



## Being Freed from the Sin of Spin

Matthew 5:33-37

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*God's presence is faithful and his word that has been proclaimed here has not gone out in vain! But can we recommit ourselves this morning to lovely speech, simple speech, and God-breathed speech?*

### Scripture

Matthew 5:33-37

<sup>33</sup> 'Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord." <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No"; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

### Sermon

The first car that Jennifer and I ever bought together we bought from a salesman named, "Buck." He explained to us that his nickname came from the white buck shoes that he always wore. It's a good thing that he didn't get his nickname from his haircut otherwise he would have been known as "Mullet."

He must have seen us coming because he talked our ears off before we got into the negotiations. After being numbed by his patter we settled into discussing the car that we wanted. Buck promised us a rebate and then went to speak to his manager. He came back

and told us that we couldn't afford that car with what we were positioned to pay. Having now been here for over four hours, we settled on another car and Buck mysteriously disappeared again. He returned and we were just about to sign the necessary paper work when the finance person came in, motioned for Buck to join him outside, and when Buck came back he told us he had just learned that with the vehicle we had decided on the rebate was not offered and we were out that \$2,000. By this time, we wanted the car, we were exhausted by the time spent, and the prospect of being freed from the dealership and no longer subject to any more of Buck's stories or philosophy on life seemed worth at least two grand. We signed the papers and left. As I have thought more about what I'm pretty sure now was a classic bait and switch offer, I see in my mind's eye Buck and the finance guy giving each other a high five.

Buck told us one thing and gave us something else. It happens all the time. It is ingrained in our culture. In the consumer culture that we live in we are constantly promised that if we buy something that what we have purchased will turn our lives around. If we have that new house, that new car, that new pair of shoes, it will bring us happiness! Much of the debt crisis that we live in as a society is traced right back to this idea to our belief in what we hearing, that we can purchase our peace and purpose, our happiness and joy. And what we are promised is always a bait and switch – promised happiness what we get is debt and stress instead.

It's not just in the area of consumerism that this over-promising and under-delivering is true. We are about to go into a national election and there isn't a person here who doesn't know that some of what we are going to be told will happen if that candidate is elected is a calculated exaggeration. There isn't an area of our lives that isn't affected by exaggeration and false promises, bogus claims that don't live up.

We see the pattern in this sermon, don't we? Jesus is deliberately setting us apart from the culture outside his Kingdom. He is telling us citizens of his chosen nation that we are to live differently, act differently, and, here this morning, speak differently than the world around us. To this point he has told us that under his reign, his people do not live in anger, they do not practice lust and they keep their marriages healthy and intact, and now we learn that we are to be truth-tellers as well. This morning our King is telling us that when we say "yes" we need to mean an unconditional "yes," and when we say "no" we need to mean an unconditional "no."

After the topics of the last two weeks – murder, anger, lust, and divorce – some of you are saying to yourselves right now, "Whoo, thank God we're just dealing with what we say!" Anger and lust are not topics of polite conversation and a sermon about speech seems like a respite. But the biggest lie in the playground is the one that goes, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." The truth is that ill-spoken words have enormous damage and they do great harm. As an example, there are many people in this sanctuary today that grew up with parents that never laid a hand on them but that their belittling words and their false promises have caused you a lifetime of hurt. You are the ones that when we pray in the name of the Heavenly Father struggle to get past the painful connotations of the name Father because of your earthly father and struggle, therefore, to see the grace of God.

If we are honest with each other today we will recognize that this command for simple truth-telling is one of the greatest areas of sin in our lives. Our words exaggerate, our words mislead, our words over-promise, our words belittle, and our words promote gossip and dissension. Worse yet, we often

couch those harmful words in spiritual language, dragging Jesus into our verbal mud every time we utter, “be praying for her,” as an excuse to go on and gossip about someone. I have known more breaking of confidential conversations in the church than in any secular setting. I have heard some of the cruelest language in my lifetime in the context of the church. I have heard incredible foul and bitter things by Christians who take great pride that they would never use “foul” language. I have heard some of the most ungracious things said by people who openly proclaim that they are saved by grace. And I have myself participated in those sins.

Jesus wouldn’t have it then and he won’t have it now. In his culture many religious people invoked the name of God to assert the truthfulness of what they were saying. It was a means of showing how holy they thought themselves to be and it was a way of foisting their views on someone else – “You don’t believe me? You won’t accept my point? You have to; I’ve tied my speech to God!” Using God as a trump card in what you have to say is a powerful tool but Jesus reminds us here that God is God and never a tool.

Of course when we misuse speech we create an environment of mistrust and our witness to those outside the Kingdom lacks credibility. When a moral failure in the church is made known, there is very little surprise in the secular world. They have learned not to trust our “religious” language.

But now that I have preached at you (and me), let me set out the vision that Jesus has for us as citizens of our Kingdom. What if our speech was honest? What if when we said “yes,” others knew that we meant “yes”? And what if when we said, “no,” others knew that we meant, “No”? What if the words we used were bathed in the grace that we have received? What if what we said as followers of Christ was as trustworthy as what Jesus himself says? What if when we agreed to do something here in the church, we did it? Imagine that. Imagine that here at this church we lived in that environment of trust. How refreshing that would be for you and for me. It is not as if we are building on a legacy of distrust. This morning we are giving thanks to God for 125 years of his presence in this place. And God’s presence is faithful and his word that has been proclaimed here has not gone out in vain! But can we recommit ourselves this morning to lovely speech, simple speech, and God-breathed speech?

If we were to be a church that practiced the speech here to which Jesus calls us, can you also imagine how our community would perceive us? If we were simple truth-tellers at school with our peers and our teachers, on the job with our customers and our bosses, and in conversation with our neighbors – how counter-cultural and winsome would that be? How would it be that when as a church we said that we were going to do ministry with and for our community, we kept our promises and did not hedge our commitments? How profound it could be if for the next 125 years our witness was as the church that told the truth and told the truth in love? If the answer to the call is “yes,” then let our yes be yes indeed.