

**Life Improvements --- Mountaintop Makeovers ---- Honesty & Integrity**

**Leviticus 19:1-18 & Matthew 5:33-37**

***“Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.”***

**Matthew 5:38**

Leviticus 19:1-18

*The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. <sup>3</sup> You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. <sup>4</sup> Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup> When you offer a sacrifice of well-being to the LORD, offer it in such a way that it is acceptable in your behalf. <sup>6</sup> It shall be eaten on the same day you offer it, or on the next day; and anything left over until the third day shall be consumed in fire. <sup>7</sup> If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an abomination; it will not be acceptable. <sup>8</sup> All who eat it shall be subject to punishment, because they have profaned what is holy to the LORD; and any such person shall be cut off from the people. <sup>9</sup> When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. <sup>10</sup> You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God. <sup>11</sup> You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. <sup>12</sup> And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup> You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. <sup>14</sup> You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. <sup>15</sup> You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. <sup>16</sup> You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD. <sup>17</sup> You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. <sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*

The other day I received an e-mail from a friend that was rather cute and I thought was quite applicable to our message this morning. Maybe some of you have seen it or read it --- A 1<sup>st</sup> grade school teacher had twenty-six students in her class. She presented each child in her classroom the 1st half of a well-known proverb and asked them to come up with the remainder of the proverb. It's hard to believe these were actually done by first graders. Their insight may surprise you. While reading, keep in mind that these are first-graders, 6-year-olds!

1.	Don't change horses	until they stop running.
2.	Strike while the	bug is close.
3.	It's always darkest before	Daylight Saving Time.
4.	Never underestimate the power of	termites.
5.	You can lead a horse to water but	How?
6.	Don't bite the hand that	looks dirty.
7.	No news is	impossible
8.	A miss is as good as a	Mr.

9.	You can't teach an old dog new	Math
10.	If you lie down with dogs, you'll	stink in the morning.
11.	Love all, trust	Me.
12.	The pen is mightier than the	pigs.
13.	An idle mind is	the best way to relax.
14.	Where there's smoke there's	pollution.
15.	Happy the bride who	gets all the presents.
16.	A penny saved is	not much.
17.	Two's company, three's	the Musketeers.
18.	Don't put off till tomorrow what	you put on to go to bed.
19.	Laugh and the whole world laughs with you, cry and	You have to blow your nose.
20.	There are none so blind as	Stevie Wonder.
21.	Children should be seen and not	spanked or grounded..
22.	If at first you don't succeed	get new batteries.
23.	You get out of something only what you	See in the picture on the box
24.	When the blind lead the blind	get out of the way
25.	A bird in the hand	is going to poop on you.

***And the WINNER and last one!***

26	Better late than	Pregnant
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Jesus had somewhat of the same problem when He was teaching on the Sermon of Mount. As we have heard over the past several weeks, Jesus' message from the mountaintop was a message that confronted the status quo. Jesus would say to them --- "You have heard it said, "do not murder,' but I tell you anyone who is angry with his brother or sister has already committed murder. You have heard it said, 'do not commit adultery,' but anyone who looks at a woman intentionally to lust after her has already committed adultery." On the mountaintop makeover, Jesus is challenging the people to a new moral mandate. Much like when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, only Jesus did not write these down on stone tablets—he wants to write them on our hearts.

Our reading this morning is the fourth of Christ's six great illustrations of true morality, found at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Over the past few weeks, we have wrestled with Jesus' moral mandate concerning anger and contempt, lust, adultery and divorce. Today let us listen for His teaching concerning honesty and integrity.

Matthew 5:33-38

<sup>33</sup> "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, 'Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great

King. <sup>36</sup> *And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.* <sup>37</sup> *Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.'"*

Let us pray... Dear Lord God, You have given us Your word as a light for our path. May we walk in this light and live our lives with Your truth and integrity. May your word be alive and redemptive within us this morning. Amen

If you are taking notes this morning, there are three points: 1) The Situation, 2) The Sermon, and 3) The Solution.

### **THE SITUATION**

In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law had made a bad habit of consistently adding to the law. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law had taken the third commandment --- *"You shall not misuse the name of God"* (Exodus 20:7) and expanded it. The teaching that Jesus quotes here in verse 33 was a composite of ideas based on three different Old Testament writings found in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They were:

Leviticus 9:12 --- *"And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD."*

Numbers 30:2 --- *"When a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."*

Deuteronomy 23:21 --- *"If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not postpone fulfilling it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you would incur guilt."*

Even a superficial reading of these commandments indicates plainly their intention. They prohibit false swearing or perjury--making a vow and breaking it. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law went to work on these awkward prohibitions and tried to restrict them in their favor. They shifted people's attention away from the vow itself and the need to keep it, to a formula they created in using it. They were teaching that it was fine to swear by heaven, or God's throne, or earth since it was God's footstool, or even the hairs on their heads.

What do we swear by? By the Star of Texas, the Eyes of Texas, The Yellow Rose of Texas, or maybe your Grandmother's Bible, or your uncle's truck? Maybe we still swear by heaven or earth or the hairs on our heads. May we say, "I swear to God..." The situation of the time of Jesus found people taking the words of God to Moses—and diluting them in their own favor. The Pharisees and religious teachers had taken liberty with God's commands and the people followed them like blind sheep. The Ten Commandments had gone from ten to over 600—that is the situation Jesus is addressing on the mount.

### **THE SERMON**

Jesus' message is short and sweet. I would like to model that more and more --- especially since I've been hearing that our services have been going over their allotted time. Jesus simply says, *"But I say to you, 'Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his*

*footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.'"*

Jesus was seeking absolute truthfulness. The people did not want to be hampered by God's standard for absolute truth. They felt that if they were able to swear by anything other than God's name then they were not taking God's name in vain. Jesus confronts them and reminds them again it is God who owns the heavens, the earth and even numbers the hairs on their head. God's absolute, unchanging standard is truth and sincerity in everything. The people were going around and making oaths and vows with little intention of fulfilling them. It would be like telling someone that you would do something and then going back to them and saying "I had my fingers crossed." When I first moved to Texas, I heard the phrase, "I'm fixin' to..." I suppose that would be a great modern-day illustration of what Jesus was trying to say! What Jesus was confronting his followers with was a higher moral mandate. Let your "yes be yes and your no be no." Jesus was explaining to the people that no promise can ever be made, no word can ever be spoken, without being done in the presence of God. In the book of Proverbs, chapter 17 it says the roots of a life in God are righteousness and justice and the fruit of that life are love and truth. Jesus is fulfilling the Law by telling us, "Simply let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no.'"

### **THE SOLUTION**

The "so what" for this morning is simple. Let your "yes be yes and your no be no!"

I had a pastor friend who used to say to us all the time, "You can believe every word I say in the pulpit; but don't believe a word I say outside of it." To be honest with you, that always bothered me. I thought to myself, "How can he say one thing and the next day say another?" While I was working on my seminary degree, the Holy Spirit impressed upon my heart that I should always be the same person in the pulpit that I am in the public and private arena. In essence, the Holy Spirit was echoing to my heart the words of Jesus, "Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and let your 'no' be 'no'." You know, I could have 100 stoles—but it isn't the stole that makes me a man after God's own heart. In Upland, Pastor Gary and I used to call our robes our "sin fighting suits!" It isn't the robe that makes me a man after God's own heart. (Take off robe.) I might have a nice cross on—a cross that says Christ is counting on me—but it isn't the cross that makes me a man after God's own heart.

In his commentary on this passage William Barclay said it this way, "Life cannot be divided into compartments in some of which God is involved and in others of which he is not involved; there cannot be one kind of language in the Church and another kind in the shipyard or the factory or the office; there cannot be one kind of standard in the Church and another kind of standard in the business world. The 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 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 thing as a form of words which evades bringing God into a transaction. We will regard all promises as sacred, if we remember that all promises

are made in the presence of God.”<sup>i</sup> What makes me a man after God’s own heart is knowing who I am in Christ. The lesson of week one of Lent: YES and NO—from the heart alone.

So What? Have we lost the value of telling the truth in our lives? Is our “yes” really “yes?” Does our yes carry a definite commitment or are we given to modifying the truth and disguising it? Is our word reliable? Do we do what we say we will do? Can people trust us as models of integrity? These are the very practical, day-to-day issues that Jesus raises here. Today is the first Sunday of Lent. As we journey towards the Cross these next seven weeks, let us think about these questions as we consider how we make our oaths and vows today. How would our world change if our ‘yes’ were ‘yes’ and our ‘no’ was ‘no’?

To end the message for today, let’s do a little audience participation:

“It’s always darkest....before the dawn.”

“No news....is good news.”

“You can lead a horse to water....but you can’t make it drink.”

“An idle mind.... Is the devil’s playground.”

“Where there’s smoke...there’s fire!”

“If at first you don’t succeed...try, try again.”

Let your YES be YES...and your NO be NO!

Let us pray ....

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February 21, 2010

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<sup>i</sup> Barclay, William, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975