

Lesson 8

Keeping Promises

Icebreaker:

Tell one promise that someone made to you, that was not kept and how did it make you feel?

Introduction:

Jesus smoothly transitions topics from adultery to vows. He links the two subjects by dealing with unfaithfulness (breaking oneness) both in marriage and in keeping one's vows. To better grasp what Jesus is talking about in this lesson, a Biblical understanding of some inter-related terms would be helpful.

DEFINITIONS

1. To swear means to give one's word or testimony that something is true or the truth.
2. To vow means to swear to do or give something.
3. To promise is to vow.
4. A pledge is something tangible that is required by the person to whom the promise or vow is made. The pledge acts as surety or assurance that the vow will be fulfilled. Collateral on a loan conveys this concept.
5. An oath is the same as a vow or promise with something of value given with it. The Hebrew word for oath is also the same word for the number seven. Seven is considered God's number and connects Him with the concept of oath. It means something that has been multiplied by seven or made full and complete. It has the idea that it was not spoken in haste or carelessly but repeated seven times.
6. A curse or curses are added to swearing, promises, vows, oaths and covenants to strengthen the agreement. To curse is asking God to bring evil in some form on the individual who makes the promise if it is not fulfilled. The words "God damn" are an example of this. The individual to whom the promise is given may require a curse or the one who gives the promise offers it.
7. A covenant is a formal agreement between two or more people and may involve all of the above.

To see the actions associated with these words we'll turn to a story in Genesis 21:22-33. "Now it came about at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, 'God is with you in all that you do; now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, or with my offspring, or with my posterity; but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me, and to the land in which you have sojourned.' And Abraham said, 'I swear it.'

But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well of water, which the servants of Abimelech had seized. And Abimelech said, 'I do not know who has done this thing; neither did you tell me, nor did I hear of it until today.' And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them to Abimelech; and the two of them made a covenant. Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said to Abraham, 'What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?' And he said, 'You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand in order that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well.' Therefore he called that place Beersheba (which means well of the oath or the well of seven); because there the two of them took

an oath. So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, arose and returned to the land of the Philistines. And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

Group Discussion:

1. Four of the seven terms described earlier are used in this story, which ones are they? (Swear, covenant, oath and pledge)

Reading The Scripture:

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:33-37

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil.

The Commands:

1. Make no oath at all.
2. Let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no.

The Lesson:

Swearing oaths, taking vows and making promises are sacred and not to be taken lightly. God is the witness to all that men say and by their words they will be judged. Jesus attests to this fact when He speaks with the Pharisees. In Matthew 12:36-37 He declares, *"And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."*

Jesus tells the disciples that they should not swear oaths, vows or promises. All of these deal with giving or doing something at some future date. Oaths, vows and promises are presumptuous and based in pride. No one knows whether he will live long enough or have the resources to fulfill what he promises, except God alone. This point is best illustrated by wedding vows, most of which end with the words, "until death do us part."

Jesus tells the disciples that they should not swear an oath by heaven, the earth or Jerusalem because these things belong to God, not to the person who is offering them as a pledge. No one has the right to offer another person's property as a pledge. A person who swears an oath by God seeks to indebt Him. The one who swears in this manner is in effect saying that he has power over God and can demand that God accomplish his own personal will. Should the person making the oath fail to keep it, how will the other collect from God? Swearing in this manner only discredits a disciple's relationship to God and ruins his testimony of Jesus Christ if he fails to keep his oath. In the next statement Jesus uses the term "your head" to indicate an oath in the individual's own name. The person who swears this type of oath offers himself as the pledge. He is declaring that he is God or at least equal in power and authority to Him. An example of this is given in Hebrews 6:13. *"For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself."*

Should the one who swears in this fashion not keep his oath he will be indebted to the other, thus having to render service to him and not God. Swearing by one's self hides the truth, that men are not God, when in reality they are weak and in need of His help. If a disciple swears in this manner and does not keep his oath his testimony of Jesus Christ and His ability to save people will also be shrouded in doubt.

By saying, "let your yes be yes and your no be no", Jesus is declaring that He expects His disciples to keep their word! To do what they said they would do. If the disciples don't keep their word they will be known as liars and cannot be counted on to speak the truth or be trusted. How then will people believe, the message of the gospel that they preach? There is an old saying that goes like this: "A man is only as good as his word." God is good. He always does what He says he is going to do.

Group Discussion:

2. Why do people make promises?
3. What is the result of a broken promise?
4. How do you think broken promises affect children?
5. What was the last promise you can remember making? Did you keep it?
6. What was one promise you wished you had never made or was the hardest for you to keep.
7. Which of God's promises is your favorite and why?

The Point Of The Lesson:

Don't put yourself in a position to lie.

Application:

At the next group meeting report any occasion you had to promise something and how you dealt with it.