

The Messiah Has Come
Week 19
Matthew 5:33-37
“Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say”

Introduction

Do not misuse the Name of The LORD your God, because The LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses His Name. **Exodus 20:7**

Do not give false testimony against your neighbor. **Exodus 20:16**

Like most of the people of my generation, I tend to look back to a better time. Or at least, we thought it was a better time. The world has always been a sinful place, and it's not like any one generation had a lock on “goodness”, but I most certainly can remember some things being better when I was young. In particular, I remember how a man's word used to be his bond. I grew up in a farming community where most deals and bargains were struck with a simple handshake. These days you almost have to sign a stack of legal documents just to buy something out of a vending machine. No one seems to honor their word anymore. You need some legal mechanism to hold people accountable, and often, this still isn't enough.

I remember when I was working as a loan officer in a bank. One of the other consumer credit officers in our branch had a woman come to him for a personal loan. She seemed trustworthy and breezed through all the necessary paperwork and credit checks with ease, so the officer agreed to lend her the money. In retrospect, I suppose, he should have asked her a few more questions, for as it turned out, she signed the loan documents, agreeing to the terms, and as soon as she walked out the door she took the money to her attorney to pay her bankruptcy fees! She then filed bankruptcy and included *us* in the default arrangement. In other words, we loaned her the money so that she could be guaranteed never to have to pay it back!

Now, I will be honest, I had a field day teasing the other loan officer about his offering a new service for our branch! I even printed him up a nice sign to hang in his office that read, “For Bankruptcy Loans, Apply Within.” We laughed about it for a while, but really what kind of person would be so willing to sacrifice their integrity in such a brazen fashion? We live in a world where people consider integrity to be optional. And a pledge means nothing, for promises are apparently made to be broken. And what does God think of such behavior? We need look no further than the Sermon on The Mount and hear the words of The LORD saying, “**Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’, and your ‘no’, be ‘no’.**” (**Matt. 5:37a**).

Now, I have no idea of that particular woman's faith, or whether or not she was an active member in any church whatsoever, but I can tell you this: She most certainly did NOT belong to Christ. How do I know this? For the Scriptures plainly tell us:

The wicked person borrows and does not repay, but the righteous one is gracious and giving. **Psalms 37:21**

For you see, to the child of God, integrity matters. And when we fall short of this standard, we feel the conviction of The Holy Spirit within us. To keep one's word is the mark of a born-again Believer, for this is just one of the things a righteous person does. And as our LORD Himself has said:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. **Matthew 5:6**

So, as we continue in our study of The Sermon on The Mount this morning, we will see for ourselves just how much our honesty and integrity matter to God. For once more, to be untruthful or purposely deceptive with those around us reveals for all to see the inner condition of our heart, for to bear false witness is to align ourselves with the enemy of truth, namely Satan, for he is “**a liar and the father**

of lies” (John 8:44). So let us hear the words of Christ in regards to our personal integrity, and the command of God to be a people who say what they mean and mean what they say, for in this passage we see *Vows Foolishly Taken*, *Voices of Truth Plainly Spoken*, and the *Vices of The Evil One*. Please allow me to explain.

Vows Foolishly Taken (vs. 33-36)

Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to The LORD. But I tell you, don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God's throne; or by the earth, because it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of The Great King. Do not swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. Matthew 5:33-36

You've really got to hand it to those Pharisees, for they were masters at trying to “game the system”, as it were! So, in order to fully understand this commandment, you have to have a bit of insight into the little shell game these so-called “righteous leaders” had been playing with the truth. *The Old Testament* most certainly allowed for people not only to make vows unto The LORD, but to also make vows *in His Name*. One of the more common ones in the OT was when someone promised to do something, and they would vow, “As surely as *The LORD lives*, I will do... such and such.” A perfect example of this kind of sworn statement can be found in the second chapter of **1 Kings**:

The King Solomon took an oath by The LORD: “May God punish me and do so severely if Adonijah has not made this request at the cost of his life. And now, as The LORD lives — The One Who established me, seated me on the throne of my father David, and made me a dynasty as He promised — I swear Adonijah will be put to death today!” Then King Solomon dispatched Benaiah son of Jehoiada, who struck down Adonijah, and he died. 1 Kings 2:23-25

This is but one example of many of such an oath taken in The LORD'S Name, so there was no command against doing thus. Even to this day, when we perform a wedding ceremony, the bride and groom take vows to love one another for life in the Name of The LORD. However, it is also of the utmost seriousness in which we should enter into such an oath, for God is sorely displeased when we do not honor our vows made before His throne.

When you make a vow to God, don't delay in fulfilling it, because He does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow. Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth bring guilt on you, and do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry with your words and destroy the work of your hands. For many dreams bring futility; so do many words. Therefore, fear God. Ecclesiastes 5:4-7

Now what The LORD was teaching about integrity his sermon, was an expansion of what Solomon had written in *Ecclesiastes*, namely the latter portion of the passage above. The focus was on why it was important not to take a foolish vow before The LORD, for He will hold us accountable for what we say.

Now on to the manipulation of the Pharisees... They took this verse and used it to say, that there were some vows that a person did not have to keep! Oh they insisted that a vow taken in The Name of The LORD had to be honored, but what if you wanted to make a promise, that maybe you would keep and maybe you would not? That was easy (according to their twisted logic), just swear by something else other than God. Swear by the earth, or Jerusalem, or even by one of your body parts instead, and then God would not hold you accountable.

In other words, lying was ok, as long as you followed the correct protocol! Once more, these wicked men were all about the outward appearance, but they had no concern whatsoever for the inner man. And it is the heart that God sees. The intent reveals what is hidden inside. And someone who would hedge their bets with a lesser vow, so that they might have a loophole for getting out of keeping their word, most definitely has a heart issue. The LORD actually expounded further upon this wanton dishonesty in a later message found in **Matthew 23**:

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever takes an oath by the temple, it means nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gold of the temple is bound by his oath.' Blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? Also, 'Whoever takes an oath by the altar, it means nothing; but whoever takes an oath by the gift that is on it is bound by his oath.' Blind people! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore, the one who takes an oath by the altar takes an oath by it and by everything on it. The one who takes an oath by the temple takes an oath by it and by Him Who dwells in it. And the one who takes an oath by heaven takes an oath by God's throne and by Him Who sits on it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, and yet you have neglected the more important matters of The Law — justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things should have been done without neglecting the others. Blind guides, you strain out a gnat, but gulp down a camel!

Matthew 23:16-24

Voices of Truth Plainly Spoken (vs. 37a)

But let your 'yes' mean 'yes', and your 'no' mean 'no'.

Matthew 5:37(a)

Every point given in this sermon focuses on the inside and not on the outside. The Pharisees were all about outward appearances, but God is concerned with who we are. And truth be told, without inner integrity, it is impossible to honor God simply by what we do. God wants us to be transformed within, and not just to have a superficial *makeover*. I remember when I was a kid, sometimes our house looked like a disaster inside. I had two other brothers, and we could really wreck the place.

Back in those days, before cell-phones and day planners with intense scheduling, sometimes, folks would just drop by the house unannounced (I know right?!). And when we all saw the cars pulling in the drive, you would not believe how rapidly we all moved to do a superficial cleaning of our living room! We threw everything else in closets and bedrooms and then tightly shut the doors so that no one could see the disaster. Oh our living room would look presentable by the time our company had parked the car and knocked on the door, but oh, what would they have thought of us, if they had dared to venture behind any of those closed doors!

For some folks, their religion is just like that superficial house cleaning. Oh, they present themselves pretty well, but if you could just take a tour of the inner chambers of their heart, well that would be a different matter entirely. Let's be honest here, wouldn't it be a good idea to look around at what kind of mess is way down deep inside us and do a bit of "spring cleaning?"

After Christ called out the religious phonies for their corrupt and ridiculous attitude toward truthfulness, He said one of the most powerful things in this entire Sermon; "Let your yes... *mean* yes, and let your no... *mean* no." And I really believe that a lot of Christians miss the point of that statement. For you see, if you have a reputation for being truthful in all things, if you have a pure heart that's true, then you don't have to swear an oath in order for people to believe you. Your reputation for honesty dispels any and all need for swearing.

Think about it. If a person tells you something, and then has to say, "I swear that's the truth" in order for people to believe it, then maybe they have a reputation for stretching the truth a bit. I said that in a kind way, truth be told they're more than likely a liar! We all know the type. They live in a world of half-truths and exaggerations to the point that when they do cry "*wolf*" nobody comes running.

God wants His children to say what they mean and mean what they say. And if you have an honest heart, you'll speak truth every time you open your mouth. In essence, your **yes will mean yes, and your no will mean no.** I can remember my dad always telling me, "Son, if you say you will do something, then do it, even if it hurts." Wow, that sounds exactly like something Jesus would say! But how many people do you know that only keep their word so long as it is convenient.

Recently, I purchased an incubator for my turkey eggs on Craigslist. I called the lady up and gave her my word that I would be there to pick it up on a certain day and at such and such time. I called her when I left the house and got there exactly when I said I would. I remember what she said to me when I got there; *"I had a lot of people who wanted to buy this, who said they could be here earlier, but I believed you, because I could hear the honesty in your voice."* It was at that moment that I was able to witness to her and share my faith. Why? Because if you think anyone would ever believe a liar when they spoke about Christ, well... you're sadly mistaken. Even pagans know that God is all about the truth.

We make excuses for our dishonesty, by saying it doesn't really hurt anyone. We call them "white lies", instead of lies, as we try and minimize the damage within our dishonest hearts. When my kids were young, they sprang a word on me that I had never heard before. When I caught them in what they perceived as a "minor falsehood", they proceeded to tell me that it was just a *"fible"*! Now, I have to admit that was a new one. But guess what, they still were punished for lying, creativity notwithstanding. Because in reality, there are no little white lies. There are no *fibles*. There is only truth and deception. And Christ has saved us for better things than a dishonest heart. The true born-again Believer will say what they mean and mean what they say. So, child of God, be as honest as your Heavenly Father. Let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no.

Because God wanted to show His unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of promise, He guaranteed it with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.
Hebrews 6:17-19

So, how do we know that our hope is secure in Christ? Because God has promised it, and our God CANNOT lie. To be His child is to do likewise.

Vices of The Evil One (vs. 37b)

Anything more than this is from the evil one.

Matthew 5:37(b)

Jesus tells us that dishonesty is from the devil himself. He warned the Pharisees that they were the devil's own children, for the way that they corrupted The Law and for their refusal to believe in Him.

You are of your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies.
John 8:44

When we offer up anything less than pure honesty, honesty in our speech, honesty in our dealings, honesty in the way we pay our debt, then we are not honoring Christ, but rather, carrying out the desires of the father of lies. May these things never be! Integrity takes a long time to build and can be torn down forever in a moment. So many have fallen for the temptation of compromising the truth in order to receive some short term personal gain. But Christ has called us to so much more than this.

We have been chosen to be His ambassadors here in this fallen land, and to be as such we must maintain our moral purity. For:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Matthew 5:8

When God sets a person on the good path, there will be many temptations along the way that will try and lead us astray, but so much is at stake. And without integrity, no one will ever believe our message of truth. To compromise our truthfulness is a prime example of what it means for the “*salt to lose its saltiness*”, as described in **Matthew 5:13**. We live in a society where the truth has become simply a lie with the right “*spin*” placed upon it. But God forbid, the Christian who will set aside his or her integrity. Our word is to be our bond. If we were to ask for a show of hands today for those who desire to follow after the devil, I have little doubt that no one here would raise their hand in the affirmative. However, when we are willing to set aside our integrity by being anything less than truthful, make no mistake, it is the devil we are emulating.

Christ was crucified for telling the truth. Simple as that. He would not sell His personal integrity at any price. He would have never cheated on His taxes, on a test at school, or in any relationship. And when He spoke truth to those in power, He was willing to die for it. May we be just as committed to speaking and living truth at all times. To be like Christ is to be a truth-teller, for He *is* the truth (**John 14:6**). And to be dishonest is to allow the devil to hold sway over our speech. We must heed the warnings of Scripture:

But the cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolators, and all liars — their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death. **Revelation 21:8**

TRUTH!!!