

The Sermon on the Mount

Keeping Our Word (Matthew 5:33-37)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. As Jesus sat down with His disciples and began teaching them in what we not call "The Sermon on the Mount" He made several statements that must have shocked and surprised many of those who heard Him.
 - A. The one statement that must have surprised most was when Jesus said, *"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."* **(Matthew 5:20)**
 1. The Pharisees were a very strict religious sect of the Jews in Jesus' day, and the scribes were men who had become the legal experts in interpreting the Law of Moses.
 2. As we've said in previous lessons, the scribes and Pharisees were looked upon by the common people of that day as being at the very PINNACLE of righteousness and faithfulness to God.
 - a. So, how could Jesus POSSIBLY expect that the righteousness of His disciples EXCEED the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees?

3. But if you remember, the scribes and Pharisees were seen by Jesus as being nothing more than rank hypocrites.
 - a. Their so-called righteousness was Inconsistent and contradictory because they didn't practice what they preach.
 - b. Their righteousness was all show – they were like an actor on a stage, giving their greatest performance when they were in the public eye.
 - c. They were extremely legalistic.
 - d. And their so-called righteousness was merely a mask to hide their real fleshly, worldly nature because inwardly they were sinners who could see the sins of others but not their own.
 - e. And finally, they were untrustworthy, deceitful and dishonest because they didn't keep their word.

II. As we moved deeper into the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew chapter 5 verses 21 through 48**, Jesus revealed the kind of person His disciples should be.

A. In THESE verses Jesus gets down to the very ESSENCE of what it means to be RIGHTEOUS.

1. He shows that righteousness is NOT simply EXTERNAL COMPLIANCE with the Law of God.

2. TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS goes to the INTERNAL CONDITION of OUR HEART – and it's that internal condition of our heart that MOTIVATES us to be obedient to God.
- B. Therefore, in **verses 21 through 48** Jesus repeatedly said: *"You have heard that it was said... But I say to you..."*
1. In these verses Jesus does two things.
 - a. First, He sweeps away all the MAN-MADE DOCTRINES and TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS of the Old Testament Law of Moses that had been handed down from generation to generation.
 - b. And second, He reveals the TIMELESS MORAL AND ETHICAL TRUTHS that God has ALWAYS expected people to live by.
 2. In other words, Jesus was introducing the fundamental truths of the GOSPEL OF CHRIST that would eventually replace the Old Testament Law of Moses.
 - a. These eternal truths and timeless principles would be the foundation of the NEW COVENANT – the GOSPEL of the KINGDOM.

BODY:

- I. In these verses Jesus began by reminding His disciples of what the Old Testament Law of Moses taught regarding keeping ones word.
 - A. **Matthew 5:33** – *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'"*
 1. In essence Jesus was saying, *"You have heard from generation after generation that the Law which was given to Moses on Mount Sinai taught, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'"*
 2. In fact, that's EXACTLY what the Old Testament Law of Moses taught.
 - a. **Leviticus 19:12** – *"And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD."*
 - b. **Numbers 30:2** – *"If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."*
 - c. **Deuteronomy 23:23** – *"That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth."*

3. There are other passages in the Old Testament where this same principle of keeping our word is taught.
 - a. **Ecclesiastes 5:2-7** – *"Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few. 3 For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words. 4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed – 5 Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God."*
 - b. In other words, Solomon said if we say we're going to DO something, or if we make a PROMISE, we BETTER keep our word because God WON'T BE happy with us if we don't keep our word. It would be better for us to NOT make any promises than to make a promise and not KEEP it. And whatever you do, don't come back and say, "I know I PROMISED, but I

didn't mean it the way you took it," or "I know I PROMISED,
but circumstances CHANGED."

- B. Why would someone make a promise and not keep it? Why would someone give their word that they will do something, and later back out of their commitment and break their word?
1. The answer is simply that there is a problem with the condition of their HEART.
 2. Their righteousness is similar to that of the scribes and Pharisees who were the MOST REVERED religious leaders in the days of Jesus, but who were ALSO untrustworthy, deceitful and dishonest because they didn't keep their word.
- C. In fact, Jesus later revealed just how deceitful and dishonest the scribes and Pharisees actually were.
1. When someone made an OATH or SWORE by the name of God they were calling on God as a WITNESS to their honesty and integrity.
 - a. In other words, they would swear or affirm by the name of Almighty God as their Witness that what they are SAYING is ABSOLUTELY TRUE.

- b. Or, they would swear of affirm by the name of Almighty God as their Witness that they WILL KEEP their word or their promise.
2. However, in the days of Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees came up with what they thought were loop-holes in the Law of God that would allow them to AVOID having to always keep their word.
- a. **Matthew 23:16-22** – *"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' 17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.'*
 - b. The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees taught that the Temple in Jerusalem, which was made by the hands of men, was not as great as the massive amounts of gold that adorned the pinnacles of the Temple because gold was a creation of God.
 - c. They also taught that the alter upon which animal sacrifices were made, and which was built by the hands of men, was not as great as the animal being sacrificed because that sacrificial animal was a creation of God.

- d. Therefore, if you swear an oath, or make a promise, and you want to leave yourself an OUT – a way to OUT of KEEPING that oath or promise – then swear or affirm your oath by the TEMPLE or the ALTER, but NOT BY the GOLD of the Temple or the SACRIFICE on the alter.
 - e. If you affirm your oath by that which is made by the hands of mere men then you DON'T have to keep that oath or promise.
 - f. But, if you swear by what GOD CREATED then you ARE obligated to keep your oath or promise.
2. Now let me clarify something here. NOWHERE in ALL the BIBLE did God EVER allow ANYONE to get out of keeping their oaths or promises.
- a. God NEVER allowed His people to break promises, or to not keep promises – that would be tantamount to God saying it's okay to LIE!
 - b. The loop-holes taught by the SCRIBES AND PHARISEES were nothing more than an INVENTION of their own wicked, deceitful, dishonest hearts.
3. Even the Old Testament prophets, who lived hundreds of years before Jesus, spoke about the lying and deceit that existed among the people during some of the darkest days of the nation of Israel.

- a. **Jeremiah 5:1-2** – *"Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her. Though they say, 'As the LORD lives,' surely they swear falsely."*
- b. **Hosea 4:1-2** – *"Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: 'There is no truth, or merc,y or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed after bloodshed.'"*

D. People who are dishonest, deceitful and who will not keep their word have a serious HEART PROBLEM – it's not so much that they are being dishonest, deceitful and lying with their LIPS, it's that their dishonesty and deceitfulness and lying words originates in their HEART.

1. Even the Psalms speak of the need for us to be truthful and honest and pure in our HEARTS.

- a. **Psalms 15:1-2** – *"LORD, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart..."*

- b. **Psalm 24:3-4** – *"Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
Or who may stand in His holy place? "He who has clean
hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an
idol, nor sworn deceitfully."*

E. Therefore, Jesus told His disciples that the teachings of the Old Testament Law of Moses were perfectly clear.

1. Vows to the Lord, or to ANYONE for that fact, MUST be kept.
2. And, God DEMANDS truthfulness, honesty and integrity in ALL we say or do.

II. But now, Jesus tells His disciples what He expected of THEM, and what He ALSO expects of US TODAY who claim to be His disciples.

A. Rather than feel we need to affirm our oaths or promises by invoking God as a Witness, Jesus said we need to practice what God has ALWAYS demanded of His people – being truthful in our hearts.

1. **Matthew 5:34-37** – *"But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."*

2. In fact, even James – the Lord's brother – said essentially the same thing in his letter to first century Christians: **James 5:12** – *But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.*
 3. So, let's take the remainder of our time this morning to fully understand what Jesus is saying here.
- B. Some believe that Jesus was forbidding ALL oaths – even those made in a court of law when He said in **Matthew 5:34** – *"But I say to you, do not swear at all..."?*
1. But, I don't believe that's what Jesus OR James is saying.
 2. Affirming what we say by invoking God as a Witness to the truthfulness of our testimony was common even during New Testament times:
 - a. Jesus was willing to answer under oath when He was on trial before the Sanhedrin: **Matthew 26:62-64** – *And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" 64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said.*

Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

- b. The apostle Paul affirmed what he said on occasions with solemn oaths:
 - (1). **2 Corinthians 1:23** – *"Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth."*
 - (2). **Galatians 1:20** – *"Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie."*
- c. God has sworn an oath to us: **Hebrews 6:16-18** – *"For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. 17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."*
- d. Even an angel of God swore an oath: **Revelation 10:5-6** – The apostle John said, *"The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven 6 and*

swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it..."

3. So, affirming what we are saying by invoking God as a witness is NOT unbiblical – in fact, it's VERY biblical.
4. Both Jesus and James seem to be qualifying their statements concerning oaths
 - a. In **Matthew 5:34** when Jesus said, "*swear not at all*" He immediately qualified the KIND of swearing He was condemning – flippant and hypocritical oaths commonly voiced by the people.
 - (1). **Matthew 5:34-36** – "*But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.*"
 - b. In **James 5:12** when James command "*do not swear*" he also qualified the KIND of oaths He was condemning – meaningless, flippant and hypocritical oaths which were also common among the people in that day.

(1). **James 5:12** – *But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.*

5. So, it seems that the only exceptions to not swearing oaths would be solemn oaths made in judicial circumstances, and those oaths that affirm some important biblical or divine truth.
- C. However, let me add that the safest of all courses would be to simply "*swear not at all,*" or invoke God as our Witness, under any circumstances.
1. Fortunately, in courts of law in this country we're allowed to "*confidently affirm*" in judicial matters.
 2. However, there is simply no grounds for us to judge or condemn those who DO swear and oath, or invoke God as Witness, in affirming the truthfulness of what they say.
- D. Jesus wants us ALL to be the kind of person whose YES means YES, and whose NO means NO.
1. The Lord demands that those who would be His followers be the kind of people whose word is BOND – who are recognized for their honesty and their integrity.
 2. The Lord demands that those who would be His disciples to be men and women who are trustworthy and dependable.
 3. We need to be the kind of people who:

- a. Who never make promises or give our word unless we intend to KEEP our promises and our word.
- b. Who never break promises – no matter how hard they may be to KEEP.
- c. Who never say one thing and mean another.
- d. Who never lie, or deceive, or who never twist or pervert the truth.

CONCLUSION:

- I. When it comes to doing as the psalmist said in **Psalm 15** – *speaking the truth in your heart* – does your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees?
 - A. Are you a man or woman whose life is characterized by honesty and integrity?
 - 1. Sadly, we're living in a world where truth is a rare commodity.
 - 2. Truth has become relative rather than absolute.
 - a. In other words, so many in our society believe there are times when lying is totally justified.
 - b. It's NEVER justified!

- c. Even though we might lie for what we consider the greater good – such as lying to avoid hurting someone – it's still a lie, and it's still a sin.
 - 3. But people continue to make promises, to give their word, to make oaths with little or no intention of keeping them.
 - a. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the way wedding vows have changed over the past several decades.
 - (1). Traditional wedding vows used to be something like this:

"I take you to be my wife/husband, to love, comfort, and keep you, and to forsake all others and remain true to you as long as we both shall live."
 - (2). But in a society where vows are broken and divorce is rampant, perhaps we need to change wedding vows to be something like this: "I take you to be my wife/husband, to love, comfort, and keep you, and to forsake all others and remain true to you until we have irreconcilable differences, or until someone comes along who I like better."
- B. If we truly claim to be a disciple – a follower – of Jesus Christ, then we must be the kind of man or woman whose life is characterized by truth and integrity.

1. The apostle Paul summed it up this way as he wrote to Christians in his day.
 - a. **Colossians 3:8-10** – *But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him...*
2. Have you put away all of these things from your life: anger, wrath (rage), malice (hatred), blasphemy (saying something bad about someone in an effort to destroy their credibility), filthy language (profanity, or suggesting language), and lying?
3. If you haven't put away these things from your life because you've never given your life to Jesus Christ to become His disciple, then you can be cleansed of all these sins and every other sin in your life by coming to Christ in complete obedience, believing Him to be the Son of God, repenting of your sins, and being washed by the blood of Jesus Christ in the waters of baptism for the remission of sins.
4. But if you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, and yet some of these sins have crept back into your life, then you can be cleansed of all

these sins and every other sin in your life by coming to Jesus Christ with a repentant heart, confessing those sins to God, and receiving the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ all over again when those sins are completely forgiven and wiped away.