



DID GOD REALLY SAY...TELL THE TRUTH?

~ MATTHEW 5:33-37 ~

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ JULY 13, 2014

³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ ³⁴ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.



Grace, mercy and peace are yours through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

There stands in London an old building commonly referred to as “Old Bailey.” It is at this building that major criminal trials are held from all of England and Wales. On top of the dome of this building is an iconic statue. It is the bronze statue of Lady Justice. In her right hand is a raised sword, and in her left are the scales of justice. The statue is a constant reminder of what justice is – no partiality, just the truth. You can find statues like this all around the world depicting the same ideas – judging fairly, executing judgment. Some of these statues have Lady Justice blindfolded – a further reminder of justice to be fair. Even in this postmodern culture which has muddled the waters of ultimate truth, there are systems in place to keep the laws and punish the wrongdoers.

It is in these courtrooms that official justice is handed out. How many of you have been in a courtroom when a trial has been going on? How many of you have watched TV shows or movies that have depicted a courtroom scene? How many of you are completely ignorant of what goes on in a courtroom? Whether you know from experience or not, one of the ways to investigate the case is to call witnesses forward. Before these witnesses get up and give their testimony they are asked to swear an oath – usually on a Bible – to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Now, why are they asked to do this? To confirm what they will say is actually the truth and not a fabrication.

This might lead some to think that outside of a courtroom, when you’re not under oath, you don’t have to be as truthful. And certainly this is reflected in many of the activities we see that go on. Sometimes even Christians can fall into this trap as well. It’s a trap in thinking that we act one way when we’re in church on Sunday, and another way the other six days of the week. It was this kind of attitude that Jesus was speaking against in our gospel for this morning, and that we consider this morning for our summer series. DID GOD REALLY SAY TO TELL THE TRUTH,

1. The whole truth and
2. Nothing but the truth?

It was a bright spring morning when Jesus arose on some of the mountain ranges in the northern part of Israel – Capernaum. He had selected twelve apostles, twelve men whom he would personally send out with his message. But far more than that gathered on that spring morning to bring to Jesus their

concerns of body and soul. And it was there that Jesus preached what is now commonly known as his Sermon on the Mount. It was a sermon that had no equal, it was a sermon that was completely different than any teacher past or present had taught before. He preached about the Kingdom of God and what this kingdom would be like.

He began where others ended, and he ended where others began. Where others showed a goal to be attained, Christ placed his listeners at the goal (Matthew 5:13-16). It is here Jesus speaks, **“blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”** The kingdom of heaven does not operate under our human assumptions, the kingdom of heaven is not only concerned with the outside, but the inside. You cannot enter the kingdom of heaven if you have murdered your brother in your heart, committed adultery in your mind or swore an oath to cover up a lie. And it is in this whole two and a half chapter section of the gospel of Matthew that we pick out a small portion to consider. It is these words that we read again:

“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made. But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

When we gather in the context of the purpose of Jesus’ entire Sermon on the Mount we can come to a basic summary that people have distorted God’s laws so much that they actually think they can keep them. In the case of swearing an oath, it is true, in the book of Leviticus God tells the people to make oaths, and that when they make them, they are to keep them. The standard oath that was to be kept invoked the name of God – Yahweh. Over the course of time, the Israelites became so superstitious about breaking the second commandment (Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God), that they refrained from using that name, instead they substituted a different name for God. Voila! You cannot break the second commandment if you don’t use God’s name. This was the kind of reasoning they used for all of God’s commandments. That’s like trying to plug a hole in the bottom of a sinking boat with your finger, it just doesn’t work.

But in the Jewish minds it did. Instead of swearing calling upon God’s name as a witness, they swore by everything else – the heavens, the earth, Jerusalem, their own head, the very things that Jesus spoke against in this section of the Sermon on the Mount. The Jews felt that when they swore upon these things, their oaths were not as binding, and you could get out of your oath. This is probably the kind of oath Paul’s opponents swore in Acts 23, when they said they would not eat or drink until they killed the apostle Paul. It doesn’t take long even for us to look at this and say these kind of oaths are pointless. The main point of swearing an oath is to verify truth, if you can break an oath anytime you want just because it isn’t spoken in the name of the Lord, it is pointless.

Jesus knew these kind of oaths held no binding effects on people. People were using them to cover up their lies. When Jesus says **“Do not swear” “Do not break your oath,”** he is speaking against needless and unnecessary swearing. Instead, he says, **“Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ ‘no.’”** These are simple truths.

So we ask the question, DID GOD REALLY SAY TO TELL THE TRUTH? I think we all know the answer to that. Yes, yes he did. I don't think there would be anyone who would argue with you about that. But like the courtroom oath states, Christians do not just tell the truth, but the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. There's a difference here. I can say a true statement like – "I saw the pastor going to jail," which might convey the thought I'm a criminal, but the whole truth is, "I saw the pastor going to jail...to visit an incarcerated member of the church.

Unfortunately we live in a world that thinks the only time the whole truth and nothing but the truth need to be told is in a court of law. As long as you're out of a court of law, everything is fair game. Similar to the Jews thinking as long as they didn't actually say the name of God, they were OK. Sometimes even truth is forsaken for a lie. When a company exaggerates or outright lies about their product. When a husband doesn't tell his wife everything that happened in Las Vegas, or outright lies about it. When a student lies about cheating on a test. Sometimes it's not so much telling the truth, but omission of the truth.

It's bad enough when this happens in our everyday lives, it's even worse when it happens with God. When we treat truth as our own little pet, something we can control, something we can manipulate. Of course nobody would accuse us of doing this, but it happens. I always find it funny when I tell people I'm a pastor and it's like a switch is flipped – people clean up their language, they tell me all the good things they've done. It's like they feel they need to act differently because I'm a pastor. Why they don't feel the need to act differently all the time because God is always watching them, I don't know.

OK, so actually I do know. It's because of the presence of sin in this world. Sin that is evidenced in the fact you don't need to teach a child to lie, you teach them to tell the truth. They lie naturally. And that is the ultimate truth that we can do nothing to manipulate. The ultimate truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is that we are lost and dead in sin. Not only do we sin every day of our lives, we were born sinful, it's just what we were. We cannot even as Jesus says, "**Let our 'yes' be 'yes' and our 'no' 'no.'**" And what God makes very clear in both Old and New Testaments is "**The wages of sin is death.**" That's why we're all going to die someday. But the death our sins deserve is nothing less than eternal suffering in hell. And we have no one to blame except ourselves. That's the truth that so many people cannot handle.

That is the law truth. But also in Scripture is the gospel truth. It does not negate the law truth, it fulfills it, literally. The law that God demands, fulfilled by Jesus' life. The death we deserved, died by Jesus on the cross. The life we receive, won by a resurrected and glorious Jesus. Jesus does not bring us a new law to follow, he brings us freedom from that law. Freedom to love and serve him. This is the truth that God promised in the Garden of Eden, it's the truth he promises in Revelation, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

GOD REALLY SAYING TO TELL THE TRUTH goes beyond not lying at school, at home, on our taxes etc. That truth is trivial compared to the greater truth he is asking us to tell. That is the truth about what he done for us. Biblical Christianity differs from every other religion, because it's not about what you do for God, it's about what God has done for you. That is the job that you as individuals have. It's about more than inviting people to church to let them sit and listen to pastor. It's about living a life that reflects

that love, that truth. It's about telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in everything we do so people might ask, why do you do that.

GOD SAYS TO TELL THE TRUTH, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It is not our job to make people believe the truth, only to present it. To present it in a way that does not deceive or give people false hope. To present it without harmful additions or subtractions, for this truth is not ours to fashion. To present in its full severity God's serious punishment for sin, and also present in magnificent light God's loving forgiveness.

I don't think anyone would really argue with what God really says here in his Word about telling the truth. But it's more than about telling some of the truth, it's about telling all of it. It's about not omitting certain parts of the truth that are uncomfortable for that. Christ is calling for simple truthfulness from us, so that his truth can be clearly seen and demonstrated in our lives. Amen.