

As people redeemed by God we have a sense of freedom and peace in our hearts that the world can never know. Look around you. The fear, anger, and hatred are like a tidal wave of despair crushing down on humanity. This is not us. Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." That's what we're going to talk about tonight, truth, and what that has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

PRAYER

READ Matthew 5:33-37: "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. ' 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 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 take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."

Where can you find in the Bible these words, **"You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn"**? You can't. This statement is not in the Old Testament at all. The teachers of a Jewish sect made it up, and they went on to create an elaborate system of ranking oaths according to a hierarchy based on what you swore by.

A person might swear by heaven, by earth, by the heavenly city Jerusalem, by God's name, or by his own life. But this was not random. Each object of one's oath had points, so to speak. So swearing by God name's was more serious than, say, swearing by the life of your cat. And of course you can imagine the arguments the teachers of the law would have if someone broke an oath as regards penalties and such.

But Jesus' teaching was that there was no hierarchy in vows, for you're either telling the truth or you aren't.

To drive home the point, Jesus said, **“And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.”**

Granted, it’s your head, but who gave it to you?! Who determines even the color of your hair? In other words, to swear by anything—God’s name, heaven, earth, or your head—is really to swear by the power of God, for He is Lord over all things.

A commentator wrote, “Let spoken words have their proper significance, and let the people who speak them remember their own frame, that they are but dust (Psalm 103:14) and that nothing will prosper and no vow will be kept unless God enables it to happen (James 4:13-17).”

This is about humility and understanding that God is Lord and we’re all sheep in His field. Even our most sincere promises sometimes fail because we are not masters over what the future might bring. So we say with St. James, 4:15, **“If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”**

As we’ve learned, Jesus used hyperbole, gross exaggeration, to make his arguments throughout the Sermon on the Mount. In this section the hyperbole is his command, **“Do not take an oath at all!”**

Some faith traditions, like the JW’s, take this statement literally and do not permit any kind of oath-taking among their members. For example, they will not say the Pledge of Allegiance and they will not take the oath in a court of law. I appreciate their desire to be obedient to God’s Word, but what they’ve done is taken Jesus’ statement out of context and failed to look at the rest of Scripture.

As a case in point Jesus took vows himself. In the midst of his Passion, **Matthew 26:63-64, “the high priest said to (Jesus), ‘I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’”** ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, **“You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”**

Jesus confirmed in the name of the “Living God” that he was the “Christ, the Son of God.”

St. Paul also took vows. In Romans, 2nd Corinthians, Philippians, and 1st Thessalonians he took oaths in God's name. His expression was, **"God is my witness."** And during his 2nd missionary journey we read, **Acts 18:18, "(that Paul) had cut his hair, because he was under a vow."**

Jesus didn't condemn vows outright, but his point was truthfulness.

The second commandment reads, **"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."** We remember this commandment when we hear people cuss, but it's more than that. We were baptized in the name of the Triune God, and the Scriptures read that we were sealed with the Holy Spirit and God's name is written on our foreheads because of this baptism. Thus when we lie we do so as emissaries of God and we use his name in vain! So the commandment warns us, **"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).**

Jesus finished His teaching on oaths with, **"Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil,"** or more accurately, the **"evil one."**

In other words, to lift ourselves up with lies is from the devil. That's what Jesus is saying. Whether it's coloring the truth; exaggerating our personal story; making promises we won't keep; anything that might come out of our mouths which leads to our praise or promotion, or anything we might say that is at someone else's expense, is evil.

Today, how often is the promise "to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" nothing but a sham & a mockery?

And how often have we heard someone say, "I swear to God!" and then everything that came dribbling out of their mouth were lies, words built on straw.

We've taken vows. In Confirmation you were asked, "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" And you said, "I do so intend with the help of God."

If you're married you said something like, "I pledge myself to you as your spouse according to the Word and ordinance of God our Father. As God is my witness, I will never forsake you. I am your spouse until death do we part."

Despite ourselves the Lord has taken a vow on our behalf. We read in **Luke 1:68-75, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people...to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him ..., ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."**

Friends in Christ, the Lord has sworn Himself to us in His love and faithfulness in order to redeem us through His Son Jesus.

There is no hierarchy of vows, different truths with a sliding scale of value. Rather, there's only one truth, Jesus, whom God has pledged to us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the name of God is always a part of what we say. There is no other name in heaven or on earth greater than His, and He's given it to us. Let us bear the name "Christian" with confidence but also respect. It is an awesome thing to bear this name in this world in which we live.

Friends in Christ, this week let's meditate on our Lord's promises and vows to us, like, "**I will never leave you nor forsake you,**" and "**on the last day I will raise you up,**" and let us give thanks.

This week let's make a point of being truthful with one another, with our families, and coworkers, looking for ways to build one another up.

And this week let's look for an opportunity to share the truth of our Lord Jesus with another person who really needs to hear it, that truth that set us free which will do the same for them. Amen.