

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

**Teaching: Carlon Tschetter**  
**Series: The Sermon on the Mount**  
**Message: Truth-Tellers**

**Transcribed Message**  
**March 11, 2018**  
**Matthew 5:33-37**

I don't know how many of you have been called on to take a lie detector test, a polygraph test. Probably more than I might imagine depending on your work circumstance. That is where I'm going with that. Your work circumstance. There was no other thought intended there. One time I had to take a polygraph test when Bonnie and I were in Dallas in seminary. I applied to work for Affiliated Foods one summer as a warehouseman, and as part of that process for the first time in my life I had to take a polygraph lie detector test. So I took the test. A couple days later, as I remember, a guy from HR called and said you failed the test but we're going to hire you anyway. I said okay, can you tell me why I failed the test? He said well, you're a seminary student, aren't you? I said yes, I am. All of you guys fail that test. You just haven't learned how to lie yet. I wasn't sure if he was joking or if he was offering me a compliment, but he did hire me and I worked there that summer. I never did find out exactly why I failed the one time I took a polygraph test.

Back in the 60's, there was a TV show called *To Tell the Truth*. My parents told me about it. Well, wait a minute. This is to tell the truth. I do remember watching an episode or two. There were four celebrities on every week. Four celebrities and three contestants. Those three contestants were there to try to convince the four celebrities of the occupation that they were in. sometimes it was kind of a weird occupation. Sometimes it was pretty normal, but the celebrities would ask the contestants different questions. They couldn't ask them direct questions about what they did, but they would ask in any way they could to get information. One of those three contestants was telling the truth about what they did. The other two were lying all the way through the show. It was the job of the four celebrities to figure out who was telling the truth and who was lying. If you remember, some of those folks did an incredible job of lying their way

through that whole show in trying to convince the celebrities of the fact that they were that person.

In Matthew chapter 5 verses 33 to 37 this morning, Jesus calls on us to be truth tellers. I would suggest to you that one of the most precious commodities that we share with each other is truthfulness. One of the most precious commodities we share is truthfulness. In a world that seems literally to not just allow for, but in so many circumstances to actually embrace lying, Jesus calls us to value honesty and to be truth tellers.

Let's do a quick review. We're back in the Sermon on the Mount. If you haven't been with us before, this is probably the most well-known sermon that Jesus gave. Matthew chapter 5, 6 and 7. It's really Jesus showing us how it is that He lived His life. This is the life that Jesus lived. We don't have to make this too much of a mystery. We ask: what did Jesus's life look like? If you ever ask that question, just go to the Sermon on the Mount and see the life of Jesus being described for us verse after verse, passage after passage. This is the life of Jesus. For us, the first thing that means is this is the kind of living that is possible only if you're a child of God, only if you're a Christian. Jesus doesn't give us the Sermon on the Mount to show us how it is that we can work our way to heaven. This isn't about doing these things and you'll be rewarded with eternal life. This is the life that a Christian is to live.

The second thing we follow up on is to say that this isn't just the life a Christian lives. This is the life that a Christian lives only as they're controlled and dependent on the Holy Spirit. This is a picture of a Christian who is walking in the power of God's Spirit. It doesn't take very long as you read in the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount to get into the Beatitudes. You are quickly confronted with the fact that even as a believer this isn't the way you normally live your life unless you're walking in obedience and dependency on the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us a standard of living that calls on us to depend on the Holy Spirit.

Then lastly, this kind of living is what honors God. This is the kind of living that honors God and proclaims the Gospel. The passion of our Lord was to do the will of the Father. Psalm 40. I have come to do your will, O God. That is the way Jesus lived out His life. That's our calling as well. We live our life with a passion to glorify God. We live

our life with a passion to do the will of God. We are truly going to be salt and light in the earth just as God has called us to be. Jesus describes that for us all through this passage. One of the most effective ways to be salt and light is right here before us, and that is to exchange falsehood for truth.

So let's look at that. I'm going to read these verses and then we'll work our way through beginning in verse 33. "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.' But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no; anything more than this comes from evil." So here we are again looking at the fourth time in which Jesus is going to contrast the law that God gave through Moses with how it is that the religious leaders of His day were distorting that law. This time it has to do with the matter of taking oaths. It is all about being truth-tellers.

Some have taken Jesus's words as we just read them and they believe that what He is saying to us is never put yourself under any kind of a vow. Never put yourself under any kind of an oath. Never swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. There are some people who look at this passage and say what Jesus is telling us as a Christ follower is if you are ever called into the courtroom do not raise your right hand and put your hand on the Bible and repeat after me. Don't say I swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God. Don't do that, because Jesus says right here, don't ever do that. Those same people also say to us that you should never do that for public office. You wouldn't raise your right hand and swear to tell the truth. You wouldn't do that if you were called to give a legal statement or a deposition. Do not swear. Do not take an oath. Do not take a vow. Do not join the military. Do not join the police department and raise your hand and give a vow or a pledge or an oath of allegiance. They would even some go so far as to say to become a citizen of a country, do not give a vow. Do not give a pledge. Do not give an oath.

Is that what Jesus is calling on us to do here? Is that Jesus's point that we are to never even under special circumstances put ourselves in that kind of place? I just step

back and ask you again to remember what's going on. Jesus is contrasting all the way through this section 6 different times. This is the fourth one in which He points out to us the way the Pharisees and the religious leaders were calling on the people to live. It was all based on externals. It all had to do with what it is that you saw and what it is that you heard. Remember what we said each time is Jesus is peeling that back. While He's saying that's important, the most important thing in the eyes of God is what's going on in your heart. It is not just what you do, it is why do you do it. It is not just what you say, it is why you say what you said. I suggest something a little bit different.

I'm going to suggest to you that Jesus's primary concern here is not the matter of taking an oath. It's not a matter of a vow. It's not a matter of swearing allegiance. I don't think that's the primary focus that Jesus is zeroing in on here. I want to suggest to you that it is not the matter of taking an oath but it's the matter of abusing the oath that we take. It is the matter of telling the truth that is really at the heart of what Jesus is talking about.

Let me show you why I believe that. We'll start off by looking at some Old Testament examples. You go through your Old Testament and let's say you took a concordance and you looked up the words vow, oath and swear. What you would find are some 200+ occurrences in the Old Testament in which somebody offered a vow, an oath or swore allegiance to something that they said that they would do or not to. Most of those are positive. There's one that you might immediately think of that is very negative. When Japhtha in the book of Judges says the next person that greets me when I come back from this encounter I will sacrifice on the altar. Terribly foolish vow before God that he made. Remember the first person he encountered was his daughter. Not only did he make an incredibly foolish vow, but he followed through on the incredibly foolish vow.

So there are those instances in the Old Testament where it is foolish in terms of the vow, but most of the time the vows that are made are positive. In Genesis 24, Abraham wants a bride for Isaac and he calls Eliezer his servant. He says Eliezer, I'm going to put you under an oath. I want to make you vow before God that you will bring back for Isaac a wife and she cannot be a Canaanite. I'm asking you now to vow and make that pledge. That was one of the first instances in the Old Testament where we

have that. In numbers chapter 30 and verse 2. Just listen. We won't read all of these different passages but here's one that says: "If a man vows a vow to the Lord or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." You can find scores of verses just like that all through the Old Testament. Here's the interesting thing. In the book of Psalms in chapter 89 you have God putting Himself under a vow. Verse 35: "Once for all I have sworn by My holiness." God makes a vow, a pledge against His own holiness that He will not lie to David. No, it's not just people in the Old Testament. It's actually God Himself who makes vows with regard to His own character.

If you want to summarize the taking of vows in the Old Testament, you find three things. You find first of all that they were permitted. They were even at times required. There were instances when God required someone to take a vow. Secondly, they were just a part of daily commerce. They were a part of day-to-day life. Today what would we do? If it wasn't so serious as to require an attorney, we might go to a notary public. We might have something that we wanted to have notarized. That would signify our intention. It would speak to what we wanted to see transacted. The third thing I think you see in the Old Testament is when you made an oath you are obligated to fulfill it. God expected people when they made an oath, when they made a vow, to follow through. That's the Old Testament. That's life under the law you say.

So let's go to the New Testament. What do we find in the New Testament? In the New Testament, you are going to maybe be surprised to find that there's quite a number of cases where there are vows that are made as well. You could point to the life of Paul. Four or five times in the life of the apostle Paul, he says something like with God as my witness. He's putting himself under a vow. He's putting himself under an oath that he is going to do something because this is his intent. In Matthew 26, Jesus Himself, the very one who spoke the words of the Sermon on the Mount, stands before Caiaphas the high priest. You might remember the high priest Caiaphas says this to our Lord: I adjure you by the living God. Now what is that? He's asking Jesus by means of an oath and a vow under the name of the living God to say something, to be truthful in His response. Jesus said what to him? I'm not allowed to make a vow. I'm not allowed to be put under an

oath. No, Jesus said to him, you have said so. He was in agreement with what was said.

To me, one of the great passages in the book of Hebrews speaks to this. In Hebrews chapter 6. Listen to verse 13: "For when God made a promise to Abraham, since He had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself saying, 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you,'" and thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise." We could go on and read. It just reinforces that. But when God made a promise to Abraham, the writer of Hebrews says there wasn't anybody else that He could name beyond Himself to put Him under an oath and obligation to do what He said. There is no greater name than God. There is no higher authority. He puts Himself under a binding oath to His own name and own self.

That brings us back to the passage that is before us this morning. What are we going to do with the words in Matthew 5 in which Jesus says to us that we should not make a vow or put ourselves under an oath. Whenever we're handling Scripture and we have these kinds of seeming difficulties between different passages, what do we do? There are a lot of ways we handle the Word accurately. One of the things is we let Scripture interpret Scripture. That's kind of what we just try to do. We try to just do a 30,000 foot flyover of what does the Bible say about this whole matter of oaths and vows and allegiances? We kinda got a little bit of a snapshot that shows us part and parcel of daily life in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

What is the other thing that you do? One of the main things is you look at the context of what is going on in that passage. Before us that will help us understand what it is that Jesus is calling for us to do or not do. So with that in mind, let's go back to Matthew 5. Let's see if we can cast some light upon this. I want to suggest then secondly this matter of breaking an oath. What does it mean to break an oath?

I'm going to read again in verse 33: "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord that which you have sworn.' But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one here white or black." Once again the context reminds us that the Pharisees were

manipulating the law. They were taking what God had given in the Old Testament and they were twisting it to their own purpose, their own advantage. What they were doing is rather than allowing an oath or a vow or an allegiance to compel them and to contribute towards truth telling, they were taking that system of the oaths and vows and they were allowing that very system that was to compel them to be truthful to allow them to be less than honest, to weaken the truth.

They were doing this in a couple ways. One of the first ways they were doing it was they were encouraging frivolous vows and oaths. Jesus speaks about the fact of taking vows or not taking vows. They had gone to such an extreme in Jesus's day that every little thing called for somebody to make a vow. It became very frivolous. They were taking oaths for no significant reason at all. They were doing it to cloak the fact that they wanted to be less than truthful. It became very insincere. It became very commonplace for them to put themselves under a vow and an oath. Instead of instilling confidence that they were vowing to be truthful, it was a distortion of the very idea that God had in the Old Testament. It promoted skepticism. Frivolous vows.

I don't even know if this still happens today. I want to suggest that it was so long ago when I was a kid that this doesn't happen anymore. But when I was growing up, if you were in the family room and you happened to be occupying the best chair the favorite place on the couch to watch TV. Does that still happen? Do you still have in your family group the favorite place? If dad occasionally watched TV with us, then he automatically got that chair. That was just understood. Oh, for the days of old when we could do that still today. But that's beside the point. If you had to leave the room, before you left you would tell all of your siblings this is my chair and I want all of you to promise that when I get back I am still going to be able to get in this chair. You'd put them all under an oath. You made them all vow, made them all promise that they would not occupy your seat. Now, of course, what would happen if one of my sisters said that? When she got up and left, I would immediately jump into that chair after I had gone along with the oath. What would I tell her when she got back? Oh, I had my fingers crossed. It became very frivolous. All of that was not really to enforce anything significant or truthful. It was really a way to minimize the truth. I think that's part of what Jesus speaks to here. We even had that terrible vow. Remember: "Cross my heart,

hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.” Who in the world came up with that one? That wasn't very binding either it seems. So as well it shouldn't have been.

The other way that this was happening was what we would call evasive vows. Evasive oaths. Evasive swearing. If you in Jesus's day had every intention of being a truth-teller and of being honest and there was something significant that you were going to commit yourself to, you would do so by putting yourself under the name of God. That's why Jesus says what He does in this passage. Rather than doing that, what were they doing? They would swear under heaven. They would swear under earth. They would swear under the throne of God. They would swear under the footstool. They would swear by Jerusalem. If you swore toward Jerusalem that was a big deal, but if you just swore by Jerusalem, then you could be less than truthful. So all of this evasiveness on the part of these people in allowing them to get out of the vow that they were making.

The context I think that Jesus speaks to us here about is reminding them of the importance of telling the truth. Jesus says it's better for you not to make an oath at all if all you're going to do is break it. It is better for you to not make a vow if you have no intent on being truthful about it. Just don't do it at all rather than making it evasive or frivolous. What was happening was an oath became a cloak for being less than truthful. It was used to hide one's real intentions. That I believe is what Jesus is speaking to. It's like a little boy in the class when the teacher asked what was a lie and he said a lie is an abomination unto the Lord, but a very present help in time of trouble. That is how they were using a vow. The heart of the passage in my mind is not so much whether you take an oath or not. The heart of the passage is what's going on in your heart. The greatest concern that God had is that people would be committed to being truthful, to telling the truth whether they took a vow or not. It was what was going on in their heart and were they going to be committed to truth.

The reason I think that is because if you go back just a couple of passages when we were dealing with the matter of lust what did Jesus say? In dealing with lust, take your eye and pluck it out. Cut off your hand or whatever you have to do. We said then He's not telling people to physically maim themselves. He's telling them to do whatever it is that you need to do to deal with the heart problem. Here the same thing is true.

Knock off with the oaths. Stop making vows to each other if all you intend to do by making those statements is truly to deceive each other and to be less than honest then don't do it at all. So we can be just as guilty in our day of being less than truthful.

What does Jesus say to us. He tells us thirdly to tell the truth. Look at verse 37: "Let what you say be simply yes or no; anything more than this comes from evil." Here is the requirement. The requirement is really simple. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. when you say you're going to do something do it. The proper use of an oath is not to hide your true intentions. It's to declare that you are going to be a person of truth. Jesus is saying let your character, your reputation speak for itself. You have a reputation. Your character is such that you are known as being an honest person. Your words are to be so obviously true that no one would even think that they would need to ask you to take an oath or to take a vow or to put yourself under some kind of allegiance. You're so trustworthy that your word is your bond. It is possible for us today to fall into the same trap, into the same problem that Jesus is confronting here. We can become very flippant with regard to the truth. We can become evasive with regard to the truth.

How many times have I said, how many times have you said to somebody I'll pray for you. Maybe our intent and our heart is right to do that, but we never think about it. We've told them that we're going to do something and we don't follow through. Somebody needs help. We ask them if they need help. We never follow up to see if that help has been realized or if there is something else we can do. An easy one is somebody calls you and you say I'll call you back. You know the very issue that they want to talk about or deal with is one that you're really not too excited about, so even though you told them you would call them back, you really know in your heart you have no intent to do so. You're going to be somewhere at a certain time and if you're there, whenever it is that you can get there, it didn't really matter. You borrow money. Tell somebody you'll pay them back. You don't pay them back. We can be very frivolous in the way we handle truth. We can be very evasive too. That's part of the reason why lawyers draw up contracts. Sometimes the nature of the business and the nature of the transaction calls for as many loopholes to be written into the statement as can possibly be thought of. The whole idea that we want a way out of what it is that we're committing to be doing here in this transaction that is before us. We speak about half-truths. We all

know there's only whole lies, not half-truths. So Jesus says to us in verse 37, let what you say be simply yes or no; anything more than this comes from evil. Jesus doesn't go on to spell out in these few verses how it is that we can do this or the reasons why we should do this.

I'd like to take our remaining time to spend a few minutes reflecting on this whole chapter which is how is it that you live a righteous life. How is it that you live the life of Jesus? Why is it that Jesus calls us to be people who are truth-tellers? Let's look at that secondly here by way of the reason. We find all kinds of help in Scripture in answering this question. Why is it so important to be characterized as being people who are truthful? The first reason I would suggest is one of, if not the chief characteristic of the old nature, is lying deception and falsehood. One of the chief characteristics of our old life is to be less than truthful, is to be frivolous in the way we handle the truth, is to be evasive so that we're wording something with a way out knowing full well that's what we intend to do. Where do we start to show from Scripture that this is the case? I'd go to John chapter 8 when Jesus spoke about Satan. What did He say of him? He is the father of lies. He lied from the very beginning. That was the very downfall of Satan, and you could argue this again in Isaiah 14 and in Ezekiel 37. He looked at himself in a way that was to be prideful. What is pride? Ultimately it's a false estimation of oneself. Satan is a liar from the beginning. He is the father of lies.

That's why when you look at verse 37 and your Bible may actually add the word "one" at the end. Let what you say be simply yes or no; anything more than this comes from the evil one, some of the translations say. ESV says in the bottom notes that very same thing. It comes from the evil one. He's the father of lies. He lied from the beginning. So what you do? You go back to Genesis chapter 3 and what do you encounter in the garden? The serpent coming to Adam and Eve and what does he do? He lies. He lies to them about God. Has God really said that? He didn't really mean that? He's a liar. He is holding out on you. You get a little bit farther into that chapter after they have gone along with this deception and lying, Adam and Eve are in effect trying to deceive God by hiding and covering and then pretending like something dramatic hadn't happened. You get to chapter 4 and Cain is lying to God about Abel. God asks Cain where his brother is. How would I know where my brother is? Am I

supposed to keep track of him? It was just a blatant lie. He knew exactly what had happened before God. Go to Genesis 12. Abraham decides that rather than facing the prospect of King Abimelech taking Sarah his wife he will just lie. Sarah does the same thing back when the angelic messengers come. She lies to them. All the way through the book of Genesis, you don't even get through the first book of the Bible, and you've got Rebekah and Jacob lying to Isaac. You've got Rebekah lying to Isaac about Esau. You've got the brothers in chapter 37 lying to Jacob about what happened to Joseph. You can't even get out of the first book of the Bible without more than ample evidence that one of the chief characteristics of the old nature is that we're less than truthful. We're people who easily move towards that which is false.

Then you go to your New Testament and you go to the book of Acts. In the very first sin recorded in the book of Acts is the sin of Ananias and Sapphira who were lying to the Holy Spirit, lying to Peter and the leaders of the early church. Simply told, few things come as easily or naturally to us as lying deception and falsehood. I would say it's a daily battle to speak the truth and love to each other. It is a daily battle. It is just so easy to say something that's less than truthful. In innocent conversation, it's easy just to let something be said that we know is not the truth. Jesus rightly puts the focus here on the heart.

The reality is our whole world system is based on a lie. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians in the end days that God is going to give over the whole earth to the great delusion, to the great lie. I mean, you can't miss it. It's right there before us. The constant reminder in our life is that when we are not walking in the power of God's Spirit and we're walking in the flesh, one of the easiest things we do is to be less than truthful with each other. On the positive side of that, here's the good news. One of the essential characteristics of the new life is truth. It's integrity. It is honesty. In other words, when you become a believer something happens. You step out of the domain of the lie and you step into the truth. The very god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) who has blinded us to the truth, now that blindness is gone and we see the truth for what it is. The old has gone and the new has come. Paul rightly says in Romans 3 and verse 4 let God be true and everybody else be found to be a liar. God is going to be truthful even if everybody else lies. Jesus said He's the way, the truth and the life. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of

truth. The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. So you can't miss the fact that truth is the way that God wants us to walk. We're to worship in spirit and in truth. Ephesians 4:25 therefore having laid aside, having put away falsehood let each one of you speak the truth to his neighbor. Why? Truth is to characterize our lives.

Let me ask you. How does it go in your marriage relationship you're not truthful with each other? It doesn't go very well, does it? You can't have a growing vibrant relationship unless you're confident that your spouse is being truthful, is telling you the truth. You can't function as a family, as a parent in relationship to your children if you're not handling the most precious commodity in that family relationship with utmost care. That's truth. Truth is the most precious commodity that you trade in as a family every day. The reality is our children watch us and hear us every day as parents. I assure you they know when you lie. They know when you're being less than truthful. We're teaching them something about this most precious commodity. We're teaching them that it can be handled frivolously, that we can be evasive when we need to. Children back to their parents. If there's not trust that truth is being shared in that relationship, we all know the harm of the damage that happens. You just go on and on down that list. Government to citizens. Why is it that we that we are filled generally with cynicism towards our government? Because our government has largely found it very comfortable to embrace lying to us. We literally expect our leaders to just flat out lie. I'm not talking about top secret stuff. I'm just talking about day-to-day functioning. Citizens back to government. If they're going to do that to me, then I don't have to be honest with them and so forth. Employer to employee. Employee to employee. Friend to friend. I think this is not so much a matter about whether you raise your right hand and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. I think the far greater issue that Jesus is concerned about is our heart and our telling the truth. The most precious commodity that we have is truthfulness. In a world that embraces lying, Jesus calls us to value honesty. We're to be truthful people.

What do we take away? We've been talking a lot about being people of the Book this year. People of the Word. Do you know what people of the Word are? People of the Word are people of their word. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Here's the thing. It'll be noticed. Do you have any idea how truthfulness stands out in our world

today? This commodity that is so precious. If you're a truth telling person, if you're a person that people know to go to to get a reliable answer, one that is trustworthy and honest and true, you will stand out in our day and our culture. God will be honored. The gospel will be lifted up because you'll be known as a truth teller.

Let's pray. Father, I'm so glad that You have shown us the truth. You've shown us the truth about ourselves. You've shown us the truth about our need. You've shown us that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Father, thank You for being truthful and honest with us about our need and our condition before You. Father, if there's someone here who has never put their trust and faith in Christ, we would ask that You would open their eyes to this truth, that You would give them understanding of how it is that all of us have a relationship with You, that it is through Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross. Then, Father, we ask that as the people of God we would lay aside, put away falsehood. We ask that we would be truthful and honest with each other, that we would be people who pursue that which is true and right and good. For Your honor, for Your glory, for the advancement of the gospel, we pray in Jesus's name, Amen.