

Let me ask you, what do people think of you? That question, what do people think of me? What do people think of you? That can sometimes be our biggest source of encouragement or maybe even more accurately, it's our biggest source of fear.

It's the thing we worry about more than anything else. What do people think of me? Well, I want to ask you, what does Jesus think of you?

And Jesus is the ultimate think-betterer because he thinks better of you and he wants better for you and he's offering better to you.

And he knows exactly what your circumstances are today. However you are feeling, he will meet you right where you are. And Jesus takes all the criticism that ultimately belongs to us because on the cross, he took our place and he has absolutely not brought you here today to start criticizing you.

[ 29 : 31 ] his message is a message of forgiveness, of healing, of forgetting about our mistakes. And most importantly of all, Jesus is satisfied with simplicity.

So if you can say to Jesus today, I really want to follow you. If you can say to Jesus today, I really want to follow you.

Even though there's probably tons of fears and doubts and uncertainties and baggage and hesitation, there's tons of other stuff, that's fine. But if you can say to Jesus today, I really want to

follow you, Jesus will respond by saying, that's enough for me.  
Let's go. Amen. Let's pray.