

Introduction:

- So far in the passages we have covered from Mt. 5 we have looked at:
 - Living Righteous...Life Beyond Anger. Murder vs. Anger
 - Keeping the Command vs. Keeping the Heart - Adultery. Adultery vs. Lust
 - Divorce vs. God's original intention.
 - In both passages we finished with these truths: One, God is looking at the heart while man looks at the outside. Two, both the sin of anger and lust are devaluations of the worth of a person. The devaluing of something God has called precious. Three, **Here is where the value of human life begins – in the heart** – and when human life is devalued in any way it is an affront to the God who created that life. This is what the Pharisees were missing and this is what Jesus wanted the people to get.
 - For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Mt 5:20
 - Jesus then starts these five sayings, "you have heard but I say" portions of scripture. By doing so, He is after the heart of the people and not just the behavior. He is after the people to find righteousness that is of the heart and not just of the behavior.
 - The first two have come directly from the 10 Commands. The next two come from the law of Moses. Divorce. Tonight - Integrity. I believe Jesus is being intentional with his choice of laws to drive home the point...that a changed heart is way better than a changed behavior.
 - Mt 5:33-37
 - Jesus calls us to live above the law...so far that we would never be called into question for breaking it. This section on oath really is about integrity. Anger, lust, integrity...
 - IL: So insecure were the ancient Chinese of their enemies on the north side that they built the Great Wall of China, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It was so high they knew no one could climb over it and so thick that nothing could break it down. Then they settled back to enjoy their security. But during the first 100 years of the wall's existence, China was invaded 3 times. And not once did the enemy break down the wall or climb over its top. Each time the enemy simply bribed a gatekeeper with money and marched right through the gates. According to the historians, the Chinese were so busy relying upon the great wall of stone, that they forgot to teach their children about integrity. Integrity for their country, culture, and each other.
- I. **Understanding An Oath** What is your word worth?
- A. In verse 33 Jesus quotes parts of two OT scriptures. *“You have also heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.’”* (Matthew 5:33, NLT)
1. Don't break your vows. *“Do not bring shame on the name of your God by using it to swear falsely. I am the Lord.”* (Leviticus 19:12, NLT)
 2. Make sure to keep your vows. *“Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High.”* (Psalm 50:14, NLT)
 3. Both of these passages deals with related practices of oath taking and making vows.
- B. The oath system had become a system of rules that said when it was OK to lie and when it was not. So instead of strengthen the cause of truth, like oaths were intended to do, they weakened it. You could learn to swear in a very evasive way to deceive people!

1. The original intention of the oath system was to assure that people avoided perjury. Perjury is: A crime that occurs when an individual willfully makes a false statement during a judicial proceeding, after he or she has taken an oath to speak the truth. The oath was intended to help people to tell the truth for fear of punishment.
 - a) *So help me God...*
 - b) *God, do so to me and more...*
 - c) *Kids, Cross my heart and hope to die...*
2. In swearing, we appeal to the truth of something know, to confirm the truth of something doubtful or unknown. We appeal to something greater to sway the decision of the hearers.
 - a) A great number of people are liars. If that language is too strong for you, I can use marginally deceptive. Because of that, we use oaths and vows at the court level and friendship level because we are mostly distrustful of each other.
 - b) Our hope is to convince people of 'honesty' by taking a vow or swearing by something.
- C. What happened over time was that the religious leaders of the day began to find ways of getting around the truth of the vow. They did not want to swear by the name of God. That could get you killed. So they chose other things, and stood with fingers crossed behind their backs.
 1. "Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye." When the 'cross my heart' vow was taken, the only legal way to break it without any repercussions was to have had your fingers crossed at the time the commitment was made. The thinking was that you could commit to anything, and as long as you had your fingers crossed you could renege with impunity. This is what Pharisees were doing.
 2. Mt 23:16-22 read it.
 3. In Mt 26 they are trying to find liars to take an oath. Then putting oath onto Jesus. Example: Mt 26:63 *"But Jesus remained silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.""* (Matthew 26:63, NLT) Put Jesus under oath.
 4. *It is as you said, but I will say something greater than your oath!* vs 64

II. Call to Integrity

- A. Jesus said, *"Do not make vows, do not swear by...heaven (It's God's throne), earth (It's God's footstool), or Jerusalem (It's the City of the Great King), or by your head (you can't turn one hair white or black)."* Just say yes or no. Let your word be good enough to stand by itself! Jesus is talking about integrity!
 1. Webster Dictionary- Integrity: The steadfast adherence to moral values and truth.
 2. Simply put, integrity is more than just telling the truth. Integrity is doing what we said we would do. Integrity means keeping our word. Integrity means that our words & our actions are the same. In other words, we practice what we preach.
 3. Jesus reminds of the simple truth that everything we say should be an oath...truth.
 4. *"When you make a promise to God, don't delay in following through, for God takes no pleasure in fools. Keep all the promises you make to him. It is better to say nothing than to make a promise and not keep it."* (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5, NLT)

- B. "No one demands an oath from those whose word is known to be their bond; even a solemn oath on the lips of other tends to be taken with a grain of salt." FF Bruce P67, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* IL. Four high school boys were late to their morning class one day and, thus missed the scheduled mid-term exam. They entered the classroom and told their teacher they were late due to a flat tire. The teacher smiled and told them it was too bad they were late because they had missed the mid-term exam that morning. But she was willing to let them make it up. She gave them each a piece of paper and a pencil and sent them to the four corners of the room. Then she told them they would pass if they could answer just one question: Which tire was flat? Do we have integrity? Do our youth have integrity?
- C. God is looking for us to walk in integrity in:
1. Our words - Jesus is calling for our communication to be honest.
 - a) No room for lies
 - b) No room for exaggeration
 - c) We must live honestly
 2. Our actions
 - a) Our words and our actions must align with each other.
 - b) James 1:22 *Be does of the word and not just hearers.*
 3. Our lives – live so that no one questions your character.
 - a) *"Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure."* (1 John 3:2-3, NLT)
 - b) Jesus gave us the example of integrity, it is our responsibility to live up to that integrity.

Conclusion:

- Let me ask you tonight, What is your word worth?
- God is the only one who is really capable of keeping an oath. Heb 6:17 (NLT) says, *"God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind."*
- *"But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned."* (James 5:12, NLT)