

# The Simple Truth

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[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew chapter 5 verses 33 through 37 will be the text for this morning's sermon.

! I invite you to turn in your Bible there as we today continue going through a series of sermons! on a portion of the sermon. The sermon on the mount, the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived.

If you were here last week, you know, you may see or come to the realization I'm going a little bit out of order. That's by design. We'll come back to verses 27 through 32 next week.

But today we'll look at Jesus' sermon, a portion of his sermon about speaking the truth and not taking oaths. So Matthew chapter 5 verse 33, if you're there with me, would you honor or would you stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together?

Again, you have said, or you have heard, excuse me, that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

[ 1 : 26 ] But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no.

Anything more than this comes from evil. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word.

Would you please be seated? Amen. Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.

That phrase is one many children learn growing up. It's a statement often added to a promise or to express or emphasize how seriously someone is about being honest, telling the truth or keeping a secret.

Pinky promises are another way children learn to express the importance of keeping our Word and securing someone else's pledge.

[ 2 : 44 ] Apparently, there's something about interlocking two pinkies that somehow elevates the level of commitment to the next level, making us feel more sure that the words we spoke were words that we were going to keep.

Those things are funny. They're kind of cute. But if you think about it, they're pretty sad. At a young age, we become aware, we've learned that people don't always tell the truth.

That people don't always keep their promises. That we don't always tell the truth. That we don't always keep our promises. We learn at an early age how to blur the lines between telling the whole truth or just enough of the truth.

To provide ourselves with the wiggle room, we may need to excuse our dishonesty. Like, for example, crossing your fingers behind your back.

Remember doing that? Hopefully, you're not doing it anymore. Somehow, that act, we think, serves as an escape clause for our dishonesty and makes the person who trusted us seem foolish for not checking to see if our fingers were crossed behind our back.

[ 4 : 06 ] In those ways and others, we learn to speak in such a way to gain people's trust and ways to maintain our credibility even though we don't plan on keeping our word.

Older generations in our society remember a time when a person's handshake was enough to seal a deal. They remember a day when a person's word was considered to be their bond.

But I think we can all agree that those days are past. And the credibility gap has only continued to widen as we have come to accept the reality that a lot of people just can't be trusted.

But still, we know that in some cases, as it pertains to some things, people need to be completely and totally honest.

Like in a court of law, a witness who takes the stand is sworn in. They promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

[ 5 : 18 ] Because without truth, even a semblance of justice is impossible. And so, if a person commits perjury, if they are found to have lied under oath, they face harsh penalties.

It's a crime. I remember the MLB steroid hearings back in 2005, Major League Baseball steroid hearings back in 2005.

Some of the best players in the world were listed in the Mitchell Report and were called to testify before Congress about their use of or accusation that they were using performance-enhancing drugs.

And it was clear to me, and I think as time has gone on, it has been verified that they were guilty of using those drugs.

But even though they knew they were guilty, they didn't want to confess the whole truth. So some, like Sammy Sosa, acted as if all of a sudden he couldn't understand or speak English.

[ 6 : 26 ] Some, like Roger Clemens, said that they, you know, were just suffering from a bad memory. Remember he kept saying, I misremember, I misremember, I can't recall certain things.

And so he avoided giving a straight answer. They knew they used those drugs. But they knew that telling the truth would significantly damage their careers and their legacies.

And so they answered as truthfully as they could without telling the whole truth, because doing so would not benefit them.

That's typical. People are inclined to tell the truth, the whole truth, only when it benefits them. Such was the case in the Garden of Eden when sin entered the world.

God called out to Adam. And what did Adam do? He blamed Eve. God spoke to Eve. And what did Eve do? She blamed Satan.

[ 7 : 27 ] He did tempt her. Eve did give Adam the fruit. But no one told the whole truth. No one accepted full responsibility. But the truth, as we see there, can never be kept from God who knows all and who sees all.

In their conscience, people know that truth is right and essential. And that is one reason why we go to such great lengths to make what they say appear to be truthful.

And they're careful with their words to maintain their own credibility instead of telling the whole truth if it does not serve their benefit in the end.

The Jews of Jesus' day revered the idea of the truth in principle. But in practice, it was buried beneath their system of traditions, which over the centuries had continually lowered God's standard of telling the truth, of not bearing false witness.

And as he did before, and will continue to do in this sermon, Jesus challenges the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees and hear their elaborate system of oath-taking that they devised to maintain their credibility, integrity, and honesty, when in reality they had no intention of speaking the whole truth or keeping their promises with the oaths that they made.

[ 9 : 00 ] And so the main idea that comes out of our text this morning is that Jesus commands us to speak the truth in its purest form. Jesus commands us to speak the truth in its purest form.

In these verses, Jesus gives two principles for speaking the truth in its purest form. And by that I mean unmixed, unmingled, uncontaminated with sinful intentions.

Why should you want to be someone who speaks the truth and whose words are pure? Well, if you're a Christian, it's pretty simple.

Your greatest desire should be to be like Jesus. He is the one through whom grace and truth has come.

In John 14, 6, Jesus said he is the truth. He said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

[ 10 : 08 ] He is the truth that leads to eternal life. He is the one who gives truth which sets us free from our sins. So the truth is something that we who have been saved by Jesus should desire to know, to love, and to practice.

When Christians lie, when they break their word, when they fudge the truth, those actions will severely damage their credibility, their integrity, and their honesty.

We have been commanded by Jesus to go and make disciples, but nothing will destroy your witness as much as actions that betray your being an honest person, a source of truth.

Lying damages our witness. It damages our relationships with other people. It damages our relationship with the Lord, who knows all and who sees all.

And that's why this should matter to you as an unbeliever as well. Because God knows your every thought. He sees and bears witness to the true motivations of your heart.

[ 11 : 26 ] The true motivations behind everything that you say and everything that you do. And so once again, Jesus confronts us all with the truth of the matter, which is the matter of our own hearts.

As he once again hears, shocks our heart back into rhythm with the truth that he's revealing to us through this sermon in God's word, that we are to be a people who speak the truth in its purest form.

And so again, Jesus gives us two principles in our text in this section on his sermon on the mount that if understood and applied in practice, I believe will lead you to be a person who desires and who does speak the truth in its purest form.

The first principle that we see from our text is that when the truth is perverted, it ceases to be true. When a truth is perverted, it ceases to be true.

So again, the beginning of verse 33, Jesus says, Again you have heard that it was said to those of old. Now, once more, it's important for us to understand that when Jesus says here, as he will continue to say, you have heard or you have heard it said of those of old or the ancients have said, he is not challenging, he is not altering, he is not correcting Scripture.

[ 12 : 49 ] Jesus, in the strongest possible terms that he could, already made that clear in verses 17 through 20 of this sermon.

He said, I have not come to abolish the law, not even the littlest, tiniest jot or till of it. I have come in fulfillment of Scripture. What Jesus is challenging is the way the scribes and the Pharisees had relaxed God's commands through their system of regulations and traditions that they had established over hundreds of years.

Jesus is challenging the external legalistic forms of keeping the law that bypass the heart and misinterpret what God has said and what God has commanded in his word.

The traditions of the scribes and Pharisees, as Jesus continues in verse 33, was that you shall not bear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

Now, this teaching that they had was based off Scripture, is derived from Scripture. For example, Leviticus 19.12 says, You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God.

[ 14 : 11 ] I am the Lord. In addition to that verse and many other verses in the Old Testament is examples of Old Testament saints who made oaths in God's name.

Abraham, on a couple of occasions, confirmed his promise, his word to the king of Sodom and then to Abimelech with oaths that he made in God's name.

He also made his servant Eliezer swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, to not take a wife for his son Isaac from among the pagan Canaanites, but from among his relatives.

Later on, Abraham's grandson Jacob made a covenant with his father-in-law Laban, and they called on the name of the Lord as a witness to keep their word.

Psalms 132.2 likewise mentions how David swore to the Lord and vowed to the mighty one of Jacob. On top of these examples of godly men who made oaths and swore to keep their word in God's name are examples in the Old Testament of God himself making oaths.

[ 15 : 25 ] God reaffirmed his covenant with Abraham after a great test of Abraham's faith and his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac.

We read about that in Genesis 22, 16 through 18. And said, this is God speaking, By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you.

I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of the heaven, as the sand that is on the seashore, and your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.

In the New Testament, Hebrews 6, verses 13 through 17, explains why God made this oath to Abraham in Genesis 22. There we read, For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, Surely I will bless you and multiply you.

And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes, an oath is final for confirmation.

[16:44] So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath.

God is holy. God is always true. But at times, when he desired to impress special importance or the urgency of a promise he made, he would make an oath.

He would swear by his name. Jesus did something kind of similar when he would use the phrase, Truly, truly, I say to you. It wasn't that the other things that Jesus said weren't true or were less true. He would use that statement to draw emphasis, to alert us that what he was about to say was something really important that he wanted us to remember, to hold on to, and to not lose sight of. Jesus, when he was arrested and he was led to Caiaphas' house, the high priest, and was tried there, and he was silent before his accusers, was placed under oath by Caiaphas, and he answered his questions.

[17:56] We read about that in Matthew 26, 63. But Jesus remained silent, and the high priest said to him, I adjure you, that's legal language, I'm putting you under oath. You, by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.

And what did Jesus do? He answers, You have said so, but I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

So, taking all of this together, we learn from Scripture that God and godly people made oaths at certain times and in certain situations to affirm the truth of a statement or a promise they made because people are sinful and inclined to lie.

And so they invoked God's name in an oath to add the greatest amount of validity that they could to express the sincerity of the words that they spoke.

But externally, what we are, what Jesus is dealing with now in Matthew chapter 5 is this tradition of the scribes and the Pharisees which said, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

[19:14] And now again, that seems to be right. It looks to be in line with Scripture. However, the scribes and the Pharisees were crafty. They wanted to be able to lie while also maintaining a sense that they were honest and righteous people.

Thus, they developed an elaborate system of oaths that enabled them to get away with lying but maintain an external facade of righteousness which was something that Jesus couldn't stand.

In Matthew 23, we see Jesus sort of reach his limit with the scribes and the Pharisees as he pronounces a series of woes upon them for their rank hypocrisy.

In Matthew 23, 16 through 22, Jesus unleashes a sharp rebuke against the way the scribes and Pharisees paid fast and loose with the truths that they took with their oaths.

We read about that. He says to them, Woe to you, blind guides, who say, if anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing. But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.

[20:31] You blind fools, for which is greater the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, if anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing.

But if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath. You blind men, for which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it and whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

So here we see the contrast Jesus makes between what the Bible said about oaths and the traditions of the scribes and the Pharisees that he is challenging and correcting in our text this morning.

Biblically speaking, an oath was made or given to emphasize a commitment to tell the truth and to keep the truth.

[21:40] But the oath-making system used by the scribes and the Pharisees was designed to undermine that purpose and promote deception through oaths which is the opposite of why anyone should take an oath.

Many years ago I was doing premarital counseling with a couple who asked me to officiate their wedding and we had met a few times and we were set to meet again as the wedding day was quickly approaching.

And when the couple came into my office I could tell that something wasn't right. That there was some kind of issue that they were trying to, you know, avoid talking about.

And at the end of the session I had to know what it was. And so I asked is everything going okay? And the bride looked down looked over at her husband-to-be and then looked at me and she said well, yeah, I want to know what are your thoughts on prenuptial agreements.

The groom-to-be was quite a bit more established than the woman that he was about to marry. He had already owned a nice house which she was going to move into.

[ 23 : 18 ] He had a lot of assets. He had, it seemed, materially everything in this relationship. And so I turned to him and I asked him why do you want her to sign a prenuptial agreement?

And he was uncomfortable and he kind of hemmed and hawed a little bit and he talked about well, I trust her and I love her and, you know, it's not her it's just some other things, some family members that she has and I'm concerned if something happens to me, what might happen to our things and, you know, it's just basically just kind of standard practice.

And I looked to him and I replied, the only reason why prenuptial agreements exist is because of an expectation that the marriage is going to end in divorce.

And if you have concerns about that now, then why are you getting married? Because you are making a vow not just to each other, as significant and as great as that is, but you are making a vow before God as your witness to a lifelong commitment to one another as husband and wife.

And you should not have a plan for divorce before you get married. You shouldn't have loopholes in place to protect yourself whenever something happens that you don't like or whenever you get hurt in a way that you can't stand to get yourself out of the vows that you are making to your spouse before God.

[ 25 : 07 ] In a similar way, that's what the scribes and Pharisees were doing. Oh, they said, you can make an oath and you can break it just as long as you didn't invoke God's name.

You didn't invoke God's name, did you? No, we didn't say anything about it. Okay, you're fine. Don't worry about it. Oh, I know that I made an oath to the temple and that place is important, but what you missed was that I didn't say anything about the treasure in the temple which really gives it its value, so I'm justified in having broken that oath to you.

I'm not liable to you for breaking my oath, you see. In verse 34, Jesus addresses this twisted form of logic and he explains that a half-truth is really a whole lie because when the truth is perverted in any way, it is no longer true.

He says, but I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven for it is the throne of God or by the earth for it is his footstool or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great king.

And do not take an oath by your head for you cannot make one hair white or black. In other words, God and everything that pertains to him is sacred. God is the author of truth.

[ 26 : 30 ] Whether an oath is made in his name or not, his command is that we not bear false witness to others and that we do not bear false witness to him.

Every sin, the Bible says, is ultimately a sin committed against God and every lie is a sin. Every lie is an act of rebellion against God, the source of truth, the definer of truth, who knows our hearts, who knows our true intentions and bears witness to every single thing that we do and that we say. Jesus says in effect here, you may think that you can fool other people with perversions of the truth and believe that you can escape with your integrity, your credibility, and honesty intact, but God knows all things and God sees all things.

Which brings us to the second principle in our text that if understood, applied, and practice will lead you to be a person who speaks the truth in its purest form and that's this, that God is always present to judge the truth we claim to speak.

God is always present to judge the words, the truth we claim to speak. Jesus concludes this section on the sermon, of this sermon on Ose with these simple words, verse 37, let what you say be simply yes or no.

[ 27 : 54 ] Anything more than this comes from evil. The Bible says that God is omnipresent. He is everywhere. The Bible says that God is omniscient.

He knows everything. The Bible says that God is omnipotent. He has all power. He is sovereign over all. There is no court, there is no authority that outranks or outrules Him.

This being the case, I think it's safe to say, in fact, I think it's right to say that we should speak as if we are always under an oath to tell the truth.

Look with me at Matthew 12. In this passage, Jesus is once again addressing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees who think they can maintain an external appearance of honesty, integrity,

and credibility, and righteousness, all the while forgetting that God is an ever-present judge who knows their hearts, who knows their true intentions behind their words, and will judge them for playing loose and fast with careless words.

Jesus says, either make the tree good and its fruit good or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. And here He says to them, you brood of vipers, how can you speak good when you are evil?

[ 29 : 21 ] For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Now here's the part I really want you to see. I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every, underline that word, every careless, word they speak.

For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned, eternally condemned. A person's words reveal the true state of their heart.

And that's ultimately what Jesus is getting at in the Sermon on the Mount. The righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, He says here, and we'll say again and again, it doesn't cut it.

Eventually the sinful condition of your heart will be exposed, and eternal human efforts to try to cover that up might fool people. It might fool a lot of people, but it won't ever fool God.

[ 30 : 32 ] God is a holy God. His kingdom is a holy kingdom, and His people are to be a holy people who mean what they say, and who say what they mean, as evidenced by a transformed heart, having been born again by faith in Jesus Christ, who is the way and the truth and the life.

Of every person, He desires that they delight in the truth of the inward being, Psalm 51, 6. Among things He hates is a lying tongue, Proverbs 6, 17, and lying lips which are an abomination to Him, Proverbs 12, 12.

And just as God hates lying, so should those who are faithful to Him, Psalm 119, 163. William Barclay said something very convicting that I read this week about our words and how we're so willing to put ourselves in different compartments as if God is not hearing everything that we say. He said, here is a great eternal truth. Life cannot be divided into compartments in some of which God is involved and others of which He is not involved.

There cannot be one kind of language in the church and another kind of language in the shipyard or the factory or the office or I'll add on the sports field or on social media.

[ 32 : 00 ] There cannot be one kind of conduct in the church and another kind of conduct in the business world. That fact is that God does not need to be invited into certain departments of life and kept out of others.

He is everywhere all through life and in every activity of life. He hears not only the words which are spoken in His name, He hears all words and there cannot be any such things as forms of words which evades bringing God into any transaction.

and He concludes, we will regard all promises as sacred if we remember that all promises are made in the presence of God. And so how should we adjust ourselves to this word that we've heard?

I think it's simply practice honesty and integrity in your speech. Practice honesty and integrity in your speech. Say what you mean and mean what you say.

are you someone who often says I swear to God in casual conversation. If you do that, if you feel the need to do that, what does that reveal about you?

[ 33 : 12 ] One, that you don't care about taking God's name in vain which is not a little thing. Two, that maybe you know in your subconscious that you've lost so much credibility with others that you are someone who is hard to believe and trust unless you say something like I swear to God and you do that to try to make up for your lack of integrity and credibility and honesty.

It could be something else like this. One thing that I've been convicted of is my use of the word maybe. I like the word maybe because it's noncommittal and I was convicted of this one time because we were in the car going somewhere and I can't remember what it was.

The kids asked if we could do something and I said maybe and without me missing a beat Jack said that means no. Cut out the maybes in your speech.

Something as simple as that. Yes or no? Yes and if it's yes keep your word. No if it's no then it's no. It may not be a salvation thing but it can discredit you as a source of truth as a Christian who is a source of truth when you share the gospel.

[ 34 : 48 ] Think before you speak. God is a witness to your every word and so say what you mean and keep your word.

Honor your commitments. We need people who can be trusted and people who can be trusted are people who know the truth of Jesus Christ and who stand for what is true and they speak what is true because they know that what they say will be judged by God and the truth matters.

Jesus commands us to be people who speak the truth in its purest form. James 5:12 says but above all my brothers do not swear either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath but let your yes be yes and your no be no so that you may not fall under condemnation.

It's as simple as that. Practice the truth. Don't take oaths or don't try to find loopholes in what you say. Pay attention to what you say, what you speak that God's word would be a guard over your mouth.

we live in a world that has been deceived and is continually being deceived and what our world needs is for Christians to know the truth and to speak the truth.

[36:24] And if you're an unbeliever here this morning I'm speaking the truth to you when I say that without Jesus Christ the way and the truth and the life you have no hope for salvation.

You can try to be a more honest person that's great but ultimately that's not going to solve your greatest issue which is your issue with sin. Jesus lived the sinless life that none of us was capable of living and he died sacrificially on the cross to atone for all of our sins which we've committed against God our holy creator.

And the Bible says it's not about you first changing your language or being a more honest person but that you turn to him in repentance and faith and you'll be saved. And I hope that today is the day of salvation for you.

And I hope that for all of us we've seen God's word today and that we will take it seriously and that we will be more careful about the words that we say and how we say them. That we'll be honest and people of integrity and credibility because we are in a world in desperate need of such people. Let's pray. Lord God we thank you that you are the God of all truth. We thank you that you Lord are one who deals honestly with us.

[37:52] That God when we come to your word we don't need to doubt in any way that these words that you've given to us are not true. Lord you have the words of eternal life.

You have the words that set us free. Lord forgive us that so often we unlike you don't tell the truth or we tell just enough truth to get away with lying.

God I pray for each of us having heard your word that Holy Spirit you will convict us. That you will make us think more about the words that we say and how we say them.

Lord that we would all be compelled by you to pay more attention to our speech and that we would as you said just simply follow through with what you've commanded us to do and practice to just let our yes be yes and our no be no.

Lord I pray that in doing so you would let our that our light would shine brighter for you as people in this world who live in darkness that the truth will be proclaimed through us and that we would judge to be people who are honest and who can be trusted and that you'll be glorified in that.

[39:10] We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.