

Sermon Study

I Swear
Mathew 5:33-37

vision

Eastview
Christian
Church is a
fearless church
of Christ
followers whose
ridiculous love
and dangerous
witness are
irresistible.



AUTHOR'S NOTES (summary of key points for this study)

Swearing oaths to God (or 'by God') is an Old Testament practice (Deut. 10:20, Lev. 19:12, Num. 30:2, Deut. 23:23). The idea was, if you're swearing an oath to God, you're going to keep it. That's as serious as it gets, lest you break your word and be guilty of violating multiple commandments (3rd, 9th). To get around this pressure, scribes and Pharisees started making oaths by invoking important, God-associated things...but *without expressly* using the Lord's name. They thought this was quite clever, believing they had found a loophole that allowed them to still *sound* super-honest by citing things with lofty gravitas, but without any real consequences if they ended up breaking their word. By Jesus' day, it was a fashionable practice to make big-sounding oaths 'by heaven,' 'by earth,' 'by Jerusalem,' or 'by the Temple.' *This* is what Jesus is addressing, and in this study, we'll see why He scoffs at it: namely because it's a) pointless, and b) harmful.

Gather (your group getting to know each other)

Who is the most reliable, trustworthy person you know?

How have they earned this?

Go
(your group on
mission)

We live in an age of Fake News, propaganda, and cherry-picked information. We have fact-checkers, but we're even suspicious of them too. Our culture has created a credibility crisis.

Who knows what the truth is anymore? Into all this, we're called to witness. In a world that doesn't keep its word, your Unwavering commitment to truth, honesty, trust, and reliability maybe what sets you apart and opens the door for a conversation about Jesus.

Grow (your group growing as Christ-followers)

Key Word: "Let what you say be simply 'yes' or 'no'..." (Matthew 5:37, ESV)

Discussion

1. Have someone begin the discussion time by leading the group in prayer, then read Matthew 5:33-37 aloud.
2. How have you demanded excessive oath-swearing? For example, when have you said any of the following: "*Promise me!*" or "You have to *swear* that you won't..." or "Pinky swear, cross your heart..." In these moments, why did you feel the need to require such extra measures?
3. In addition to the motivations behind oath-swearing in general, what interesting things have you (or others) sworn by? (For example, swearing on a stack of Bibles, or swearing on someone's grave, or swearing on the life of your children.) What is the appeal of hearing people invoke these sorts of extreme ideas? Why do we do this?
4. Let's get to Jesus' specific examples in v.34-35. How does He re-shape the significance of the lofty-sounding oaths to Heaven, Earth, and Jerusalem?
5. Let's get to Jesus' specific examples in v.34-35. How does He re-shape the significance of the lofty-sounding oaths to Heaven, Earth, and Jerusalem?

6. In v.36, Jesus transitions from swearing by the external to the personal. In using the expression "by my head," people of that day meant something like, "May I lose my head (i.e. my life) if I'm lying." How does Jesus' remark about not even being to change the color of your own hair re-shape the significance of this lofty-sounding oath?

7. If God is the standard of all truth and honesty by which any oath should be made, and you start swearing by some other person, object, or idea, thereby elevating it into God's place, why is that problematic?

8. It's as though Jesus says to them (and us), "These things you're swearing by (Heaven, Earth, Jerusalem, Yourself) are all subject to God. So what exactly is it you think you're accomplishing by not just swearing directly to God?" Could it be you're not interested in actually *keeping* your oaths; you're only interested in *sounding* like you are? What about you? Have you established a system of loopholes in your speech and commitments that you think allows you to safely skirt accountability based on technicalities? Do you think others notice this?

9. Further, Jesus says this false loophole system of creative oath-making isn't just pointless, but it's also evil. These charades have *consequences*. Once you've gone to such lengths to convince others to believe you, their heartbreak and anger will only be magnified when you inevitably falter. What negative fallout have you seen or experienced as a result of someone breaking a promise? And how is this 'evil' or associated with the 'Evil One'?

10. Jesus offers the solution in v.37. Rather than all the effort it takes to maintain a system of complicated hypocrisy that lets you sound super-righteously honest, why don't you just say yes or no and mean it. Crazy idea, right!? But, as you discussed at the start, we don't live in a culture where a simple 'yes' or 'no' feels like *enough*, do we? How can we get better about both living out this teaching, and accepting it from others?

Give

(your group
serving each
other)

Another dynamic of this issue is what happens when unexpected things "come up." Most of us mean well. We have every intention of upholding our 'yes' and 'no,' but sometimes "things happen," we break our word, and then have to apologize. We feel bad, but we expect people to understand. In small groups that have regular meetings and activities, we imagine this is a common occurrence. How can you serve your group in this area, helping each other to keep your word, while also not holding grudges when things "come up"?