

Resolutions & Promises

Matthew 5:33-37 NIV

Preface

The truth is a hard thing to find these days. Telling the truth seems to be a lost art that disappeared with basket weaving and blacksmithing.

Today, the truth is lost and words are carefully crafted to get what we want.

Illus: A couple was speeding down the highway when a State Trooper pulled them over. He asked the man to step out of the car and show him his license. The trooper asked, "Did you realize you were going 85 miles an hour back there?"

The man said, "Officer, that would be impossible. I'm the most law-abiding driver you've ever seen. I never exceed the speed limit, no matter my circumstances."

The policeman leaned into the window of the car and asked the wife, "Is that true?" "No Officer, it's not, he drives like a maniac, he speeds wherever he goes, his driving scares me to death."

The policeman wrote out a ticket. Then he said, "I also noticed you didn't have your seat belt on, which is against the law in this state."

"Officer," the man said, "with all due respect, I value life too highly. Buckle up, that's my motto."

The policeman asked the wife, "Is that true?"

"Are you kidding? I've never seen him wear the thing, you'd probably find cobwebs in his seat belt."

The policeman began to write him another ticket. About that time, the man leaned in the window and screamed, "Woman, what are you trying to do to me? Keep your big fat nose out of my business!"

The officer said, "Ma'am, does he always talk to you like that?" She replied, "Only when he's drunk."

It is pretty clear who was the honest one in this family.

Illus: Two wealthy but wicked brothers. One dies and the other offers the preacher a large sum of money for the church if he will do the funeral and call his brother a saint. Preacher agrees and at the funeral he says, "This man in this coffin was an ungodly sinner and wicked to the core. He was unfaithful

to his wife and abusive to his children. He was ruthless in business and a hypocrite in the church. But compared to his brother, he was a saint."

Well, the preacher kept his promise to the brother and his honesty before God. He told the truth.

Jesus had some strong things to say about honesty and truthfulness.

Text - Matthew 5:33-37

³³ "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."
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Introduction

Jesus had a way of grabbing people right when they thought they had him fooled. Just when they thought he was in the dark, he would go right to the heart of the problem and expose their hypocrisy.

Matthew 23:16-22 - In the day of Jesus, there were some real shenanigans being pulled. The brighter folks had learned how to cheat the less informed by making false promises and using the legal system to get their way.

They would commit to certain business transactions and swear or promise on items such as the temple. However, they would later claim that since they did not swear on the gold & silver of the temple, the oath was not valid. In other words, they would split hairs and weasel out of their commitments.

Such shenanigans are not unlike the stunts we pull today to get out of our commitments and promises. Jesus says you should not have to swear or take oaths. We should be the kind of person that only the truth comes from our lips. Always!

“Cross my heart and hope to die. My fingers were crossed. I swear on a stack of Bibles. May lightening strike me dead. I swear by my mothers grave. With God as my witness.”

These are all saying and additives we often feel compelled to give because we know our own lack of honesty. We have to add these phrases to make our words legitimate.

Jesus rebukes this and says, “Let your Yes be Yes and your No be No, anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

Oh how our generation needs to learn this lesson.

Illus: Several years ago, President Bill Clinton spent all day Saturday & Sunday huddled up with his lawyers preparing for his testimony before the grand jury. When you think about it, that is pretty odd. If your purpose is to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, what is there to rehearse? You just tell the truth.

New Years Resolutions - indicate that we are resolved to do certain things. They are promises to our self. Many years ago, I decided not to make New Years resolutions because I didn't like my success rate too well. In fact I found it depressing when I would not keep them and realized that I was in fact lying to myself. Paul describes this as, “deceiving yourself.”

But, Jesus teaches us to be true to our word and **always**, **always keep our promises**. This is not always easy.

1. Keep your promises even when they seem insignificant

The text makes it perfectly clear. There is to be no rationalizing about just how serious a promise was.

The Lord gives us no wiggle room to weasel out of our promises. He says, let your Yes be Yes and your No be No.

We don't have the right to weigh the consequences and decide whether we should keep our promise or not.

What you consider to be insignificant may be very important to someone else. They may be counting on you to keep your word.

Illus: I heard about a bus load of politicians who were traveling to a convention. It wrecked on a farmers land and he decided to do the humane thing and get his tractor and bury

them. When the trooper arrived he said, “Didn't you call the coroner? After all, not all of them might have been dead.” The old farmers replied, “Well, some of them kept saying they weren't dead but you know how them politicians lie!”

The little lies and broken promises add up and soon you have a reputation for not being trustworthy or reliable.

When we start being a little dishonest, we are where Satan wants us. We are on our way to doing things we said we would never do.

If you are dishonest with the little, seemingly insignificant things, then you are a liar.

Never consider the significance, just tell the truth all of the time.

Keep your promises, tell the truth even when it seems insignificant.

2. Keep your promises even when you regret making them

So often we make commitments and then regret making them. Perhaps your circumstances have changed or you didn't get the money you expected and now you really don't want to follow through with that commitment.

Maybe you made a commitment and thought you would get something in return but now it looks like you will get nothing. Keep the promise.

Illus: There is a story about a wealthy businessman who was on his deathbed. He asked the preacher to pray for him and promised that if he was healed he would give a million dollars to the church. Miraculously, the businessman got better and fully recovered. When the preacher saw him on the street he reminded him of the promise he had made. The businessman replied, “Did I say that? I guess that goes to show you just how sick I really was.”

Illus: Signing mortgage papers involves numerous documents all the result of people who have broken promises.

Psalm 15:4 describes a righteous person as one “who keeps his oath even when it hurts.”

I don't think it is an accident that Jesus follows his comments on divorce with the challenge to keep your promises. We promise to love, honor and cherish in sickness and in health, in good times and bad, until death do us part. Yet, 50% of all marriages in the US end up in divorce.

Divorce is not the unpardonable sin and there is healing. But, we must take our vows seriously before God.

Jesus says don't take the easy way out. Fulfill your commitments.

The real test of trustworthiness comes when telling the truth is going to cost you something.

Keep your promises and tell the truth even when you have regrets.

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

Promises to our self are sometimes the hardest to keep.

There is no accountability and seemingly no consequences.

Jesus makes it clear that any promise is a promise before God. When we break a promise we are not just lying to ourselves, **we are lying to God.**

Lying to others has immediate and noticeable consequences. However, lying to our self has a way of slowly eating at us, dissolving our character and self esteem.

Promises to our self are rarely a matter of privacy. Usually there are others involved.

Illus: Like the young American engineer who was sent to Ireland for a year. When he left, his fiancée gave him a harmonica. She said, "I want you to learn to play this to keep your mind off those Irish girls."

So he wrote and told her he was practicing the harmonica every night. After a year she met him at the airport, he grabbed her to kiss her and she pushed back and said, "Wait, before you kiss me, I want to hear you play the harmonica."

His promise had unexpected consequences that he did not anticipate.

Keep your promises and tell the truth, even when you think you are the only one who knows.

Conclusion

As Christians we must realize that so much is at stake. People look to Christians for honesty and for answers.

As you enter this New Year, **make one important promise between you and God. Make the promise that only the truth will come from your lips.**

Commit today to God that you will live your life in a way that will be pleasing to him. Make your life a testimony to your relationship with God.

And, if you have not accepted God's gift of salvation you should stop lying to yourself and do so today.

Illus: In the 18th Century King Fredrick of Prussia visited a prison in Berlin. One inmate after another tried to convince the monarch of his innocence. He was amazed how each one declared that they were unjustly punished. Then he noticed one man sitting quietly. The king asked the man why he was in prison. "Armed robbery, your honor," he responded.

The king asked, "Were you guilty?" "Yes, Sir," he answered without attempting to excuse his wrongdoing.

The king called over the guards and ordered, "Release this guilty man; I don't want him corrupting all of these innocent people."

Telling the truth begins with telling God the truth. We must admit that we are a sinner and acknowledge that we need forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

When we do, God is willing to say, "I release this guilty man. I release this guilty woman. Go and live a life of truth - a life for Christ and tell others of the grace you have found."