**Being a Truth-Teller in a World of Liars**

**Rich Nathan**

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**Neglected Virtues Series**

**Matthew 5:33-37**

Interacting with the Sermon

Synopsis of the Sermon

There is an epidemic of lying in our country today—from local schools to national schools to academic institutions to government to commerce. Two thirds of Americans now say they can’t trust *anyone!*

According to the bible, words matter. God spoke the universe into existence, and because we are made in God’s image, our words have power, too. Words can start wars and shred a person’s self confidence and words can heal hurts and restore hope. The book of Proverbs tells us that words have the power of life and death!

The bible also teaches that telling the truth matters. Oaths were developed because people’s words could not be trusted—a person’s word was not enough. But when we realize that God is always watching, then we don’t need oaths—our yes will be yes and our no will be no. Jesus is not forbidding any oath at any time—He is forbidding the *misuse* of oaths. People used oaths as a way to cover up or mask lying. Instead, Jesus said, just be known as a truth-teller! In the bible, lying is serious. It puts you in league with the devil and it can keep you out of the kingdom!

What should we understand about truth-telling?

1. **It builds trust**. When we trust someone, we aren’t self-protective or afraid to be vulnerable. Today people’s trust in institutions and individuals is at an all time low because of lying. Pre-nuptials are at an all-time high, because even though people are willing to marry, they don’t really trust the person they are marrying! We are angry when we are lied to and it causes us to disengage socially. But when we tell the truth, we build trust which strengths relationships.
2. **It is rooted in Christ**. We lie to protect and promote ourselves. We want to appear better than we really are, so we exaggerate and embellish. We pretend to be someone we are not! But when we are secure in God’s love for us and His acceptance of us, we don’t have to pretend to be someone we are not.
3. **It is uncommon**. When a Georgia high school basketball team returned a state championship trophy because they discovered they had violated conference rules by playing an illegible player, it made news because being honest is so rare! Truth-telling will set us apart in a world of liars. If Christians became known for not sleeping around, for serving the poor and for *telling the truth* people would be drawn to Jesus and the church!
4. **It is a test**. When we are tempted to lie (e.g. when we get a bank error in our favor) it is not a gift from God, it is a test from God to see what we are made of—to see if we will be a truth-teller!
5. **It is hard**. According to Psalm 15, the person who is allowed to be in God’s presence and dwell in His sanctuary is the person who keeps his word, even when it hurts! We know we are growing and maturing in Christ when we don’t run from and avoid things that are hard—like telling the truth!

*In 5 minutes or less, briefly give a synopsis of this week’s sermon. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend’s message did you find to be most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? Explain.*

Getting the Conversation Started

*These questions can be used as ice-breakers in the beginning OR interwoven between the questions below to draw the group into the discussion.*

* + - Think about a situation in which you discovered you were lied to. How did you feel? Why? What did you do? How did this affect your relationship with the person who lied to you?
    - Think about a situation in which you lied. Why did you lie? How did you feel afterwards? What happened as a result of your lying?

Scripture Study

Read: Acts 5:1-11

*Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.****2****With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.*

***3****Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?****4****Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”*

***5****When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.****6****Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.*

***7****About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.****8****Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?”*

*“Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”*

***9****Peter said to her, “How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.”*

***10****At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.****11****Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*

The book of Acts was written by Luke, who also wrote the gospel that bears his name—the two are companion volumes written to the same person for the same purpose (see Luke 1:1-4 & Acts 1:1-2). Luke’s style of writing is very organized and accurate, full of facts with lots of attention to detail. His writing provides some of the most reliable histories in all of scripture. The book of Acts is an excellent record of the early church and is a great resource for the church today.

*After reading through the passage lead your group inductively through the story. Begin with observation.*

1. Let’s retell the story in our own words. Who were the players in this story (note them *all*)? Where does this take place? What happened in this story? Consider the context—what precipitated this story (read Acts 4:32-37).
2. What *specifically* did Ananias and Sapphira do wrong? (What were they *not* judged for?)
3. How did Peter interpret what Ananias and Sapphira did? How do you think Peter interpreted what happened to them?
4. What impact did this incident have on the broader community of believers? Discuss.

*Now let’s try to interpret the meaning of this story and why Luke chose to include it in his history of the early church*.

1. Why do you think Ananias and Sapphira lied? What do think they imagined would happen to them if they *didn’t* lie?
2. Peter said that “Satan filled” their hearts. What does this mean? How does this happen, especially to a believer?
3. Do you think the judgment was harsh? Why or why not? What does this say to you about the seriousness of lying?
4. What would you say is Luke’s main point and why? Why do you think he chose to include this story in his history of the early church?

*Let’s now take what we’ve learned and apply it to our own lives.*

1. What details stand out to you? Did anything surprise you? Did anything upset you?
2. Imagine you are one of the members of the church fellowship and there when this happened. How would this incident affect you and change you?
3. Think of a situation we may face today that can be compared with this story from the first century. Why would we be tempted to lie—what would be the motivation?
4. What are some motivations to tell the truth?

Ministry Application

*Below you’ll see some options for ministry time with your group. We always encourage you to reserve time in your group to pray for one another and wait on the Holy Spirit.*

* There may be members of your group who are *wrestling between lying and telling the truth* in a situation at work or in their family. They may need courage and strength to do what they should do and wisdom to know how to do it.
* Others may have been deeply wounded by someone who has *lied to them*, especially if it was someone they should have been able to trust. These lies may have both destroyed the relationship and harmed their ability to trust anyone again, even God. Truth is foundational to all of life and all relationships. They may need prayer to restore trust first and foremost in God, and then grace and strength to trust others.
* There may be others who have been *lied about*, and they are struggling with anger and bitterness. They will need grace to both receive healing from God and the power to forgive.
* Many may realize that while they may not be verbally lying, they misrepresent themselves—they *exaggerate and embellish and pretend* to be someone they are not. It is because of a lack of security in God’s love and acceptance, but they feel trapped, and unable to change. Pray for the power of God’s love to flood their hearts and set them free.