

Scripture Readings

Philippians 1:27-2:2

²⁷Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ²⁸without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

^{2:1}If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

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.' ³⁴But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Message

The Good and Beautiful Life:

“Life with Integrity”

Today, as we continue to explore Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teachings, I want you to imagine that you are making a puzzle. Are any of you puzzle-makers? There have been seasons in our family life where there was always a puzzle covering our dining room table. Usually puzzles are a wintertime thing, but we've also enjoyed bringing a good puzzle with us up to camp in the summertime. "Knock on wood", especially if we end up with a rainy week.

For just a minute, think about your own puzzle making strategy. And I'm not just talking about a 100 or 200 piece puzzle; I'm talking about the 500-1000 piece kind. So get out those reading glasses and dump out the puzzle on a big table and let's get going.

Usually we buy puzzles because they eventually form some beautiful picture; sometimes a painting or an actual photograph. They are usually scenes which fill us with warm feelings depicting a simple lifestyle, a beautiful scene, or animals playing in the grass.

So tell me, what is the first thing you do after you dump out your pieces onto table? Do you not flip over all the pieces so that you can begin to get a clue as to where they belong? Has anyone ever tried to make a puzzle by pulling out one piece at a time and then looking in the box for another piece that fits with that one? Of course not, you imagine how long it would take if

that was the rule of puzzle making?

So now you've got all of the pieces in front of you all laying face up on the table....you start seeing some patterns; perhaps you start seeing all those pieces that have blue sky in the, or flowing water, or puffy clouds; and you tempted to start grouping those pieces together. Is that how you begin your puzzle? Or, do you begin making most puzzles by looking for **edge** pieces? Rather than focusing first on color and patterns we look for the sharp edges and corners on pieces of puzzle which define the boarder. Only then do the colors and patterns arrange the edge pieces and we form the **frame** of the puzzle.

Today, I am suggesting to you that our lives are very much like puzzles. While we all have a "picture" of our life; a dream or a hope of what our life will eventually look like, it takes quite a while before enough pieces come together in our lives that we actually see what we are becoming.

We begin by searching for the frame; the edge pieces we can put together in order to form that "Norman Rockwell-like" picture; a full, rich & meaningful existence?

But most lives don't turn out that way, do they?

When it comes to life, our puzzle pieces rarely end up looking like the ideal picture we once imagined.

Now, if our lives are very much like puzzles, I also want to propose that what Jesus is offering to us; by his example as well as his teachings represented so well in his Sermon on the Mount, is the framework for LIFE, the boarder from which we are able, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to build

a uniquely beautiful life, a completed puzzle. And each one of us has a unique picture, a unique life that will develop and impact the world. But whether a given life benefits or burdens the world will, to a great measure, be determined by the framework which defines that life.

This summer I offer you Jesus' teachings as **the** framework for LIFE which benefits others, and leads us to experience the kind of LIFE God wants us to experience.

In the past few weeks we have heard Jesus calling us to frame our lives beyond the letter of the law so that **our lives are not defined by anger and lust but by peace and faithful relationships**. And **today**, another big piece of the framework for a healthy life is defined, as **Jesus calls us not to be define by lies but by integrity**.

Jesus taught:

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.'³⁴But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne;³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.³⁷Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Now, before someone stands up, offended by being called a "liar", let me share some surprising statistics.

According to a study conducted by Robert Feldman, **in a 10 minute**

conversation people tell an average of 3.3 lies.

Another study suggests that **we are lied to every 5 minutes**. If you do the math that would be, on average, 200 times a day.

Another study affirms what we might expect; that nearly all parents do not want their children to lie and that they have no tolerance when the children lie to them. However, **59% of American parents admitted to lying to the children on a regular basis.**

How often do investigative news reporters take perfectly-running automobiles in for repairs only to be lied to about needed repairs? And how many reports need to be made before people realize all the lies published online?

Then surprisingly... or maybe not..... ***A survey of more than 50 U.S. state and federal judges, as well as lawyers and academics, conducted by the ABA Journal, found that most of the judges interviewed said that increasingly "lawyers appearing before them are bending the truth, not telling the whole truth, or just plain lying."***

Joe M. Sprinkle, "A Call to Honesty," *Decision* (October 2000), p.32

Lying is a daily problem with which we are all too familiar. And while you may not see yourself as a liar, **statistics seem to indicate that we probably lie more often than we think we do.**

- We lie when we don't want to hurt someone, ,
- Our "white" lies are still lies, whether or not they cause any harm.
- And though the ends sometimes seem to justify the means,
a lie is still a lie.

This morning I want you to recognize, first of all, that...

1. Lying betrays our claim to follow Christ

It has been suggested that there were **two primary reasons as to why people lie; fear and personal gain.**

We tell lies whenever we fear having to "face the music":

"I didn't do it!", said one child.

"But officer, the light was yellow....."

We learned early in life that truth can be painful. So sometimes, because we are unwilling to suffer consequences, we will "bend the truth".

We also lie for personal gain:

"This car is in excellent condition."

"I am more than qualified for the job."

(Recently expelled Harvard student lies about his past!)

We lie because we've convinced ourselves that our needs are more important than anything else, even if our gain means someone else's loss.

The obvious problem that we, as Christians, should have with lying is that we cannot find LIFE in the kingdom of God when fear and personal gain so affect our behavior. Lies rob us of the integrity we aim for as followers of Christ.

- As Christians we have to live by the truth though it may mean suffering, and
- As Christians we must live for God's will even if our will, our personal gain, is lost.

Jesus said:

Luke 14:27

*And anyone who does not carry his cross
and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

The Apostle Paul revealed his Christian integrity when I wrote:

Colossians 1:24

*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh
what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions,
for the sake of his body, which is the church.*

Jesus taught:

Matthew 16:26

*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world,
yet forfeits his soul?*

Jesus offers us LIFE if we are willing to trust Him and live for God's Kingdom. If we have the integrity to do so, we will find that LIFE, but if we allow ourselves to lie, we are demonstrating that we trust ourselves more than God, and that getting what we want is more important to us than giving God what He wants.

This morning I also want to reinforce Jesus' emphasis, that...

2. We find LIFE when we operate beyond the Law.

“...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.’³⁴But I tell you, Do not swear at all:³⁷Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Here, Jesus is calling us to live lives of integrity and truthfulness, for **the older way of “people long ago”**, which Jesus is referring to, **was to call others to truthfulness when they were under an oath**. Not unlike today, there was penalty for people when they lied under oath; when they failed to do what they promised to do after taking an oath.

But what about those times when we are not under oath?

Are we to continue to tell the truth as we interact with one another, or does truth become a relative thing, defined by our needs?

Jesus is calling us to a level of integrity such that, whether or not we are under oath, we speak truth in love.

Jesus knew that the societies of this world but eventually decline & self-destruct when lying to one another became the norm. However, the growing and eternal Kingdom of God will be populated by people who trust one another because they are committed to speaking only truth to one another.

In the Apostle Paul's wonderful letter to the Ephesians, a good place to celebrate the unique relationship we have with one another in the body of Christ, we read

Ephesians 4:25

*...each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor,
for we are all members of one body.*

Truth-telling is essential for building a community of trust. Truth-telling is also necessary for society to find justice. That is why it is so offensive to our judicial system if someone lies. It is called perjury, and perjury is penalized. But again, as Jesus calls us to discover LIFE He is calling us to an integrity of truth-telling that will not only ensure justice but will build the eternal Kingdom of God.

Think for a moment about the hope and the securities we have because our God is truthful. Now imagine what a world would be like if everyone in the world displayed that same integrity by telling only the truth. Imagine the trust,

imagine the clarity we would have

and the hope we would feel

when surrounded not by people and media which lies to us five times every hour, but by followers of Jesus who have, with the help of the Holy Spirit, developed true integrity.

That is the LIFE to which Jesus invites us to experience.

Finally, this morning I want you to recognize that which can

3. Counter our Lying

If fear of worldly consequences is one of the two main reasons people lie, then if we can counter our fears we can counter our habit of lying. **We need to keep in mind that all we need to fear is God; and that God's**

love for us will even calm that fear.

In the kingdom of God we affirm God's protection over his children. We affirm that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said:

Matthew 10:28a

*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the **soul**.*

The psalmist sang out:

Psalm 33:18

¹⁸ *the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love*

The Apostle John writes:

1 John 4:18

*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear,
because fear has to do with punishment.*

We choose to live in the Kingdom of God by not allowing fears of this world to cause us to lie.

And if you find yourself motivated to lie for personal gain, let the Word of God remind you that life not about you, and it's not about personal gain.

If you want LIFE in it's fullest, then the growth of God's Kingdom is your primary goal. It was Jesus' goal, it was why he came into this world, it was why he did the miracles, and it was why he died on the cross. It was all about accomplishing the will of his Heavenly Father; to save us and to

begin building His Kingdom.

As we continue to explore Jesus' teachings in his Sermon on the Mount, we keep on receiving the framework within which our lives can develop. None of us knows what our final picture will be like; when all the pieces of our puzzle are put together. But we can resonate with a truth found in

1 John 3:2-3

²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Let us continue to strive for that purity which requires us to give up worldly ways and to walk in the ways of Jesus. Let the teachings of Jesus frame your life, so that the world will not only celebrate your unique identity, but will also see Jesus in you. Amen

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (r).
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