

To Tell The Truth, The Whole Truth, and Nothing But The Truth
Matt. 5:33-37

INTRO.:

1. Paul Harvey told a story of four high school boys who were late to their morning class one day.
 - a. They entered the classroom and solemnly told their teacher they were detained due to a flat tire.
 - b. The sympathetic teacher smiled and told them it was too bad they were late because they had missed a test that morning.
 - c. But she was willing to let them make it up.
 - d. She gave them each a piece of paper and a pencil and sent them to four corners of the room.
 - e. Then she told them they would pass if they could answer just one question: Which tire was flat?

2. Sadly, this story reflects the epidemic of lies, falsehood, deceitfulness, and distortion of truth that permeates our entire society today.
 - a. We hardly know any longer who or what to believe in virtually every field of human endeavor.
 - 1) We have largely abandoned any concept or hope of universal, objective truth – that which is true for all people everywhere, irrespective of age, nationality, ethnicity, gender, education, or income level.
 - 2) We are told that what is true for you may not be true for me.
 - b. Companies have assured their clients that their private financial or health data is totally safe and secure with them, that is until a buyer was found willing to offer the right price.
 - c. Huge corporations have gone out of business or their executives have been imprisoned because of lies they told their investors.
 - d. The health of millions has been jeopardized because tobacco companies never told the truth to smokers about the high risks of cancer.
 - e. Drug companies have withheld serious risk factors regarding their products until deaths of patients precipitated legal proceedings.
 - f. So much of the legal profession today is caught up in trying to find clever, sophisticated ways to bypass, avoid, evade, undermine or conveniently twist the law and the truth to suit their client's purposes.
 - 1) It would take a highly trained, high paid lawyer to interpret to most of us all the convoluted fine print of so many of the deals and transactions we make, that we generally just sign and hope for the best.
 - 2) For example, how many of you read all the fine print when signing up for something like Facebook, or do you just click "accept?"
 - g. And tragically, some Christian organizations have also played fast and loose with the faithful contributions of their sponsors to where very little of the money ever reaches the cause it was intended for.
 - h. To try to get to the truth in a court of law, we used to have to raise our right hand and place our other hand on the Bible and "swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God".
 - 1) But the fear of God, the mention of His name, and the use of the Bible have been banished from our judicial system.
 - 2) However, it is still assumed that when you stand before a judge and make a statement under oath that to knowingly give false testimony, makes you guilty of the crime of perjury.
 - i. Even as children, we learned at an early age that as long as you crossed your fingers you did not have to tell the truth to your friends.

3. This erosion of honesty which plagues our society stands in sharp contrast to the instructions we as Christians are given in the New Testament.
 - a. We are simply told, "To tell the truth, period."
 - b. Or as Jesus put it: *"Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No' be 'No.'"*

4. Today as we continue to look at the Sermon on the Mount I want us to explore what Jesus had to say about truth-telling in Matthew 5:33-37.
 - a. I want to begin by looking at what Jesus was teaching here.
 - b. And then I want us to apply what He said to our lives today in the 21st century.

LESSON:

- I. As we look at our text Jesus is telling us: "Speak nothing but the truth."
- A. In Matt. 5:33 Jesus began: *"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.'"*
1. There is no particular verse in the Old Testament which gives this command, but it is an accurate summary of what the Old Testament law says.
 2. In the Old Testament God's people were forbidden to make false vows.
 3. Here are a couple of examples:
 - a. Lev. 19:12: *"And you shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord."*
 - b. Numb. 30:2: *"If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."*
 - c. Deut. 23:23: *"You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised."*
 4. God's premise in the Old Testament was that if you made a vow before Him, you were obligated to keep that vow.
 - a. An oath or vow was considered a serious statement or declaration, made with an appeal to God for the truth of what is affirmed.
 - b. God said if you make a vow, you must keep it.
 - c. And if you invoke God's name in a vow and do not keep it, you would bring dishonor upon God.
- B. In vs. 34-36 Jesus goes on to warn about being very careful what you say: *"But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black."*
1. ASK: Have you ever wondered why Jesus was so opposed to making vows?
 2. While oaths are designed to encourage people to tell the truth, Jesus knew that the Pharisees, the religious leaders of His day, had twisted things so much that oaths had become an occasion for clever lies and deception.
 3. In Matt. 23:16-22, Jesus spelled out how perverse things had actually gotten: (Read).
 4. Do you see what was going on?
 - a. The Pharisees were teaching that some oaths were more binding than others, and that some oaths were not binding at all.
 - b. In other words, if you took a particular oath, it was OK to lie, but if you made another oath, you had to speak the truth.
 - c. If you crossed your fingers it was OK to lie, if your crossed your heart and hoped to die, it meant you were speaking the truth.
 5. Does that sound familiar to today?
 - a. Jesus says that such actions are ridiculous.
 - b. In Matthew 23 He reminds us that no matter what we swear by, we are swearing by something God has made, and thus we are indirectly swearing by God Himself.
 6. The point Jesus was making is that there is no such thing as a non-solemn vow.
 - a. Every vow a person makes is binding.
 - b. Since this is the case, nothing but the truth should ever come out of our mouths.
 - c. Thus, Jesus says that there is really no reason for oaths and vows at all.
 7. Since the system of using oaths had been so corrupted that it was beyond repair, Jesus just tossed it out completely.

- C. Coming back to Matt 5:37 Jesus concludes: *“But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil.”*
1. Just so we understand Jesus' words are meant for all Christians, these words are repeated by James in 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; so that you may not fall under judgment.”*
 2. ILLUST.: Some of you remember the Dr. Seuss story, Horton Hatches an Egg.
 - a. It is the tale of an elephant who promises to sit on an egg and hatch it for this bird.
 - b. As the days and weeks go by, Horton just keeps on sitting there.
 - c. All of his friends encourage him to forget his promise and play with them.
 - d. Do you remember his response? -- "I meant what I said, and I said what I meant, an elephant is faithful, 100%."
 3. Jesus' command to us is similar.
 - a. Do not worry about making vows, just say what you mean, and mean what you say.
 - b. When you open your mouth, do not let anything but the truth come from your lips.

II. So, what is the meaning of Jesus' teaching for us today?

- A. 1st: Let us deal with the question of whether or not a Christian should ever take an oath.
1. Some people insist that these verses mean that it is wrong to go into court, put a hand on a Bible and say, “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.”
 - a. They maintain that a Christian should never take a vow of any type.
 - b. In fact, some of us who grew up in the church may remember when it was OK to affirm, but not to “swear” to tell the truth.
 2. But I do not think that is what Jesus was referring to here.
 3. Jesus' objection is not to the oaths, but to the deceit on the part of the one giving the oath.
 - a. He is concerned about our truthfulness.
 - b. I say this because the Bible tells us that God Himself makes vows or swore with an oath (Heb. 6:13-17).
 - 1) We also see the apostle Paul taking oaths: 2 Cor. 1:23: *“But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.”*
 - 2) And in Matthew 26:63-64 Jesus Himself testified under oath at His trial.
 4. To focus on whether or not it is appropriate to make a vow is to major on the minors.
 - a. That is the same trap the Pharisees were constantly falling into.
 - b. Jesus' focus, and the one we should major on, is speaking the truth, and speaking nothing but the truth all of the time.
- B. 2nd: Probably the most important lesson this text teaches us is that we all need to ask God to forgive us for not always telling the truth.
1. Reading these verses makes us realize that we are not always honest people.
 - a. Yes, I would consider most of you to be very honest people.
 - 1) There are many of you who, if you came up to me and said, “Richard, can I borrow \$20. I will pay you back next Sunday?” - I would say, “Sure.”
 - 2) I would not require you to sign a slip of paper or even to shake hands.
 - 3) I believe you are an honest individual, and that you would do what you said.
 - b. But, when we read Jesus' words, we find His standard of honesty is a little higher than we are used to.
 - 1) Sometimes our yes's do not always mean yes.
 - 2) Sometimes we are not always speaking the truth.
 - 3) For example:
 - a) When the IRS asks us on the tax form how much money we made, will we tell them the truth?
 - (1) Will we remember to report the \$200 in cash we got for doing an odd job?
 - (2) Will we sign the form knowing full well that there is some income that has not been reported?

- b) On the other hand, do you ever find yourself exaggerating – stretching the truth - about your income or your accomplishments in order to impress other people?
 - (1) When someone asks you how many were in attendance last Sunday, are you tempted to fudge and round it up a bit to impress the person who is asking?
 - (2) I know we jokingly call that “the preacher’s count,” but is it truthful?
 - c) I read the story about a denomination preacher who ended his sermon one Sunday with the typical altar call.
 - (1) He asked everyone to bow their heads and close their eyes as he prayed.
 - (2) Then he asked people to raise their hands if they wanted to receive Christ as their personal Savior.
 - (3) During the prayer, he said, "I see that hand, Lord, thank you. I see that hand. Yes, I see that hand."
 - (4) Later, someone in the audience said, "I had my eyes open the whole time and no one raised their hands."
 - (5) While it may seem like an innocent thing, what that preacher said was not truthful.
2. The point is that I doubt that anyone of us can honestly say, "I have always spoken nothing but the truth."
- a. There have been times when every one of us have been less than honest, and Jesus knows that.
 - b. So the most important response our text calls for is that we turn to God and say, "Lord, sometimes I'm a liar, sometimes I have been dishonest and not truthful, and I need your forgiveness."
 - 1) Now, maybe you are a pretty good liar, and you have never been caught, or maybe you are not so good at it, and people know you can be dishonest.
 - 2) Whatever the case, we need to confess our sin and experience the forgiveness that only Jesus can offer.
 - c. Let me carry this point a step further.
 - 1) Perhaps you are here this morning and have been pretending you do not need all this Christianity stuff.
 - 2) Maybe you have even said to yourself that you are good enough the way you are, that you are more honest than most people who go to church.
 - 3) If that is the case I hope you will realize that the words coming from your mouth are not really the truth and that you are guilty of being a liar.
 - a) Once you admit that, then I pray that you will stop trusting in yourself and turn to Jesus Christ and receive Him as your Lord and Savior.
 - b) If you are not sure exactly what that means, you can talk with me or with someone who can help you.
 - d. But the point is that Jesus wants us to admit we are liars, turn to Him for forgiveness, and then once we do, He desires for us to be people who speak nothing but the truth.

III. Finally, this AM I want to mention three areas that we all need to work on to become the type of people Jesus wants us to be as His disciples.

- A. 1st: We need to be more diligent in telling the truth, and when we do not, we need to confess our sins and failures to other believers in Christ.
 - 1. There are 2 scriptures we often overlook in dealing with our subject today.
 - a. In Col. 3:9, Paul says: “*Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.*”
 - b. And in James 5:16: “*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*”
 - 2. Have you ever noticed how easy it is for us not to tell the truth, and then try to cover it up, rather than admit our mistake?
 - a. What about this AM when someone asked you how you were doing, or feeling?
 - 1) Perhaps you had a splitting headache, or maybe you were feeling depressed because of something that recently happened in your life; but how did you respond?
 - 2) Was it, “Oh, I am doing OK,” even when you knew you are not?
 - 3) In your response you were not being truthful – or lying.

- b. I like the true story of a woman named Mary who had gone shopping. (This event happened before cell phones.)
 - 1) When she finished shopping, she went out to the parking lot and, sure enough, her keys were locked in the car.
 - 2) Mary went back inside and called her husband to come with another set of keys.
 - 3) She then went out to the car, checked and, sure enough, one of the back doors was unlocked.
 - 4) Knowing her husband was already on his way and knowing he would be a bit upset that she had him drive across town when the door was open; Mary opened the unlocked door, pressed the lock down, and slammed it shut.
 - c. Now, maybe you have never done that, but I know most of us, because of our pride and desire to impress others, have tried to cover up our mistakes.
 - d. Sometimes, like Mary, we have a real hard time admitting when we have messed up.
 - 3. But God's word tells us not to lie to one another, and then if we do we are to confess our mistake and pray for one another.
 - a. And that is not always easy to do.
 - b. If a Christian friend asks how things are going in our Christian life, in our marriage, in our quiet time, we just need to tell the truth.
 - 1) We must not pretend things are OK when they are not.
 - 2) It is good to tell the truth about who we really are, so others can pray for us, encourage us, and help us overcome the mistakes we have made.
 - 4. There are many ways this can be done, but one way is to get together with a small group of other Christians and voluntarily be accountable to that group of people.
 - 5. We need to be honest with each other, and willing to confess our sins to other Christians whom we trust.
- B. 2nd: We need to be more diligent in telling the truth by being honest in all our dealings with others, especially with those outside the church.
- 1. It is tragic when people, who are not Christians, hear Christians speak something other than the truth.
 - 2. The following story illustrates this point:
 - a. Dave and Tom live in the same town.
 - 1) Dave attends church every Sunday, but Tom has not been in church in thirty years.
 - 2) Dave reads the Bible every day, but Tom does not own a Bible.
 - 3) Dave usually listens to the local Christian radio station, but Tom does not know a single hymn.
 - b. Dave picked up some material at the local hardware store and told the owner he would pay for it within the month.
 - 1) Tom owns the local hardware store.
 - 2) Three months have passed and the bill has not been paid.
 - c. Dave invited Tom to church last Sunday, but Tom stayed home and watched TV.
 - d. Why??? – I think we all know the answer.
 - 3. We are Christ's ambassadors.
 - a. We are His representatives on this earth and in this community.
 - b. Sadly, one of the problems the American church has is that because some very visible "Christian" leaders have spoken things other than the truth, Christianity has lost its credibility.
 - 1) When a TV evangelist says one thing, but does something very different in his private live, is it any wonder people do not always trust us.
 - 2) Should we be surprised when they do not believe what we say.
 - c. In their eyes the church has lost its credibility.
 - 1) They have heard Christians speak words that were proven not to be true, and now they do not believe anything we say.
 - 2) Or they have heard us promise something, but never seen us follow through.

4. The simple fact is that whether we are at work, at school, or with a neighbor, we must be very careful that nothing but the truth comes out of our mouths.
 - a. As representatives of Jesus Christ, our integrity is one of our most valuable assets.
 - b. We cannot afford to lose our credibility.
 - c. We must make sure that what we say is always truthful.
 5. So, can people take it for granted that your word is your bond – that if you say you will do something or be somewhere at a certain time that your word can be counted on?
- C. 3rd: We need to be diligent in telling the truth by being faithful in proclaiming the Gospel message.
1. There is a great temptation in our culture, and even in the Lord's church, to water down the Bible message and tell people what they want to hear, and not what God says they need to hear.
 - a. We must not do that.
 - b. Whether I am speaking in this pulpit or you are talking to a friend at work, we must to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
 - c. Yes, we need to be sensitive, loving and gentle when we speak, but we must never compromise the truth.
 2. ILLUST.:
 - a. When a friend tells us that he has moved in with his girlfriend, and asks, "Do you see anything wrong with that?" - we have to be willing to answer truthfully.
 - 1) While we are not to condemn our friend, we should tell him that the Bible says it is wrong.
 - 2) And then, like Jesus, we should tell him to go and sin no more.
 - b. When our neighbor calls and says her nephew was killed in a car accident, and then says, "He was baptized when he was a baby. Do you think he is in heaven?" - we have to be willing to tell the truth.
 - 1) Maybe we could use tact and answer, "I know that if your nephew was a believer in Jesus Christ, he is in heaven, because the Bible tells us that is what we must do to be saved."
 - 2) But we must never say anything that is untrue, or unscriptural.
 - c. When someone at school/work says, "Are you one of those narrow-minded Christians who thinks that you are the only ones going to heaven, and that all other religious groups including Muslims and Hindus are going to hell?" - we must tell the truth.
 - 1) Maybe we can respond by saying, "It would be great if everyone went to heaven, but I know Jesus said 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"
 - 2) I do not know about you but I choose to believe that Jesus was telling the truth.
 3. The fact is that it is not always easy to be truthful, it cost Jesus, the apostles, and John the Baptist their lives.

CONC.:

1. The world around us may think that everyone should be given some latitude when it comes to speaking the truth.
 - a. You may know people who think it is not a big deal when someone lies about their sexual behavior or cheats on his income taxes.
 - b. But Jesus has another standard for us.
 - c. He calls for us to be radically different from the world in which we live.
2. As Christians, our yes should always mean yes, and our no should always mean no.
 - a. May the Lord help us to say what we mean, and mean what we say in all situations.
 - b. May the Lord give us such a deep commitment to honesty that today, and every day for the rest of our lives, nothing but the truth will come from our mouths.