

Keeping Our Word

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[0 : 0 0] it'd be great if you could have your bibles open at matthew chapter 5 there's also an outline in the bulletin that you may find helpful i swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me god it's a familiar line isn't it i'm sure you've all heard it before whether it's said in a courtroom scene in a tv show or perhaps even in real life swearing an oath is like giving a solemn promise to tell the truth it's emphatically declaring that you'll keep your word but swearing oaths can actually be misused so that you can avoid telling the whole truth and keeping your word completely imagine for a moment a young boy who gets in trouble for being naughty one saturday this is this is completely hypothetical by the way and so he has to turn the tv off and he's not allowed to turn it back on for the rest of the day but two minutes later the tv is back on and he is watching it and when i i mean when the parent asks him in this hypothetical situation did you turn the tv back on after we told you to turn it off he replies with no i swear i didn't but as it turns out he bribed his little sister to turn it on for him now technically he's telling the truth isn't he technically he did not turn the tv on he even used an oath to emphasize that part of the truth but it wasn't the whole truth was it you see even swearing an oath can be misused to emphasize the part of the truth you want and avoid telling the whole truth that you don't want to be told and so despite the oath you're actually lying and breaking your word and the pharisees were playing similar sorts of games when it came to oaths they would use oaths not to keep their word but to avoid keeping their word and so jesus says in verse 34 do not swear an oath at all but of course our question immediately rises well does that mean we cannot even swear an oath in a courtroom what happens if we get summoned to jury duty and so on or does that mean the apostle paul got it wrong on the next slide it's very short sentence he says i call god as my witness and the commentators all agree that this has got paul swearing an oath by god it's the same sort of thing and so did paul disobey jesus here well we'll come back to those questions at the end but for now we need to remember the context you remember jesus is talking to his disciples on a mountainside about being members of the kingdom how to live kingdom lives and living kingdom lives involves standing out as different or distinct so in chapter 5 verses 14 to 16 jesus says we are to be like a city on a hill it stands out or we are to be distinct like salt or light so that people may see our good deeds and praise not us but our father in heaven this is part of how the disciples were to fish for people remember jesus called them to be fishes of men or for people and part of that means standing out as different in a good way that people might be attracted by good works and end up praising god in heaven and in chapter 5 verse 20 jesus says that we are to stand out as different even to the pharisees by living lives that are even better than theirs lives that are more righteous than theirs and over the past few weeks we had a break last week but over the past few weeks jesus has been showing us how we are to live these lives that are more righteous than theirs and as we've seen it's by obeying not just the letter of the law like they did but obeying the

heart behind the law by fulfilling the law to the max to the maximum application and the law in question today is about oaths so we're at point one verse 33 jesus says again you have heard that it was said to the people long ago do not break your oath but fulfill to the lord the vows you have made i hear jesus is referring to a couple of the laws in the old testament so on the next slide we've got one from leuiticus which says do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your god i am the lord or from numbers 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 now look at the slide for a moment and notice two things first the emphasis here is on keeping your word isn't it and we saw that from our ecclesiastes reading where the writer says it's better not to make a vow than to break it the point is you need to keep your word and the second thing to notice is that these vows are made to the lord they are sworn in god's name and so to break these vows or oaths was to profane the name of the lord it says it was to bring dishonor and disgrace to god's name in other words it was to take the name of the lord god in vain which was breaking the third commandment and not to mention the eighth one or the ninth one about bearing false witness but you see the pharisees certainly didn't want to profane god's name in fact a lot of them didn't even say god's name because they were scared about misusing it they would often use the word adonai which is another word for lord instead of yahweh and so they didn't want to take god's name in vain but they also didn't really want to be bound to their word so they looked for a loophole they looked to minimize the law's requirement on them it's a little like a story i heard of a little girl not not one of ours who was told that she had to hold hands to cross the road but she did not want to hold her mother's hand because she was a big girl now and so when it came to the road her mother said you know the rule need to hold hands and she put her hand out a little girl the daughter paused for a moment and then she held her own hands and proceeded across the road she obeyed the letter of the law didn't she but she did it by looking for a loophole which still allowed her to do what she wanted and missed the point of the law altogether and that's what the pharisees used to do you see when it came to making oaths they found a loophole so that they could obey the letter of the law not profane god's name yet also not have to keep their word and so we're at point two verse 34 so jesus says but i tell you do not swear an oath at all either by heaven for it is god's throne or by the earth for it is his footstool or by jerusalem for it is the city of the great king and do not swear by your head for you cannot make even the hair one hair white or black he says see what happened was the pharisees instead of swearing by god's name they would swear by heaven or by jerusalem or by the hairs on their head and this way they could break their word but not profane god's name because they weren't using god's name they were swearing in someone else's name or by jerusalem and so on let me show you exactly what this looked like so you might like to stick your bulletin in at matthew chapter 5 and just flick a few pages forward to matthew chapter 23 matthew chapter 23 and we'll pick it up at verse 15 some page 991 listen to what the pharisees were doing and and jesus's response actually verse 15 he says woe to

you teachers of the law and you pharisees you hypocrites you travel over land and sea to win a single convert and when you have succeeded you make him twice as much a child of hell as you are woe to you blind guides you say if anyone swears by the temple it means nothing you can break your word but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath you blind fools which is greater the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred you also say if anyone swears by the altar it means nothing you can break your word but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath you blind men which is greater the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred do you see what the pharisees used to do they would sometimes keep their word and they would sometimes break their word and it all depended on what they swore by so if they swore by the gold in the temple they had to keep their word but if they swore by just the temple then it means nothing they could break their word what's worse they were teaching others to do the same thing and verse 16 calls them guides because these pharisees were to guide the people they were teachers of the law they were to teach the people how to live god's way now i assume people would start to learn the system and over time they'd have to listen carefully to what people promised them wouldn't they now did he swear to pay me by the temple or by the gold in the temple and they have to try and work it out of course some people wouldn't understand the system and others would forget or not know but the problem is these pharisees these teachers were teaching people how to break their word whether they realized it or not they were teaching people how to break their word when the old testament laws were all about keeping your word and so jesus calls them blind guides because they've missed the point they don't see the point of the law you see the laws were always on about keeping your word all the time yet they also missed the point about the things they were swearing by they kept their word if they swore by the lesser thing you know whether it was the gold or the gift on the altar and then they broke their word when it was the greater thing like the temple or the altar itself have a look at verse 17 again he says you blind fools which is greater the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred you also say if anyone swears by the altar it means nothing you blind verse 19 you blind men which is greater the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred so jesus is saying your system is foolishness it's like saying if i swear by my car i don't have to keep my word but if i swear by the bumper bar of my car then i have to keep my word which is greater in fact it's the car that makes the bumper bar valuable i mean a bumper bar is not going to get you to work is it you can't it's not going to do anything the greater thing actually makes the lesser thing valuable or sacred the temple made the gold sacred the altar made the gift a gift to god but these guys have it all back to front and what's more they've missed the connection then between these things you see because one thing makes the other sacred or valuable then there's a connection between the two and because there's a connection between the two if you swear by one you're swearing by the other see verse 20 matthew chapter 23 verse 20 jesus says therefore anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it you see there's a connection you swear by one you swear by the other verse 21 and anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it and anyone who swears by

heaven swears by god's throne and by the one who sits on it you see jesus is saying if you swear by one you're swearing by the other because they're connected the gold is sacred because it is connected with the temple otherwise it would be just everyday gold and so on the temple is sacred because it is connected with god who dwelt in it so swear by one means you're swearing by the other and in the end it all comes back to god this is what jesus was getting at back in matthew chapter 5 so come back with me to matthew chapter 5 pick it up at verse 34 again bottom of the bottom of page 969 jesus says but i tell you do not swear an oath at all either by heaven why well because it is god's throne or by earth why well because it is his footstool or by jerusalem because it is the city of the great king and do not swear by your head for you cannot make even one hair black or white he says you see what jesus is condemning here he's condemning the practice of the pharisees we just saw in chapter 23 where they would swear oaths by different things just so that they could break their word and not profane god's name but here jesus is saying it's ridiculous because in the end it's all connected back to god and his name you said you pharisees he says you may think you've found a loophole so that you can avoid keeping your word and avoid profaning god's name but you can't everything's connected to god and so when you break your word you are providing profaning his name see god is the one who controls everything we cannot make a hair on our head black or white or gray or bald nothing we try to control these things of course by coloring our hair and so on but of course they're temporary measures aren't they and you have to recolor well i'm told you have to do that but god is the one who determines what color hair we will be born with how fast it will grow whether it be straight or curly or whether it will go gray or fall out god is the one who is really in control because he is the one who is sovereign he owns it all he made it all and we are made in his image and so everything is connected back to god for he is the sovereign ruler of all things and this means to swear by anything and then break your word is to profane god and his name and so jesus says excuse me instead of playing games with oaths and and keeping your word just sometimes you pharisees forget about oaths and keep your word all the time so point three verse 37 all you need to say is simply yes or no anything beyond this comes from the evil one it's pretty straightforward isn't it jesus is saying just tell the truth just keep your word let your yes mean yes you'll know me no if we try to play games with oaths then what we're really trying to do is get away with lying get away with breaking our word and lies well they come from the evil one in fact satan is called in the gospels the father of lies he invented lies lies come from him but living in god's kingdom as god's people means being a people who tell the truth and keep their word so does this mean then we are to never swear oaths and what if you're required to do in a law of court a court of law sorry well these days in victoria at least you can make an affirmation instead of an oath you just have to affirm or declare that you will tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth but as i've mentioned even paul seems to swear by god as his witness and god himself certainly swore oaths to abraham in the

old testament but they were for our sake in the new testament so on the next show slide let me show you from hebrews chapter 6 it says when god made the promise to abraham since there was no one greater for him to swear by he swore by himself saying i will surely bless you and give you many descendants and so after waiting patiently abraham received what was promised men swear by someone greater than themselves and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument but notice verse 17 because god wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised he confirmed it with an oath god did this so that by two unchangeable things that is god speaking his word and then making an oath in which is impossible for god to lie we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged now it's a bit wordy but you notice why god swears an oath here he does it not to avoid keeping his word but he does it to assure abraham and us his descendants that he will keep his word that's why he does it and so i take it if swearing an oath helps someone else be it in a jury in a courtroom or a stranger on the street then sure if it help if it helps them swear an oath it shouldn't matter because we're going to keep our word anyway aren't we but beyond that oh should be completely unnecessary because as i said we ought to be people who tell the truth and keep our word all the time i saw this saying uh once which nicely sums up what jesus is saying here so on the slide there it says let your yes really mean yes and your no really mean no be so trustworthy that no other words are necessary that's who we to be we to be people of integrity who keep our word and this has implications for every part of our lives doesn't it if we say we will do something then we ought to do it even in the simple things like being on time as something that we younger generations have forgotten i think if we say we would turn up to something then we need to turn up to it that goes for church and bible study too if we are committed to this church or a bible study group then we're to keep our word keep our commitment by turning up and serving where we can and so on now of course there may be all sorts of reasons why we cannot do these things there are things that are out of our control things that pop up our sickness and so on but if keeping our word matters as much as it does to jesus then we should at least apologize if we're unable to keep it i know of a young man who was a young adult he was studying at a secular university over in england actually before he came to australia and if he was going to miss a lecture at university or he missed one because of sickness he would email the lecturer and apologize i'd never heard of a university student doing that they're just trying to miss as much as they can and the lecturer had never heard of a university student doing that i tell you what it made him stand out but that's the point you see we had to stand out as people of integrity like a city on a hill and we had to stand out this way or this week by keeping our word and speaking the truth and i've been encouraged when people in my bible study group had text me to let me know that they cannot make it because i know they're at least trying to keep their word but something has come up or people at church have told me that they're going away not only so that we can pray for them but so that we know why they will be missing the church they've committed to that shows integrity you see they are serious about keeping their word we're to keep our word even with our families

[20 : 17] with our spouses and kids i've often said to my wife i'll be home in 10 minutes 40 45 minutes later or if i promise the children something but then work comes up and i have to break my word or they've been naughty and in my anger i say that's it you're having bread and water for the rest of the year and then of course have to break my word because that's not fair all this means that we need to be careful about what we say in the first place doesn't it so that we can keep our word but we're not to be pharisees even about that we're not to say oh well i'll never say i'll do anything that way i'll never break my word no no we need to commit to things we need to give our word for things but we just need to be careful about it and when we do keep it and if we can't apologize for it we are to be such people of integrity that we stand out let me finish uh with another illustration uh on the next slide is a man called charles colson who died in 2012 he was the senior counsel for the white house during the the nixon administration and the watergate scandal and all the government corruption corruption now charles colson was part of that corruption he he did cover-ups and all sorts of things but during the investigation charles became a christian and so while all the other lawyers and politicians were trying to find loopholes so as to avoid punishment colson actually started confessing to things that the investigators weren't even looking for you see now that he followed jesus he wanted to be a man of integrity who kept his word and told the whole truth and he stood out for it his righteousness surpassed that of the pharisees and while some americans or many americans were still skeptical others were curious about what would lead a man to do such thing and who knows perhaps some even ended up praising god for his good deeds we are to stand out as people of integrity who keep our word just as god keeps his word to us let's pray that we would do so let's pray our heavenly father we do thank you that you keep your word to us even though it costs you your only son whom you sent as you promised father forgive us for the times that we have not kept our word to one another or have not spoken the whole truth and father we thank you for jesus who is the way the truth and the life father help us to live like him to be people of integrity and to stand out for your glory we pray these things in jesus name amen we're going to sing our next song you