

Have you ever had someone break their word to you? It could be something minor like a product not working like it was supposed to; those Chia pets never looked the same at home. It could be a company not doing right by you. I'm still waiting for a rebate check from a rental car company. It may be more serious, like someone you know lying or breaking a promise. Or it could be that you've lived through the heartbreak of adultery. Whatever it is, we've all experienced the unfaithfulness of someone else and the pain of that violation. And, if we're honest, we've all been responsible for some of that too. But God would have it different.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls himself the Truth, and throughout Scripture we're told God keeps his promises and can't lie. That character is played out not only throughout the biblical narrative but in our lives as well. **We worship a God who means what he says and does what he says**, inspiring us to sing songs like *Great is Thy Faithfulness*. If the God of Heaven lives that way, so should citizens of that Kingdom. Because his faithfulness is great, ours too should be.

This morning, as we continue studying Jesus' manifesto on the Kingdom of Heaven known as the Sermon on the Mount, we're going to look at two passages that call us to live a faithful life, one generally, one specifically. **That, like God, we too would mean what we say and do what we say.**

[Matthew 5:33-37] 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.’ ³⁴But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

Jesus continues to point to Old Testament teaching, how the Pharisees understand and teach it, and his right interpretation or reinterpretation. Here he summarizes several commands found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy all on swearing oaths. It was common practice to swear oaths in the name of the Lord to add weight to your word. It acted as a guarantee by calling down God's judgment on yourself if you spoke falsely or didn't fulfill your commitment. But in Jesus' day, the Pharisees were changing the formula. They were swearing by things other than God to diminish the requirement on them and, by it, speaking falsely. Jesus says that God owns anything else you may swear by, so it's the same as swearing by his name.

But then he has a revolutionary idea. He says that, in the Kingdom, there should be no need for swearing. That we should simply tell the truth, mean what we say, and do what we say. Swearing comes from evil because swearing assumes the possibility of dishonesty or someone knowing their word isn't good enough, so it needs extra weight. Those who traffic in these oaths are actually the least trustworthy. I grew up with a kid that would constantly challenge what you said by demanding “Swear! Swear to God!”, and no matter what he said, dramatically followed it with “I swear to God!” He was like a cartoon character, and he was the most dishonest of us all.

Is your word good enough to stand on its own? Do you play loose with the truth? If you say, “I'll do it”, can others assume it will get done? Scripture is a book of truths and promises God has, is, or will fulfill. He is our example. In the Kingdom, faithfulness reigns. I swear!

Now, the second passage. I told you last week that Jesus dials it up in these six sections, and this section is likely the most difficult. It's a painful topic for many, fraught with the potential for shame, and uber-challenging because it is so counter-cultural today. But I love you too much not to tell you what God's Word says. Jesus is laying out Kingdom standards and we have to know them to be able to live by them by his grace. But I also love you too much to not remind you that God's grace is sufficient, that he has no condemnation for you, and neither do I or we.

[Matthew 5:31-32] ³¹ "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Jesus is speaking into a current theological debate in his day. Two rabbis, Shammai and Hillel, disagreed on what were allowable causes for a man to divorce his wife. Deuteronomy 24 instructed men to give their wives a certificate of divorce so that she could be remarried. Had they not, she could not and, given that she couldn't own property or work for income, likely would have had to move back in with her parents, if they were alive, or prostitute herself. Shammai said the only allowable reason was the offense of indecency or unseemliness while Hillel said any reason was valid, even bad cooking. His view was the commonly held view of the day, meaning marriage had become dispensable in Jesus' time (sound familiar?). The Pharisees took Deuteronomy 24 as a command, but Jesus says it was always intended to be a reluctant concession. Jesus said the only valid reason for divorce is adultery, sexual union with someone other than your spouse. It was forbidden by God's Law, it automatically dissolved the marriage union, and it was punishable by death, though that was not really followed in Jesus' day. But why did he go here? The Pharisees put the focus on divorce. Jesus wants to put the focus on faithfulness.

When I marry a couple, I ask them to exchange vows of a covenant:

I, **Kurt**, take you, **Martha**, to be my wedded wife.

And I promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses,

To be your loving and faithful husband.

In plenty/want; joy/sorrow; sickness/health; **as long as we both shall live.**

They are words spoken to one another, before God and witnesses to say, "I am all in, until the day I die, no matter what." If you've ever spoken these, you've felt the weight of them. It's that weight and that commitment Jesus wants to get to.

[Matthew 19:3-9] ³ And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" ⁴ He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." ⁷ They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" ⁸ He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.

Given the current debate, the Pharisees ultimately find Jesus and ask him to weigh in. But he's having none of it because he knows it's the wrong question to ask. They want to talk about divorce. Jesus wants to talk about God's perfect plan for marriage.

I have occasionally been asked by someone if God's Word lets them get out of their marriage. Some are sincere, wanting to live faithfully to God and his Word. Others, though, are just looking for the easy way out. **But we can't take our desires to Scripture looking for them to be justified. We need to take Scripture to our desires in order for them to be modified.** If we start with the divorce question, we miss the heart of God, because God's biggest concern isn't to chart an easy path towards divorce. Malachi says God **hates** divorce. **Jesus redirects the conversation because he wants us to start with a different question.** He doesn't want us to ask, "Can I get a divorce?" He wants us to ask, "What did God intend regarding marriage and what is his will for mine?" And, in most cases, it's for us to stay married. If you are in a difficult place in your marriage, what questions are you asking?

Jesus says, "Have you not read?" He takes us all the way back to Genesis 1 & 2, to Adam and Eve, and to the first marriage. This is at creation, pre-fall, the way it was always supposed to be. Through it, Jesus wants to show God's heart for marriage and God's best for Kingdom couples.

Jesus says he made them male and female. Both bared the image of God individually, but there was something they could not reflect on their own. God has always existed in loving, united, intimate community for all of eternity as Father, Son, Spirit. So a community most fully reflects his image. We do that as the Church. But it started with a married couple. That's why God said of Adam "It is not good for man to be alone" because, by himself, he could reflect God's image only as an individual. So he made Eve and joined them together in the marriage covenant as husband and wife. It was more than a partnership. He created something new. The two became one flesh. God united them spiritually and they became a new unit. **What was two is now one: intimate, united, exclusive, and permanent.**

It's like two bricks mortared together. There are still two bricks, but they are now one unit together. God's grace is the mortar in marriage that unites husband and wife as one. The day you got married, you were changed. It was no longer two living two different lives. It was two living one shared life. And what God has joined together, we are not to separate. The one exception Jesus gives is adultery because adultery is the two becoming one flesh (you can do the mechanics) with someone other than your spouse.

If your first reaction is to say "Yeah, but...", pause and sit in this tension. Hear the heart of God. Understand the magnitude of marriage. Jesus isn't dismissing other legitimate concerns. Some say adultery, abandonment, and abuse are all valid reasons for divorce. Paul says if your unbelieving spouse leaves you, it's ok to let them go. And if you're not safe at home, get out of there and let us help you navigate what comes next. But other than those, what is Jesus asking us to do? Marriage is hard! We are messy people living in a broken world and when you put two imperfect people together and make them one, marriage brings out all those imperfections.

One of the best wedding gifts God gave you was a full-length mirror called your spouse. Had there been a card attached, it would have said “Here’s to helping you discover what you’re really like.” -Betsy and Gary Ricucci

Marriage exposes us and how we handle it determines, to a great extent, how our marriage goes. We can be selfish, unkind, stubborn, prideful, indulgent, dishonest, ashamed. Marriage has shown me I like to be in control and, at least early on, I was quick to anger. Too often these issues go unaddressed or resisted for too long. Intimacy is damaged, couples drift, unity is threatened, and two who are one begin living as two again. Most couples I meet in crisis are in this category. And the distance grows so great one or both finally say, “I’m done.” And **Jesus is saying don’t do it. It’s not over.**

If you are considering divorce, don’t do it before you **pray extensively and seek abundant counsel** from those who will tell you the truth. My default will be to join you in prayer and seek reconciliation. Why? Because I worship a God of reconciliation who calls us to live lives of reconciliation. He has called you to this and he will pour out his grace and mercy and wisdom and power and love to carry you through this! **The God who put you two together can put you two back together!** The God who raised Christ from the dead can put new life in your marriage. Don’t give up! Keep going. There’s still hope! I’ve read that over 70% of married couples in a crisis moment who decided to stay together were happy they did so after five years. That can be you!

Keep going! There’s too much at stake. Don’t miss on what God wants to do in you and in your relationship with him as you follow him faithfully in this season. Don’t miss the joy of a reconciled marriage. Show your kids what is possible with God’s grace. Think about the power of your witness. Your marriage can show the world the greatness of God and love of Christ. It’s not over for you. God does not want that for you, he has not abandoned you, he’s in the fight with you. Keep going.

Own your stuff. What are you contributing to the divide? Own it. Confess it. One of you must go first or you will stay in a stalemate. And the one who must go first is the one who is more spiritually mature. Men, lead in this. Humble yourselves. Apologize. Commit to reconciliation. Lay down your life for your wife just like Jesus laid down his life for the church like you promised to do on the day you got married. And both of you remember you have control over only one person: **You**. You cannot change your spouse. Only God can. So get on your knees, pray for your own heart, pray for your spouse’s heart, and be the most godly husband or wife you can be. Don’t wait for the other person to do that first. Don’t make it conditional, that if they do this, I’ll be willing to do that. Love unconditionally and leave the rest up to God.

Get help. If your marriage is in trouble, you should be jumping up and down and shouting for help. There is no shame in this! Marriage is hard and everyone knows it! You can’t do this on your own. If you are in a Life Group, you’ve got to ask for help and Life Groups you’ve got to step into this with your people. You are the first line of defense. The reason Martha and I have a burden and passion for marriages is because we were in a group many years ago with a bunch of married couples, went through a marriage study together and then, out of the blue, at the end of it, a wife said, “I’m out.” How did that happen? How could it be? Older couples who have been

through it all, you have a ministry here, especially if you have survived a crisis. You can give hope and counsel and encouragement. You can meet with me or one of our pastors. Go to our Connecting Center or call the church. It's not good for man to be alone, and it's not good for married couples to do this alone. Bricks are heavy! Sometimes we need help carrying them! Ask for it! We are with you!

Rest in grace and forgiveness. I know many of you have this as part of your story and it is a source of pain, shame, embarrassment. You may have been the cause of it, or you may have experienced it even though you didn't want it. I know and love dearly many who have been divorced, and I've heard that pain as they've talked about it. I've been praying for you this week because I know this message is likely a tough one to hear. If it is part of your story, I want to remind you Jesus loves you and he calls you to rest in his love. He draws near to the brokenhearted and he wants to care for you. You don't have to hold back around him. He wants you to give it all to him. And if this is part of your story, I want to remind you the God who says "It is finished" meant it. Great is his faithfulness, and great is his forgiveness. He has no condemnation for you and neither does this church.

We worship a God who is faithful, and he calls and empowers us to be people who are faithful.