

**2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters**

**Sermon Series - Focus on Your Witness**

**Sermon Title - Your witness is only as good as your word!**

**Sermon Text - Matthew 5:31-32**

**Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry**

**Introduction:**

"I cast my mind to Calvary where Jesus bled and died for me  
I see His wounds, His hands His feet, My Savior on that cursed tree"  
When I think of the cross and all that My Savior went through on that cursed tree, it changes me! It changes my behavior! It changes my attitude! It makes me want to live my life for the glory of God and to be a good witness to the world around me of God's love for them! It makes me want to be a good witness, and as such, you could say the cross keeps me honest! Let's pray and then I'll explain how your witness is only as good as your word! Let's pray.

Today we're going to talk about the concept of honesty and keeping your word! Being trustworthy in your life so people can trust your words. And when we talk about honesty, we're not talking about brutal honesty, and just saying any and everything that comes to your mind! That's not what Jesus was talking about in the section of His sermon on the mount we're about to read. Jesus was talking about your commitments, your word, your integrity, your trustworthiness, your basic honesty. If you want to talk about something important to your witness and testimony, folks this is critically important! If people can't trust your word they certainly won't consider your message and they will question your motives, and for good reason!

So let's listen to Jesus' words in verses Matthew 5:33-37...

Matthew 5:33 "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.'

Matthew 5:34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; Matthew 5:35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.

Matthew 5:36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.

Matthew 5:37 All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

So what was Jesus getting at here? For that we've got to apply some principles of Biblical interpretation that our visiting professor from the seminary in New Orleans, Dr. Norris Grubbs, shared with us at the Bible study Wednesday night. If you haven't signed up for the Wednesday night study, Relevant, I would encourage you to do so! More than a Bible study, it's a study of the Bible! You will be blessed to hear each session this summer. The principle in play in our text is that we have to look at the context of what Jesus was saying. It was a part of the sermon on the mount, but also we have to look at the historical context of who Jesus was talking to and why? What was going on back then that caused Jesus to address this topic? What was Jesus

trying to do in these verses? First of all He was trying to bring the religious establishment back to a place of truth, honesty, integrity, authenticity, sincerity, virtue, and righteousness. He was also establishing the basic ground rules for His disciples and how they would represent Him to the world. He didn't want the adherents to the new covenant to fall into the same religious hypocrisy so many under the old covenant had fallen into. We're going to look at that in depth in just a minute. Jesus was saying that honesty is extremely important, but it is not complex, it is simple! Simple honesty or lack thereof impacts our witness to the world! We have to understand that our witness is only as good as our word! Which leads us to this question: Why is our word so important to our witness to the world? Let's look at the reasons!

### **One reason our Word is so important is because it reveals what we truly believe about God!**

Matthew 5:33 "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.'

Matthew 5:34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne;

Matthew 5:35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.

What was going on here that caused Jesus to tell the people not to swear an oath at all? To get a good understanding of this we need to look at something Jesus would later say to the religious leaders of His day. They had gotten extremely dishonest and things had become absurd! Jesus confronted the religious leaders with their absurdity in Matthew 23:16-22...

Matthew 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.'

Matthew 23:17 You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

Matthew 23:18 You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.'

Matthew 23:19 You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

Matthew 23:20 Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

Matthew 23:21 And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.

Matthew 23:22 And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

So basically Jesus is saying, stop playing these foolish, and silly games with God! Just be honest in the first place! The Pharisees were trying to say that if God was involved in your vow or your word, then it mattered, but if you didn't include God in your promise, then you were exempt from having to keep your promise. Here's one of the problems with that: God is supposed to be a part of every part of our lives! The religious leaders of Jesus' day were trying to compartmentalize God. Here's your God box! Just keep God in that box and while you have your God box open, be good, but once you put God back in His little box, you can do what you

want! First of all, if you can put your God in a box in the first place, wow, that's not God! God is bigger than any box you could ever construct! God is the God of heaven and earth, so that means God is involved no matter what you swear by! Watch this...

*A willingness to lie, to be dishonest, and to have a lack of integrity reveals a belief that God doesn't really care about truthfulness!*

Oh but He does...

Numbers 23:19 God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

It's not that God couldn't change His mind about something, but He is not flippant or dishonest. If He changes His mind about something it would be in response to something like our repentance. God may speak words of judgment on someone or even a nation, but if they repent He will turn away His wrath from them. That's not lying, or flippantly changing His mind! That's God responding in truthfulness to His Word like in 2 Chronicles 7:13-15...

2 Chronicles 7:13 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people,

2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

The point is: God cares about truthfulness. And the truth is that if we repent He will turn away His wrath! Thank God for that truth! But people also must remember the truth both John the Baptist and Jesus preached...

Matthew 3:2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

And Jesus would later add...

Luke 13:5 "...But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Folks, truth matters! In these verses on lying in His sermon on the mount, Jesus was emphasizing that...

*A willingness to lie, to be dishonest, and to have a lack of integrity reveals a belief that God's Word is not important enough to put into practice!*

Oh but it is vital that we put it into practice. James, the brother of Jesus said...

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.  
James 1:23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror  
James 1:24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.  
James 1:25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

*A willingness to lie, to be dishonest, and to have a lack of integrity reveals a belief that God's warnings about the consequences of dishonesty aren't true!*

Oh but they are...

Proverbs 19:5 A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will not go free.

There are real consequences to dishonesty. We'll talk about a few of them later. But you also need to know that...

*A willingness to lie, to be dishonest, and to have a lack of integrity reveals a belief that God doesn't see your heart or your actions!*

Oh but He does...

Psalms 139:1 You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.  
Psalms 139:2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.  
Psalms 139:3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.  
Psalms 139:4 Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

So it stands to reason that a follower of Christ, should seek to be honest as a witness to their faith and belief that God is a truthful God and desires for His followers to not only to believe truth but to live truthfully! Whether we keep our word or not reveals so much about what we believe about God! But...

**Another reason our Word is so important is because it reveals the intent of our heart!**

Matthew 5:36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.  
Matthew 5:37 All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Jesus was not trying to create another layer of complexity to the do's and don'ts list. He was not creating a new law. He was trying to simplify and take people back to the intent of God's original law on lying in the Ten Commandments...

Exodus 20:16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

A lying tongue does not honor God and carelessly destroys others. A lying tongue is the result of a deceived heart and a wicked mind. A person who would give false testimony against their neighbor reveals the selfish intent of their heart! They have come under the control of the unholy trinity: me, myself and I! You see, with our tongue we either, build up or tear down, unify or separate, encourage or discourage help or hurt, love or hate, heal or sicken, become a breath of life or the breath of death! The person who lies and uses their words to deceive others, or hurt another person, has a heart problem and is using their tongue for the negative things I just mentioned! Tearing down, separating, discouraging, and destroying!

So Jesus wasn't saying a person couldn't take an oath of office or swear to tell the truth in a court of law. He was saying: be honest, keep your oaths and tell the truth! You shouldn't have to take it to the level of "I swear I'm telling the truth" every time you talk to someone. People should know if you say it, it's true! It was so important for His disciples to understand this. Why? Again, they were going to be His representatives and His witness to the world. Jesus knew that their witness would only be as good as their word! The teachers of the law, who were supposed to be God's representatives to the world, were always adding new laws to the original commands of God. And as we've already seen, their additions were not designed to help people keep the intent of the original command, but to give some type of loophole to get around the intent. It had gotten so complex and convoluted! The rulers and teachers of the law had figured out wording for oaths in order to make it look like they were keeping them, but would allow them to break them! That certainly revealed the intent of their hearts! They weren't concerned with true righteousness! They weren't loving God or their neighbors! They were in fact only concerned with how they looked to others rather than being truly righteous and Godly.

Of course we don't have a problem with any of this kind of stuff today, right? I mean we don't ever just open our God box on Sundays and at Bible studies do we? And we always let our yes be yes and our no be no right? No need for lengthy contracts with page after page of legalese, because our word is our bond. Right?

Ok, I have a confession to make. There have been times when I install an app or a piece of software, or upgrade my I-phone, which they seem to do every couple of months, and when they ask me if I've read and agree with the terms and conditions, sometimes I just click yes. A few years back when that all first started, I would click on the "see terms and conditions." As I scrolled the many pages, I realized I had other things to do with my time. Thankfully now, many of them just ask if you agree, not if you've read! I'm not a lawyer, but let me just say, with some things in life, you better read the small print. Especially on contracts. I'm not too worried about my phone! But here's my point, as a follower of Christ, we should be above reproach when it comes to our word being our bond! People should know they can count on us. By the way, your children and if you have grand-children, they are watching and listening to everything you say. How many awkward moments have been created in our world by the honesty of little children? Come on! You're talking with someone when all of a sudden your kid says, "But that's not what you told Mommy!" Nothing like a little one to keep you honest. That's cute, but here's the problem, as they grow older, they just won't say anything, but they are processing and they are

learning from what we say and what we do! The lessons they learn will go with them through life. And remember this, parents with little ones, if they see dishonesty in you, when they become teens, they will have a built-in M.O. when it comes to their communication with you and you won't like it! And it could be that your inability to trust them, may be of your own making. Notice I said may be of your own making!

Some parents who have always been a good example to their kids may have issues with them because of what they've picked up from their peers. Or it may just be that old sin nature coming out in them. I mean, you don't have to teach a kid to be bad, some of that comes naturally and that's why we need good parents who will teach us to do good. But remember this, if you teach them to be dishonest by your behavior, you will end up with some very difficult issues down the road. And this leads us to this truth...

### **A third reason our Word is so important is because it reveals to others our priorities!**

Jesus said...

Matthew 5:37 All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Folks, if your priorities are in the right place then you shouldn't have a problem with honesty! You don't have any hidden selfish agendas or motives! The writer of the book of Proverbs gives us some really good wisdom in regards to honesty and keeping our commitments and letting us know where our priorities should be. It may seem oversimplified at first glance, but a deeper look is enlightening.

Proverbs 12:17 A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies.

When you read this verse, at first glance you might think, well of course, that's only logical. But the wisdom writer is reminding his readers of something beyond the obvious. A truthful witness gives honest testimony because he or she is committed to an honest lifestyle and that's because they have Godly priorities. A false witness, on the other hand, lives a lifestyle of deceit based on their selfish priorities. The truthful witness can be trusted, the false witness cannot. And here's something to think about: One lie is all it takes to destroy your witness! Why? Because if you're lying about one thing, what else might you be lying about? It puts everything you say you stand for in question! It causes someone to question your motives and intent on everything else you do and say! That's why lying destroys your witness.

Here's something for everyone in this room to think about. What kind of witness are you? Do people know you to be honest, truthful, and a person who keeps their word? Or do they see you as someone who says one thing but does something totally different? If you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ and you are not committed to honesty, you do great damage to the cause of Christ!

None of us are perfect, I know that, but it's one thing to promise to do something with the purest of intention to fulfill that promise and then find yourself unable to do so because of something out of your control (like a sickness or unexpected financial crisis), and it's quite another thing to promise something without ever intending to keep your promise. If your intentions were pure and you find yourself with an unexpected difficulty in fulfilling your word, just be honest and explain what happened and do what's right if there's finances involved! And a quick word to any of our contractors out there. Not trying to pick on you, but this just seemed to be the perfect example. Some contractors, not all, will promise more than they can possibly do, when it comes to their schedule, so they can get work on the books. And then they have to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, got really busy, I'll get with you as soon as I can!" You should be honest about your schedule in the first place, and don't worry about losing work. That's a lack of faith that God will provide for you! I can promise you that God will bless your honesty! If you promise a timeline that is not truthful, He will not bless your dishonesty. Again, if you honestly give a timeline, and things get crazy and you have to make adjustments, that's life, but you know in your heart if the original timeline was a truthful estimate or designed to let the people hear what they wanted to hear so they would sign the dotted line. Again, not picking on our contractors, and we have some awesome ones in our church, just a practical illustration, and I know it applies to other occupations as well. In this context the wisdom writer goes on to say...

Proverbs 12:18 Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

In other words, don't be reckless with your words, or your commitments. If you are, people will stop trusting you and that will destroy your relationships. Why? Because any good relationship is built upon trust. Trust is built when a person is committed to honesty and truthfulness in their dealings with others. In fact the writer of Proverbs says the tongue of the wise brings healing! Relationships are healed, mended, and strengthened by a commitment to honesty! I told my kids, when they were living at home, if I can trust you our relationship will be good, but if I can't trust you, no matter how much I love you, our relationship will be crippled. Why? Because relationships are built on trust. I told my kids, your freedoms will be based on the ability of your Mom and me to trust you!

The thing that destroyed Adam and Eve's relationship with God was they stopped trusting Him. The serpent deceived them by causing them to believe that God had deceived them. Satan told Adam and Eve God didn't want them to eat the fruit because God didn't want them to become as wise as God! Adam and Eve both bought the lie and we all know the results. Not good! Satan continues his deceit by leading people to think doing wrong is okay. People rationalize away dishonesty. "Well, it's just a little white lie!" Or "what they don't know won't hurt them!" Let me say again, I'm not talking about being mean spirited in the name of honesty. I've seen people try to excuse their meanness to others by saying, "I'm just brutally honest!" My Grandmother's advice was so good, "If you can't say something good about someone, just don't say anything at all!" So aside from trying to use brute honesty as an excuse for being mean, God wants us to be committed to honesty. The writer of Proverbs actually gives us some very compelling reasons to be committed to honesty when he lists seven things that God hates, and this may surprise you, but I believe four of the seven have to do with our word, our honesty. Listen...

Proverbs 6:16 There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:  
Proverbs 6:17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood,  
Proverbs 6:18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil,  
Proverbs 6:19 a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

And why would I include a person who stirs up conflict in the community in the dishonest list? Remember, what our professor told us Wednesday night, “consider the context of the Scripture you are reading. Look at the verses before and after so you can understand the context!” Listen to Proverbs 6:12-14, the verses just before the list of things God hates.

Proverbs 6:12 A scoundrel and villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth,  
Proverbs 6:13 who winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers,  
Proverbs 6:14 who plots evil with deceit in his heart—he always stirs up dissension.

And then the writer goes on to list a very serious consequence of the dishonesty in the scoundrel and villain’s life...

Proverbs 6:15 Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy.

Folks, the bottom line is that nothing good comes from dishonesty! And this leads us to our last point...

### **A fourth reason our Word is so important is because it reveals our commitment to our Savior!**

If you're committed to God, then you will be committed to His will and ways for your life! And I think we've seen that honesty, integrity, and truthfulness are extremely important to God! And you might be inclined to ask what the main benefit of being a man or woman of your word would be? What's in it for me? Well, the Lord was trying to keep things simple, and so was the writer of Proverbs so listen to this very simple, yet extremely profound truth that showcases the difference between honesty and dishonesty and answers the question of what the main benefit of honesty is...

Proverbs 12:22 The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.

I don't know about you, but I would rather the Lord delight in me rather than detest me! And just why does God delight in those who are truthful? It's simple really. It's because those who are truthful have chosen the way of truth and God honors that and delights in that. And when we choose God's ways, our witness to others becomes powerful. In fact let me point something amazing out to you about the Proverbs we've read today. They were all written by Solomon, son of King David. And I believe that Solomon had been influenced by the witness of his dad in this

area of his life. David had made some bad decisions in the past, as we've recently pointed out. But he was deeply sorry and repentant, and he became a man known as one who sought after God's own heart! In fact I will close the message today with a portion of one of David's prayers and it had a lot to do with his desire to become the honest man of God that his family and nation needed him to be! Here's what he prayed...

Psalm 119:29 Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me and teach me your law.

Psalm 119:30 I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws.

Psalm 119:31 I hold fast to your statutes, LORD; do not let me be put to shame.

Psalm 119:32 I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.

Psalm 119:33 Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end.

Psalm 119:34 Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

Psalm 119:35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.

Psalm 119:36 Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.

Psalm 119:37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.

Psalm 119:38 Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared.

Psalm 119:39 Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good.

Psalm 119:40 How I long for your precepts! In your righteousness preserve my life.

Psalm 119:41 May your unfailing love come to me, LORD, your salvation, according to your promise;

Psalm 119:42 then I can answer anyone who taunts me, for I trust in your word.

Psalm 119:43 Never take your word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws.

Let's pray!