

LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: PROMISES, PROMISES

SERMON DISCUSSION FOR SUNDAY JUNE 28, 2015 | SPEAKER: PASTOR BRIAN SCRAMLIN

SERMON DISCUSSION

Ice Breaker (Everyone): What is a humorous non-curse-word you or your family uses when frustrated?

INTRO

A 1961 video was played showing a woman drinking a Coca-Cola sharing how it was low in sugar content, gave her energy and kept her from craving fattening foods. Pastor Brian asks the question “Why would a company make promises they may not be able to keep?” to which he answers: “...a company has an agenda to sell something. To sell something you need to have credibility. And the only way to manufacture credibility is through promises.”

Pastor Brian goes on to share that it is not only companies, but people who make promises to bolster their credibility. The formula looks like this: Person wants something, person needs credibility to get it, person uses promises to force credibility. For instance, a used car salesman wants to make a sale, he needs credibility, so he promises to “go to bat” for you behind the scenes. Another example is a parent wants their kids to love them, the parent feels they need to be seen as cool, so the parent promises to buy them a new phone or to let them drive next time. Lastly, it is explained that sometimes we want to force so much credibility we are willing to swear. Maybe even willing to swear by God or our mother’s grave.

What do you think about the flow of “Person wants something > Person needs credibility to get it > Person uses promises to force credibility”? Is this really why people make promises?

How would you describe the reason you make promises?

On a scale from 1-10 (ten being all the time), how often do you find yourself making promises or swearing by something?

BACKGROUND OF SCRIPTURE

Pastor Brian encourages us to remember the context of the Sermon on the Mount. He shared

“Jesus is contrasting the New Kingdom He is bringing with the Old Established Kingdom. He’s moving us from being guided by the letter-of-the-Law to being guided by the Spirit. He’s moving us from judging only our outer actions and having us consider even our inner thoughts and inclinations. Each of the declarations Jesus shares in the Sermon on the Mount are combatting and defeating manmade misunderstandings of God’s Word and traditions built around those misunderstandings.”

SCRIPTURE

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matthew 5:33-37 ESV)

MISUNDERSTOOD SCRIPTURE

The verses most scholars agree Jesus is referring to in the above passage is Deuteronomy 6:13 and Numbers 30:2.

"It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear." (Deuteronomy 6:13 ESV)

"If a man vows 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." (Numbers 30:2 ESV)

Scholars also believe Jesus is seeking to correct another misunderstood scripture, the Third Commandment:

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." (Exodus 20:7 ESV cf. Leviticus 19:12).

Pastor Brian shares that the *"...phrase "in vain" can also be translated as "frivolously", "lightly", or "profanely" Essentially, using a reference to God for any purpose other than in a serious, considerate, and worshipful manner was sin.*" But it was seen as a good, or worshipful to use God's name when making a very solemn vow. A.W. Pink says that for the Jew, using the name of God in a vow was to "most solemnly acknowledge Him as Witness, Judge, and Revenger of falsehood." The conclusion of this is that taking an oath was NOT SINFUL. Oaths were taken by Abraham, Jacob, David, and even God Himself. They were never frivolous, but always thoughtful.

What are the connections between Deuteronomy 6:13, Numbers 30:2, and Exodus 20:7?

Do people today look at vows differently than the men listed above? How so? Why do you think that?

TRADITIONS OF OATHS

Over time, the Jewish leaders created a great number of intricate ways of making vows, oaths, and promises without exactly inciting the name of God. There were casual oaths, worship oaths, levels of oaths depending on what you made your oath on. Some oaths were more binding than other oaths. Bible scholar L.A. Barbieri, Jr. wrote "The Pharisees were notorious for their oaths, which were made on the least provocation. Yet they made allowances for mental reservations within their oaths." Basically saying, the Jews Jesus was talking to made all kinds of promises, on all kinds of things, but always kept a way out.

How often do you make promises? Do you have different "levels" of promises you make (i.e. some are binding vs some are not)? Can you give an example?

JESUS' ARGUMENT AGAINST THE TRADITIONS

First, Jesus explains that we ought not take any oaths at all, second that just because we aren't using God's name doesn't mean we aren't dishonoring Him, and third, the reason we are using oaths in the first place is for evil.

To make the first point, Pastor Brian shares that the heart of the Scriptures are that oaths be solemn and forceful. The Hebrew word for oath is *shebuah*. It is only used in the passive context, meaning one should only take an oath when called upon to do so. Also, it comes from the root *shabuah*, meaning seven. Interpreters believe this etymology points toward a practice of having seven witnesses present. It could also be that since seven is the number of completeness, the oath was meant to be a "complete end to differences" (See A.W. Pink, *An exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* pp. 97–108. Bellingham, WA). Jesus cries for an end of all the abuse of oaths and swearing. He says "just stop it!"

Second, Jesus denounces the little laws and practices of the Jews regarding oaths and vows. Jesus exposes the truth that one cannot escape the repercussions and expectations of an oath. If one swears by anything he may as well be swearing by God. "Though they may omit mentioning the fearful name of God, let them know that His is the name of Creator and Owner of all things, and therefore it is invoked in all the works of His hands." (*ibid.*)

Lastly, Jesus exposes the reason the religious leaders were using so many vows and promises—to manipulate. They attempted to puff themselves up. They attempted to coerce the people.

Reflect: Might Jesus be calling you to "just stop it" because your promises are so thin? Have you slipped into the trap of thinking "if I don't swear to God, it does not offend Him"? What are your intentions in making a promise or swearing?

WHY JESUS' WAY IS BETTER

W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, Jr. suggest

"...the presupposition behind the taking of oaths is that there are two types of statements, one of which demands commitment (the oath), one of which does not (the statement unaccompanied by an oath), Jesus enjoins commitment to every statement, that is, invariable honesty and integrity."

With this understanding, we realize that Jesus isn't taking away from the Law by saying "you shouldn't take any more oaths" but is fulfilling the Law by saying "everything that comes from your mouth may as well be an oath"!

W.W. Wiersbe said "...our conversation should be so honest, and our character so true, that we would not need 'crutches' to get people to believe us. Words depend on character, and oaths cannot compensate for a poor character."

Do either of the above quotes impact you? What part? How so?

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

Pastor Brian shares four ways this message could play out in your life:

1. **Do not refer to God except in a way that is serious, considerate, and worshipful.** From the message: *“I’ll be frank if you’ve missed it thus far in the message, saying “I swear to God” is sin unless you are willing to have people there to witness the oath and you realize you are invoking God as Witness, Judge, and Revenger over the matter.”*
2. **Do not seek to make an oath.** Remember, oaths are passive by nature. But God or the government may call you to take an oath. In which case...
3. **Don’t resist oaths.** Jesus did not resist responding to one (Matt. 26:63, 64) When Caiaphas urged Him by the name of the Living God, Jesus then responded in His trial. In the book of Revelation, an angel swore by “Him who lives for ever and ever...” that there will be no more delay. (Rev. 10:4–6). St. Augustine points out that Paul takes oaths before God—even twice in 2 Corinthians (1:23; 11:31)

If you do take an oath, consider the words of John Calvin: “I can find, therefore, no better rule than that we regulate our oaths in such a manner that they be not rash or inconsiderate, wanton or frivolous, but used in cases of real necessity”

4. **Let everything you say be as if it were an oath.** In Heaven there will be no need for oaths as we will not lie. Jesus’ entire purpose in the Sermon on the Mount is to align you with the ways of Heaven—His Kingdom. That is what it means to live the Sermon on the Mount. So just start now. Let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no”.

Are any of the above applications harder or easier for you? Which ones? Why?

What is one thing you are going to allow God to work in on in your heart this week regarding the message?