

Jesus on the Fat Hill: Tell the Truth – Matthew 5:33-37

Dr. Seuss, in *Horton Hatches an Egg*, tells the story of an elephant, named Horton. Horton was asked by a bird named lazy Miss Mayzie to do something remarkable: to sit on her egg and hatch it. Horton agreed to help Miss Mayzee, as the bird flew away never to come back. As the days and weeks go by, Horton just keeps sitting there on that nest up in a tree. All his animal buddies come along and make fun of him. His friends encourage him to forget his promise and play with them.

Do any of you remember his response? “I meant what I said, I said what I meant. An elephant is faithful, 100%.”

Whether Dr. Seuss meant it or not, Horton the elephant is an example of Jesus to every child who reads the book.

Jesus thought telling the truth and keeping your promises was important. In His sermon on the Fat Hill, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called His followers to tell the truth.

READ Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus was serious about telling the truth. He wanted each of His followers, whether you were there listening to him live in the first century, or you are reading His words today in the Bible, to tell the truth. He wanted them to keep their promises and to understand how important truth telling is.

This is not an easy task. In fact, it never has been. The very fact that you are living in this world means that you are tempted to lie, cheat, and not tell the whole truth. Satan is after you and wants you lie. Especially if you are a Christian, a Christ follower, Satan wants to take you down. His major weapon is to get you to lie, to destroy your own integrity. That is why Jesus calls Satan the “father of lies” in John 8:44. He wants His follower to know that Satan is after them to get them to lie.

As followers of Christ, we have to be people who can handle the truth correctly. Jack Nicholson in the movie *A Few Good Men* said, “You can’t handle the truth.” The fact is, Jesus says that we can. We can handle the truth, because of His Holy Spirit working in our lives.

Jesus wants us to:

I. Keep your promises even when they seem insignificant.

- A. Following Jesus means a commitment to truth, even in the little things. We have to be people of our word, because Jesus is the Word. If there is something small that we say will happen, we have to make sure it happens.
- B. A few years back two guys interviewed thousands of people, and they published their findings in a book called *The Day America Told the Truth*.
1. Of those surveyed, 91% said that they lie on a regular basis.
 2. 86% said they lie to their parents regularly,
 3. 75% said they lie to their friends,
 4. 69% said they lie to their spouses.
 5. 50% said they regularly called in to work sick when they weren't
 6. Here is the thing though: Christian and non-Christian adults were no different: Christians are just as likely to falsify our income taxes, steal items from work, commit plagiarism, give bribes to obtain a building permit, ignore construction specs, illegally copy computer programs, steal time from work, exaggerate their products, and selectively obey the law.
 7. Jesus wants His followers to be different, even in the small things.
- C. Sometimes we can come up with reasons for breaking our promises:
1. I didn't think it was all that important
 2. I thought I could, but now I can't
 3. No one will get hurt, what is the big deal?
 4. It seemed the right thing to do at the time
- D. When you start to justify a little dishonesty because it seems small, be careful because you're one step closer to doing what you never thought you would.
1. Luke 16:10 - *Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.* In other words, the little areas test our integrity.
 2. Sir Walter Scott had it right when he said, "what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." Most people would agree with him, but the problem is that we often really believe the opposite. We think that life will get simpler and easier if we just lie. Lying, however, complicates our lives. If you lie, then you have to lie again to cover up the last one. You've got to keep track of all the lies you have told and to whom. Things get tricky. It gets too complex. It becomes

a tangled web! Jesus had it right when He said, "just let your yes be yes." Telling the truth even in the small things makes life a lot easier.

3. God takes stretching the truth very seriously:
 1. Psalm 51:6 (NLT) – *[God] desires honesty from the heart, so He can teach me to be wise in my inmost being.*
 2. Proverbs 6 tells us the things God detests. In the seven things that God hates, a lying tongue and a false witness who pours out lies stands out!
 3. Proverbs 12:13 (NLT) - *The wicked are trapped by their own words, but the godly escape such trouble.*
 4. Proverbs 12:22 - *The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.*
 5. Revelation 21:8 (song)

- E. There are several ways we can be careless daily with the truth because we don't see it as a big deal.
 1. We lie, exaggerate, mislead, deceive, cheat or flatter people to cover up our mistakes.
 2. A half truth is really a whole lie and a white lie is really black.
- F. God wants us to keep our promises, even if it was a little truth.
 1. Mark Twain once said, "when in doubt, tell the truth. It will confound your enemies and astound your friends."
 2. In fact, the Bible tells us that one of the main ways to grow in Christ is to tell the truth, even in the little things:
 1. Ephesians 4:15 – *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

Jesus wants us to:

1. Keep your promises even when they seem insignificant, and...

II. Keep your promises even when you regret making them.

- A. Maybe you regret making a promise because things didn't turn out the way you had hoped.
- B. Sometimes we can make foolish promises. Foolish promises are made when we don't even think about it. It just comes out of our mouth before we realize what we are doing. Maybe when you made the promise, you didn't think anything of it. Maybe you thought you would have: More time, More money, More knowledge, More energy, More whatever (you fill in the blank)

1. Now it looks like you're going to have to do what you promised, BUT you don't have the time, the money, the know-how, the energy.
 2. God would still want you to follow through.
- C. We may stand in front of this church and proclaim: "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and I accept Him as my Lord and Savior."
1. We may be tempted to let our promise slip because Monday at work or home is not the same as Sunday at church.
 1. The lodge and the civic club meetings become more important than fellowship with the Body of Christ
 2. Watching TV or going to sporting events becomes more important than studying the word of God
 3. Talking to friends or business colleagues becomes more important than spending time in prayer
 4. Our business becomes more important than God's business
 5. Sharing the latest gossip or news becomes more important than sharing our faith.
 2. God wants you to remember your promises and come back to Him!
- D. Have you ever cheated on a test? Have you ever lied to get out of trouble? Have you ever complimented someone when you didn't mean it? Have you ever kept silent when you should have told the truth? Made yourself appear better than you are? Lied to gain an advantage or get your way? Misled someone to save face? All of these lies can easily slip out of our mouths before we realize it.
- E. Eph. 4:25 – *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor...*
- F. Maybe you regret making a promise because keeping your word ends up costing you more than you expected.
- G. Maybe things have not turned out the way you had hoped, but as a follower of Christ, you keep your commitment anyway.
- H. Remember the cost of breaking your promise: breaking trust undermines our relationships. When we lie and don't keep our promises it destroys trust, and trust is what healthy relationships are built upon.

Jesus wants us to:

- 1. Keep your promises even when they seem insignificant,**
- 2. Keep your promises even when you regret making them, and...**

III. Keep your promises even when you're the only one who knows.

- A. When no one is looking it is easier to break your promise. Ask any one who has gone on a diet. When you don't have accountability, it is easy to eat that chocolate cake, or bowl of ice cream.
1. Promises to ourselves are sometimes the hardest ones to keep, because there is no accountability and seemingly no consequences.
 2. Once you start breaking promises to yourself, however, it becomes much easier to break a promise to others.
- B. Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 5 that whenever we make a promise we do so in the presence of God. So even if no one is around, God is!
1. When we break a promise, we are not just lying to others or ourselves, but we are lying to God.
 2. Lying to God is the same as misusing His name. You bear the name of Christ. If you lie, even if people don't catch you, then you are misusing God's name:
 1. Exodus 20:7 - *You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*
 2. Leviticus 19:12 - *Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.*
 3. Numbers 30:2 - *When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.*
 4. Deuteronomy 23:21 - *If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin.*
- C. Jesus also makes it clear that it doesn't matter if you can wiggle your way out of the promise, God is the ultimate witness to your promises.
1. In contracts, I hate the small print. The small print is a way of getting out your word, your promise, or your oath. The people of Jesus' time were great at getting out of their promises by using the small print. They wanted out of a contract, so they reworded their promises.
 2. The Pharisees had developed elaborate rules determining when a man was bound by his word and when he was not.
 1. If I swear by Jerusalem, I am bound by my words. If I swear towards Jerusalem I'm not bound.

2. Any promise I make using God's name binds me, but if I can avoid using God's name when I make a promise, maybe I don't have to keep my word, they thought.
3. In fact a whole book of their law-code dealt with making vows and promises – which ones you had to keep, and which ones you didn't.

3. Today, we have similar oaths to swear we're telling the truth:
 1. Cross my heart and hope to die (stick a needle in my eye)--Oops, sorry. I had my fingers crossed
 2. I swear on a stack of Bibles
 3. If I'm lyin', I'm dyin'!
 4. May lightning strike me if I'm not telling the truth
 5. I swear by my mother's grave....
 6. With God as my witness...

D. Jesus rebuked the religious leaders for trying to get out of their words: READ Matthew 23:16-22

Jesus wants it to be clear that we are to keep our promises, even when you are the only one who knows about it.

Jesus wants us to:

- 1. Keep your promises even when they seem insignificant,**
- 2. Keep your promises even when you regret making them, and**
- 3. Keep your promises even when you're the only one who knows.**

Being a follower of God, doesn't exactly mean that you will always keep the truth. Did you know that several of the Bible's greatest "heroes of the faith" were liars?

- a. Abraham lied to the Egyptian Pharaoh saying that his wife Sarah was actually his sister.
- b. Jacob lied to his father Isaac saying that he was actually his brother Esau, so he could receive the blessing meant for the eldest son.
- c. Peter lied to the servants and soldiers surrounding the fire outside the trial room where Jesus-Peter's friend, teacher and Lord-was being tried, convicted and sentenced to the cross, saying, "I tell you I never knew the man!"
- d. Paul, after his own fashion, was so blinded by his own arrogance that he sought to suppress the Truth of Jesus Christ.

However, the Holy Spirit can work miracles and change a liar into a person of integrity

- a. Abraham came to a point and place in his life when he was able to trust God for everything, even the life of his beloved son Isaac.

- b. Jacob, after a night of wrestling with God, was able to trust God with everything he had, and so he returned to face his brother Esau whom he had cheated and betrayed. In fact, God changed His name from Jacob (which means liar or twister) to Israel (which means soldier of God).
- c. Peter was able to trust God before the same crowd that had called for Jesus' crucifixion when he stood up at Pentecost to proclaim the same name he had denied a mere 50 days before.
- d. Paul, who called himself "abnormally born" because he persecuted the Church, eventually wrote: "I preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

The same is true for you. If you place your trust in Jesus and follow Him; if you believe in the resurrection that gives power over the lies in your life; if you repent of your sins, including the broken promises and white lies; if you confess Jesus as Lord every day, not just Sunday morning; if you are baptized into Christ; and if you walk with Him, you can be changed by God's power.

This is why Jesus kept His promises: to save you! Jesus, because He was fully human, faced the gut-wrenching choice of keeping a costly promise. God had been promising for hundreds of years and generations upon generations to send His Messiah to save the world through His death. But when the moment of truth came in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus felt the weight of the difficulty of keeping this promise. In fact, he asked God, "If there is any other way, please let this cup pass from me."

Jesus knows what it's like to face a promise you don't want to keep. But in that moment of truth, when He realized there was no other way to save us, Jesus became the ultimate promise-keeper. He kept His word to die in our place, to absorb all of our evil, to be cut off from the Father, so that we could live and be forgiven and be reconciled to the Father.

We are called to follow Christ's example, because He is the truth. Jesus is the truth, and is the only who can set you free from the lies this world throws at you. Someone might believe that they are worthless, ugly, stupid, dumb, not pretty enough, never amount to anything, a pain in people's lives. Jesus came to set you free.

John 8:32 - Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

I want to make it clear that I am not calling you to put your trust in a type of church, in a denomination. Someone might sing, "My hope is built on nothing less than C.O.B. and Brethren Press." That is not true. Our hope must be in Jesus.

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(Many ideas in this sermon was taken from Kyle Idleman at Southeast Christian Church when he preached "Keep your Promises" on September 6-7, 2003. He said it a lot better than I could.)