



Part 34: Jesus and Speech

Matthew 10:33-37

Jesus is calling us to whole-hearted integrity, so the world can see what He is like.

“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. Matthew 5: 33-37

Why did this matter to Jesus?

Scripture is both living and active – it is applicable, relevant and formational today- *and* it is a cross-cultural document. We must always ask the question “What *did* it mean?” (What was the meaning of this to the original audience?) before asking “What *does* it mean to me?” (How is it relevant to my life?). So we need to understand how oaths were being used in order to understand why Jesus would consider this mandate to be central to his teaching on discipleship and the nature of the kingdom

Oaths/Vows = the contracts of an oral culture, sworn upon something/someone trustworthy in the presence of others

This law was given in order to prevent God's name from being blasphemed if they broke an oath that was sworn in the name of Yahweh (Leviticus 19:12). But in Jesus's day, it was being used to *get out* of commitments. The discussion amongst the pharisees was asking when it was possible to break commitments without legal ramification- Could you swear by the temple without breaking the law? Was that too close to blaspheming God? Somewhat arbitrary lines were drawn – for instance, you could swear by your sacrifice on the altar, but not the altar itself, and your commitment was not legally binding. As a Rabbi, people would have expected Jesus to have an opinion on this. But Jesus turns it on its head.

In response to the question: What oaths are really bindings? When can I get out of a commitment? Jesus says: **Become the type of person that doesn't need oaths.** Be so trustworthy your yes and no are proof enough that you'll do that you say.

There is no situation where God is not witnessing your words.

Why does this matter to us?

Our culture needs Christians of integrity.

In a culture that does not value integrity, we need to be aware of both the overt and covert ways our integrity can erode. Some subtle ways might be....

- Being fickle in your plans and commitments
- Bending the truth for your advantage or to manage people's opinion of you
- Committing to things you likely do not have the capacity for
- Behaving or speaking one way in public, and another way in secret
- Speaking to someone differently than you speak about them

Through small acts of integrity, Jesus is showing us a new culture that reveals what God is like.

Jesus says "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. "

- Jesus is quoting Isaiah 66:1 which says "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me?" The point of this quotation is that there is nothing that does not belong to God, or any place that God is not present. So, there is nothing in creation that we can swear on that would rid us of the witness of God. In fact, even if we were to swear on ourselves, God has more authority over us than we do (we can't even control our aging). There is no "sacred" and "secular" – God wants integrity from us in everything.

How do we live this out?

- We train ourselves to have an audience of one.
- We let God's faithfulness transform us.
- When we fail, we lean on the gift of confession.

Other Passages to Consider:

1. 2 Corinthians 1:16-23 In this passage, Paul explains why he seemed to go back on his commitment to visit the Corinthians on his way back from Macedonia. He roots the reason that *he* is not fickle in his plans in the truth that God is not fickle in what he promises. We also see in this passage that Paul swears an oath to the Corinthians by God! Passages like these show us that the point of this passage was actually *not* about whether or not we swear oaths (for instance, appearing in court or taking wedding vows).
2. Matthew 26: 63-64, Jesus speaks under oath at his trial before the Sanhedrin. Again, this leads us to see that this passage is not about whether or not we can take an oath when the law or a contract requires it of us. Rather the focus is whether we have a "yes" and "no" that is trustworthy even if no one will enforce the consequences.

Small Group Questions

1. Read through Matthew 5: 33-35. What stands out to you? What questions do you have?
2. Where have you experienced or seen a lack of integrity in the culture around us? What affect has it had on you personally?
3. Who are some people you know who have great integrity? What are some ways it expresses itself?
4. How do you think it would change our churches and broader communities if we lived with whole-hearted integrity?
5. What are some barriers you have to living with integrity? Some examples might be...
 - a. Caring about other's perception of you
 - b. Difficulty saying no
 - c. Fear of confrontation
 - d. Fear of confessing your weaknesses
 - e. Busyness leading to flakiness
 - f. Others??
6. Are there any areas of your life you feel God calling you to greater integrity?
7. How do you think we live out integrity without meanness (honesty without love)? What about living with integrity while also living under grace?
8. How can we pray for you as you seek to live this out?