

Small Groups @ TBC - Sermon Discussion Notes

Date of Sermon: 19 June 2016

Speaker: Mike Levy

Title: The Sermon on the Mount - The Kingdom of honesty

Introduction: Continuing our series on The Voice (Hearing God)

Read: Matthew 5 verses 33 to 37

Review:

God' plan for human relationships was that we would be truthful and honest and, as a result, trustworthy. This soon went by the wayside; the serpent in the garden of Eden dis-honestly reframed the words of God, Adam did not tell the whole truth to God, Abraham lied about Sarah, Jacob tricked Esau with twisted words, the brothers of Joseph lied to their father and so on.

An oath is a solemn promise made by someone to indicate that they are telling the truth, they were made even before the Law was given, and Leviticus 19 vs 2 that Jesus references. Deuteronomy 6 vs 13 says "Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and make your oaths in His name". An oath was to be sworn in the name of God which means that we call on God to be a witness to what we have said but also makes us accountable to him for what we have said. So God gave the Law as a framework to help people be honest at tell the truth since they were incapable of doing so without the Law.

This did not work either! Instead of swearing oaths in the name of God the Pharisees encouraged the swearing of oaths by almost anything else (by Heaven, earth, Jerusalem, hairs of the head, the temple, the altar) but Jesus punches a hole in this logic - Heaven is where God is, earth is created and sustained by God etc. What the Pharisees were doing was "scaling truth" what you swore by showed the degree of importance, truthfulness and honesty of what you were saying. Jesus says "enough" just tell the truth be honest, let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no". If you say you will do something, just do it, if you don't want to just say so. We could say it another way "say what you mean and mean what you say".

Being truthful and honest, and therefore trustworthy, means being different to our culture. Our culture has coined phrases such as "little white lie" "economical with the truth" "cross my heart and hope to die", our culture also scales truth by scaling lies. A little white lie is still an untruth. Sometimes people try to avoid telling a lie by saying nothing at all - but their silence also speaks volumes.

Often on our frontline the Jesus standard is in conflict for the way the world works. "Hospitality" in the corporate world may be an attempt to win contracts, maybe our boss doesn't want to answer the phone and asks us to tell the caller they are not here, or we are asked to code a cost to the wrong code to avoid an over-spend, or are tempted to embellish our CV to get a job. The recent collapse of BHS has raised issues surrounding former owners as Parliament seeks to uncover the truth, the EU referendum is taking place amidst claims from each side which lack honesty and truthfulness which makes it hard to decide how to vote.

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Even in churches we sometime find it difficult to be truthful and honest, maybe for fear of rejection "will I still be loved and accepted if people knew what I was really like", "would I still be loved and accepted if people knew how much I was struggling with my faith right now".

Into this world steps Jesus who is Truth and speaks Truth and he calls time on being untruthful and dis-honest, after all, we can say any words we like but God knows what is on our heart.

We can sum this passage up as follows:

*Giving an oath matters,
Because not all words are true.
But if all words are true,
Then giving an oath does not matter.*

Reflect and Respond:

1. Have you experienced un-truthfulness and dishonesty on your frontline? What were the circumstances? What impact did it have on you? What was the outcome?
2. Have you ever felt under pressure to lie? What were the circumstances? What impact did it have on you? What was the outcome?
3. How easy do you find it to let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no"? Share examples.
4. Some Christians take this passage to mean that under no circumstances should you ever take an oath, for example in a court of Law, what are your views? Why?
5. How would you apply this teaching in extreme situations, for example if you were sheltering Anne Frank and her family and a policeman, acting on a tip off, came to the door and asked if you were sheltering any Jews?
6. How easy do you find it to be totally honest and truthful in Church? Why?
7. The call to truthfulness and honesty is not a call to be hurtful and un-loving, have you ever been on the receiving end of unnecessary bluntness, and how did it resolve itself?
8. Oaths were a permission because of the corruption of humans, Jesus has taken back that permission because he has come to transform humans into kingdom people. What does this mean for you on your frontline?

Pray: Let your prayers be led by what comes out of your reflection.