

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 5 (PART 6)

WELL PLACED AFTER THE TEACHING ON ADULTERY, MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE, JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT THE WORDS WE SPEAK AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HONESTY AND INTEGRITY. HERE'S A DEFINITION OF INTEGRITY (VIA MERRIAM WEBSTER):

- 1 : FIRM ADHERENCE TO A CODE OF ESPECIALLY MORAL OR ARTISTIC VALUES : INCORRUPTIBILITY
- 2 : AN UNIMPAIRED CONDITION : SOUNDNESS
- 3 : THE QUALITY OR STATE OF BEING COMPLETE OR UNDIVIDED : COMPLETENESS

REMINDER: THIS SECTION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT INCLUDES A NUMBER OF INSTANCES WHERE JESUS IS GIVING HIS INTERPRETATION OF THE MOSAIC LAW AS WELL AS ADDRESSING INSTANCES WHERE TRADITION HAD REPLACED GOD'S TRUTH. JESUS IS ALSO GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER RATHER THAN THE EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR ALONE.

MATTHEW 5:33-37 - VOWS & INTEGRITY

JESUS IS NOT QUOTING JUST ONE COMMAND BUT A SUMMATION OF THE TEACHINGS ON VOWS AND OATHS IN THE MOSAIC LAW. HERE ARE SOME OF THE PLACES WHERE THIS WAS ORIGINALLY COMMANDED TO GOD'S PEOPLE:

LEVITICUS 19:12 - YOU SHALL NOT SWEAR FALSELY BY MY NAME, SO AS TO PROFANE THE NAME OF YOUR GOD; I AM THE LORD.

GOD'S DESIRE FOR HIS PEOPLE TO BE PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY IS ROOTED IN HIS OWN INTEGRITY - NOTICE THE REASON GIVEN FOR THIS COMMAND TO NOT SWEAR FALSELY BY GOD'S NAME IS SIMPLE: I AM THE LORD (YAHWEH). DOING SO WOULD "PROFANE" OR "MAKE AS COMMON" HIS OWN NAME AND REPUTATION. YAHWEH IS A GOD OF TRUTH AND FAITHFULNESS, HIS PEOPLE ARE CALLED TO BE PEOPLE OF TRUTH AND FAITHFULNESS. WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE ARE NOT TRUSTWORTHY, IT REFLECTS POORLY ON HIM.

NUMBERS 30:2 - "IF A MAN MAKES A VOW TO THE LORD, OR TAKES AN OATH TO BIND HIMSELF WITH A BINDING OBLIGATION, HE SHALL NOT VIOLATE HIS WORD; HE SHALL DO ACCORDING TO ALL THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF HIS MOUTH.

DEUTERONOMY 23:21, 22 - "WHEN YOU MAKE A VOW TO THE LORD YOUR GOD, YOU SHALL NOT DELAY TO PAY IT, FOR IT WOULD BE SIN IN YOU, AND THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL SURELY REQUIRE IT OF YOU. 23 YOU SHALL BE CAREFUL TO PERFORM WHAT GOES OUT FROM YOUR LIPS, JUST AS YOU HAVE VOLUNTARILY VOWED TO THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHAT YOU HAVE PROMISED.

ECCLESIASTES 5:1-7

PSALM 15:1-5

BECAUSE OF LACK OF INTEGRITY AND A DEVALUATION OF TRUTH, IT BECAME COMMON PRACTICE TO MAKE AN OATH OR VOW AND "SWEAR" BY SOME HOLY OR SACRED THING TO ATTEMPT TO GIVE CREDENCE TO THE WORD BEING SPOKEN. JESUS GIVES A FEW EXAMPLES OF THIS (V. 34-36). ULTIMATELY SWEARING BY THESE THINGS DEVALUES THEM - THINGS WHICH ARE OF AND BY GOD. INTERESTINGLY, EVEN IN OUR OWN CONTEXT, TO ADD SERIOUSNESS TO SOME PROMISE YOU ARE MAKING, YOU WOULD "SWEAR TO GOD", IMPLYING THAT IF YOU WERE LYING OR DO NOT FOLLOW THROUGH ON YOUR WORD, YOU WILL BE ACCOUNTABLE TO (OR PUNISHED BY) GOD HIMSELF!

YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID...BUT I SAW TO YOU... (V. 34)

REMEMBER, JESUS IS TEACHING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ~~THE~~ APPRENTICE, AND IS SPEAKING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TEACHINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES.

"THE SCRIBES DEVISED A VARIETY OF ESCAPE CLAUSES FROM BINDING OATHS. ANY OATH WHICH SUCCEEDED IN AVOIDING THE NAME OF GOD WAS NOT ABSOLUTELY BINDING: ONE COULD SWEAR BY ONE'S HEAD, BY JERUSALEM, BY HEAVEN, BY EARTH, AND SO ON. GOD WAS NOT THOUGHT OF AS A PARTNER IN SUCH A TRANSACTION, SO TO BREAK FAITH WAS NOT SO SERIOUS." (MICHAEL GREEN, "THE MESSAGE OF MATTHEW", PAGE 96)

THE RABBIS TAUGHT ON OATHS AND VOWS EXTENSIVELY AND THE MISHNAH (COLLECTION OF RABBINICAL TEACHINGS) CONTAINS AN ENTIRE BOOK WITH 11 CHAPTERS JUST ON THIS TOPIC (CALLED *NEDARIM*). THE BOOK EXPLAINS DIFFERENT SITUATIONS WHERE A VOW SHOULD BE KEPT AND INSTANCES WHERE A VOW WAS NOT BINDING. IT'S LIKELY THE RABBIS TAUGHT ON SUCH MATTERS BECAUSE SOMETIMES LIFE SITUATIONS OCCUR WHERE YOU MAKE A PROMISE YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE OR MAKE A PROMISE YOU CAN'T FOLLOW THROUGH ON FOR VARIOUS REASONS. SO THE RABBI'S RESPOND TO DIFFERENT QUESTIONS OR SITUATIONS - HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT THERE BECAME SUCH A DISCUSSION ON WHICH VOWS YOU DID/DID NOT NEED TO KEEP OPENED UP THE DOOR FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO EVEN CONSIDER MAKING A VOW THEY *WOULDN'T* KEEP AS OPPOSED TO COMMITTING TO JUST SIMPLE YES AND NO. MAKING AN OATH OR VOW WAS ALREADY A SLIPPERY SLOPE, NOW THE POSSIBILITY OF NOT HAVING TO KEEP A VOW LEADS ONE RIGHT DOWNHILL. THAT'S THE CONTEXT OF WHICH JESUS IS TEACHING.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE FROM MISHNAH 10:66A, 13 - A MAN VOWED TO NOT MARRY HIS SISTER'S DAUGHTER BECAUSE HE DID NOT FIND HER ATTRACTIVE. RABBI ISHAMEL BROUGHT THE WOMAN TO HIS HOME AND "BEAUTIFIED HER" (WITH MAKEUP ETC). THE RABBI THEN BROUGHT THE WOMAN BACK TO THE MAN AFTER HER MAKEOVER AND ASKED "DID YOU VOW TO NOT MARRY *THIS* WOMAN" - AND THE MAN REPLIED "NO" AND SO THE MAN WAS RELEASED FROM HIS VOW AND THEY WERE MARRIED. (SOURCE: SEFARIA.ORG/NEDARIM.66A.13)

MAKE NO OATH AT ALL - BUT LET YOUR STATEMENT BE YES OR NO (V. 34, 37)

MARRIAGE VOWS, ORDINATION VOWS, BAPTISMAL CONFESSIONS, ENTERING INTO CONTRACTS, SWEARING OATHS OR AFFIDAVITS IN LEGAL CONTEXT - THESE ARE NOT FORBIDDEN BY THIS PASSAGE - BUT JESUS IS CALLING HIS PEOPLE TO NOT NEED TO MAKE OATHS AND VOWS BECAUSE WE HAVE A CHARACTER OF DEPENDABILITY AND HONESTY. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF INSTANCES IN SCRIPTURE WHERE GOD HIMSELF MAKES OATHS/VOWS (EVEN SWEARING BY HIMSELF - GENESIS 22:16, HEBREWS 6:13) OR GOD'S PEOPLE DO THE SAME (INCLUDING PAUL USING OATH LANGUAGE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18 AND GALATIANS 1:20). JESUS IS NOT CONTRADICTING OR DISAGREEING WITH THESE PASSAGES BUT RATHER ADDRESSING THE ACCEPTED PRACTICE OF HIS DAY (AND OURS) WHICH FOSTERS PEOPLE NOT KEEPING THEIR WORD AND THUS DEVALUING TRUTH AND BOLSTERING SUSPICION AND LACK OF FAITHFULNESS AMONGST GOD'S PEOPLE!

JESUS' DISCIPLES SHOULD VALUE TRUTHFULNESS AND INTEGRITY. WHAT WE SAY (AND WHAT WE DO IN LIGHT OF WHAT WE SAY) SHOULD BE BELIEVABLE, DEPENDABLE AND CONGRUENT WITH OUR OVERALL CONFESSION AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS WE CAN CULTIVATE A LIFE OF INTEGRITY?

- A SIMPLE "YES" OR "NO" SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT FOR SOMEONE WHO HAS INTEGRITY.
- DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF FOLLOWING THROUGH ON SMALL "YES'S" AND "NO'S" AND HOW THIS BUILDS A REPUTATION OF TRUST-WORTHINESS.
- WE SHOULD ADMIT WHEN WE ARE WRONG AND AVOID MAKING EXCUSES
- WE SHOULD AVOID EXAGGERATION
- DON'T OVERCOMMIT OR OVERPROMISE. BE HONEST IN YOUR ASSESSMENT OF REALITY.
- BE WILLING TO DISAPPOINT OTHERS WHEN NOT ABLE TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON THEIR EXPECTATIONS OF YOU BECAUSE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO/NOT DO.
- COMMUNICATE AS SOON AS YOU CONCLUDE THERE MAY BE AN ISSUE WITH OR CHANGE TO SOMETHING YOU HAVE SAID YOU WILL DO. DON'T MAKE PEOPLE GUESS OR TRACK YOU DOWN.
- MAKE ACHIEVABLE AND REALISTIC GOALS AND PLANS
- DEVELOP A HABIT OF MAKING DECISIONS IN COMMUNITY WITH THE PROTECTION THAT COMES FROM A MULTITUDE OF COUNSELORS
- WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE NOT IN CONTROL OF LIFE AND SOMETIMES THINGS HAPPEN THAT CHANGE OUR ORIGINAL PLAN (SEE JAMES 4:13-17).