



Red Letter City

Oaths

May 29, 2016

Courage Church, Detroit, MI

We are continuing what may seem like the never ending series, “Red Letter City.” - The thing that makes this series so interesting is, even though it is a long series and will take us through the summer, almost every week addresses a different topic. I have to tell you all, if I am transparent with you, I feel like I am able to function in a bit more

freedom today having finally gotten through the last three weeks. Those were tough weeks. I know that it was a LOT to take in, and a lot for all of us to hear. Thank you guys for opening up your hearts and letting the word of God minister to you as we navigated those really hard to touch issues.

Today, we are moving onto “Oaths.”

and the primary topics we are going to hit on are the concept of “oaths” and the concept of “binding and loosing” because they both relate to the heaviness of what we allow in our lives, and what we promise of our lives.

So lets not waste any time getting into it, if you would open your bibles to Matthew 5:33-37.

Oaths

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

Let's pray.

I don't know Rick Warren.

But I have met him.

somewhere out there, there is a picture of me that I have, of Dawn and I with Rick Warren, but I couldn't find it this week. I only have a picture because when I met him, he said "lets take a picture for facebook!" and so we took one... but I guess I never posted it to facebook. and I now I can't find it. But it exists somewhere.

But I don't know Rick Warren. I had emailed him a couple of times about our bands music because we wrote one particular song that I thought he would really like, and he was very encouraging and said that he did.

The last time that I put out an album with my band was in 2011, and on release day, because of our previous conversations, Pastor Warren very graciously sent out *one* tweet on twitter encouraging people to go and check out our record.

One tweet, and suddenly thousands and thousands of people were going and checking out our songs.

For a few hours our page had more visits than it had had the whole month. Until he sent out another tweet, and the one about us got lost.

His name brought me a temporary sense of popularity.

Because he said it was good, people wanted to hear for themselves.

and I could scream from the rooftops how great I thought my own music was, but when someone who had already done something significant...

like written the best selling book of all time other than the bible...

when he puts his name on it, people listen.

Here is a picture of Dawn, Milly, me, Tommy Lasorda, and the 1981 Dodgers World Series trophy that he had won as Dodgers head coach.

When we lived in LA, we lived right by Dodgers stadium and went up there for games all the time. I tried to keep my Tigers roots, because I grew up in Michigan, so the Tigers became my American League team, and the Dodgers were my national league team. Thankfully they haven't met in the world series yet.

But I don't know Tommy Lasorda.

I wasn't there in 1981 when they won the world series. I didn't win the trophy... this picture obviously does not represent anything I was a part of, in fact the trophy was won before I was even born.

Even though it is obvious by the picture that we merely waited in line to take a picture with him and the trophy... something about being close to the proof of what had been accomplished resonates with people.

So they get in line. and they shake his hand. and they take the picture and show it to all of their friends.

This next picture has a significant story behind it.

And I apologize for the picture of a man with no shirt on. It is memorial day, I am sure you will see lots of men with no shirts on as the summer progresses.

But the man with no shirt on in this picture is Travis Barker. A very well known drummer. and you probably cant tell because in this picture of someone holding a picture, I am half cut off but the person on the left is me, and the guy on the right is my friend Andrew.

I was looking for this picture this week and as I was looking through it Andrew happened to call me, so I asked if he had a copy of it and he sent me this copy of someone holding the picture... only I am barely in Andrew's copy. Not sure if that was intentional.

But I was there.

And the thing that is interesting about this picture is it is in Travis Barker's house.

There was once an episode of MTV Cribs on this house... the picture we are standing in front of is a huge picture of Elvis.

Now, I was a band kid. All I wanted to be was a rock star for many many years and truthfully, most of the people that I hung out with had the same ambitions. That was just our deal, we loved music, we wanted to make it and play it all the time.

So I could pull this picture out and show someone, and they instantly knew who it was, and it was obvious where it was... and so it gave this illusion that I just hang out in Travis Barkers house in California all the time.

we just party together.

It gives the impression, that just maybe, I am a *somebody*.

But I don't know Travis Barker.

Here is the real story.

A friend of ours in Lansing has an aunt who lived in California near Travis. and one day she saw him outside and some how there was some sort of conversation struck up between them, and she wanted to introduce us to him because the idea was that if we give him our record, he would give it to the right people and it would make us huge just like his band was huge.

So when I was 18 years old, one of the first things that I tried to do before I ever learned that bands get popular by touring and meeting kids and selling CDs one at a time... before I learned that, I tried the quick route. and Andrew who was our drummer, and I got on a plane to California, set up as many meetings as we could, and one of them we thought was going to be with Travis because his neighbor set it up.

But when we got there, she told us to just go stop by his house and give him the record. Nothing was actually set up for this meeting.

So we tried. But he wasn't home. His dad was there and said that he would pass the record on.

but we didn't believe him, so we went back that night at like 7:30 and we rang the bell at his gate. And his girlfriend answered, and we asked if he could come out and meet us.

She asked us to come back in five minutes.

and we did.

and this time, we rang the bell, and suddenly the gate opened, the door opened, and Travis walked out. It was like a movie.

and just like Rick Warren, Travis was so kind to us.

We handed him our CD, and he got in his truck and let us get in with him and listened to two songs right there with us, and he gave us some feedback and was very encouraging. Then he offered for us to go inside for a minute so his girlfriend could take a picture of us with him.

and then we left.

It sounds so creepy and stalker-ish. but We were 18 year olds under the mindset that we were going to do whatever it takes to see our dreams come true, and to us that meant it had to happen instantly and on our terms... so we launched all sorts of these gorilla missions just like this one, and non of them actually worked.

Really at the end of the day all we got out of it was a picture that told 100 different stories and only one of them was the real one.

and oddly, it opened some doors for us. Probably not the right doors, but there were doors.

It is very easy to use other people's names to elevate our purposes.

There are certain name drops that become trump cards in conversations.

and in Jesus' time and in the generations leading up to Jesus it was no different. People made promises all of the time, it was not really a big deal. But if a person were to make a "vow" or an oath, it would almost automatically be believed... and that is what Jesus was addressing here. The concept of oaths. Of promising something with someone else's name attached to it.

But do you even know the one whose name you have attached to your purposes?

So Jesus begins, in verse 33, by saying:

““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...”

What an oath did in those days was it pointed something bigger. Like today you may hear something like “I swear to God...” and that is nothing new... They may have phrased it a little differently, like “I swear by God almighty” but the point is that *when* they brought God's name into it, **it became a reliable word**. It was something that the other person automatically believed to be true and dependable.

The culture that Jesus was speaking to took oath's incredibly seriously, and here is why.

They believed, and taught that when you made an oath, you not only promised it yourself but you put God's name on it too, or you put something more powerful than yourself on it to...

You suddenly have initiated a tension in the Spiritual realm.

That when you make an oath, suddenly everything in the heavenly realm re-positions itself to make sure that you keep that vow...

and everything on the other side re-positions itself to ensure that you break that vow.

Numbers 30 talks about how serious this is.

It begins by saying that “if a man makes a vow to the LORD, he must not break his word. He shall do everything that proceeded out of his mouth.”

Moses says, “this is a really big deal.”

and then it begins to talk about when woman make vows. Now remember, especially in that culture, husbands were the heads of the household...

Fathers ruled their homes...

so don't get too caught up on the male/female stuff, I am just showing you what it was like in *their* culture at THAT time.

so what Numbers said was that if your daughter makes a vow, or your wife makes a vow... basically, if someone that you are responsible in your home for, makes a vow and you hear that they made it or you hear them make it...

it says to the Father's that if you hear the vow and do not immediately say anything, then every word that she has spoken she will be held accountable for.

But as the head of your household you have the power to declare that vow null and void the moment you hear it... You can chime in and say, “we can't allow that type of bondage to come over our home.”

So if her Father opposes that vow right away, then she and their house will not be bound to it.

Because in that day they knew that your words carried weight, and they knew that they were put in bondage by every word that they say. And so Moses is saying to Fathers, “hey, sometimes your young daughters may say things, and they don’t really even know what they are saying... but their words matter. And when you hear what they say, I am going to give you a chance as the head of your household to not be bound by this... but you have to be a man and speak up and defend your family from empty promises and if you don’t then you will be bound to them.”

Have you ever noticed that in your life?

The moment that you make an oath, you are constantly tested on it. You immediately are given the opportunity to break it... you immediately find out how hard it will be to keep it.

Every word gets tested.

Solomon says this in Ecclesiastes 5:2 “Don't make rash promises, and don't be hasty in bringing matters before God. After all, God is in heaven, and you are here on earth. **So let your words be few.**”

He is saying, think about everything you say before you say it. Sometimes saying even what is practically right could be wrong if it is not spoken at the right time. and don’t promise things just because you want to do something for someone else or because you want to commit to doing something yourself. It is like the old phrase, “under promise, over deliver.”

This sticks to the same principle we have been looking at throughout this entire series... Luke 8:17 says it about your secrets... “For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”

repent of it now... bring it to light now... so it doesn’t have to be brought to light later. It is the same with your words...

weigh your words now, or God will weight them later.

Jesus says in Matthew 12:36:

“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every empty word they speak”

The King James version puts it this way, “Every idle word you speak.”

It is the Greek word “*argos*” and it means “lazy.”

What does it mean to be lazy? What is the first thing you think of? “Someone who does nothing.” For every word you speak that does nothing, you will be judged.

Think about when something is idle... its working, but its not moving. Its not doing anything. If your car is idling.. you aren't going anywhere but it is not parked, either.

So if you make promises but you know you are too lazy to every follow through with them, those words will be judged.

If you waste your words on things that do nothing, those words will be judged.

Your words matter.

They can change people's lives.

They can bring people freedom and they can put them in bondage.

Let me give you another example from Jesus about the kind of power that we have to give people freedom, or to put them into bondage:

Jesus says something incredibly interesting and powerful in Matthew 16:16-19... I have used the first half of this passage more than just about anything... but we have never touched on the second half. Jesus is having this amazing moment with Peter, and he tells Peter that he is the rock on which Jesus will build the entire church on, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And then he tells him this in Matthew 16:19 -

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

He said the same thing two chapters later in Matthew 18 to all of his disciples.

and if you read that not understanding the Jewish culture he was speaking to, you might think that whole thing is about binding demons and binding the devil and stuff like that.

But I have news for you, and this may be hard for you to hear.

You don't bind the devil from your life by telling him he is bound.

You bind the devil from your life by living in such a way that he has no access to you. James (4:7) says “resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

The things that you do or do not do will open or close your life off to his attacks. Ephesians 6 tells us that the way you can stand up to the devils schemes by putting on the *full* armor of God.

You bind the devil by controlling your anger, not letting it last for a day, and therefore NOT letting him get that kind of a foothold in your life. (Eph. 4:27)

the bible says in 1 Peter 5:8 that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour” so Peter says “BE ALERT AND SOBER.”

Because if you make yourself vulnerable for an attack of enemy he is going to creep into your life. If you make an oath, he is going to try and get a foot in the door to see to it that you break that oath. If he sees that you are offended, he is going to try and harvest that offense so he can get a foothold of anger on you... If you let your eye hook to something that you know is leading you off track, the moment you step off of the path of righteousness... he is going to pounce... he is going to devour.

When Jesus is talking about binding and loosing he is not saying that he has given you the keys to the kingdom and the power to bind the devil. We

already know we have the power to bind the devil by the way that we live our lives for Jesus.

Can the Devil be bound even after you have opened yourself up to him...

Yes, of course.

The name of Jesus is the name above all names. It is the most powerful name and He is able to do anything... but the best way to bind the devil is to do it with your life.

But most of us think that we can live our lives in such a way that opens us up to all kinds of evil... in a way that invites all kinds of evil to set up a home in your heart... and that we will just be immune to its affects.

and then we are surprised when everything falls apart in our lives.

But we allowed that in our lives.

When we live like an island and we don't open up to anyone.

Binding and loosing, as Jesus describes does not have anything to do with casting out demons or binding the devil with your words while you live a life that exalts him.

When Jesus talks about binding and loosing he is referring to the way that certain rabbis were given the authority to bind and loose things over peoples lives. It was a part of their yoke...

It actually refers to the gray areas.

Certain rabbis had the authority to teach the word, and others had the authority to judge, and with *that* authority came the authority to bind and loose.

and from there they would give their interpretation, or their "yoke" on what the Torah looked like in *their* community. This was called "binding and loosing." What was bound was forbidden. What was loosed was allowed.

This didn't mean that they re-wrote scripture. The scripture is never changing. The answers that *are* in there are the final words on the subjects. But not all of the answers are in there.

Like when the ten commandments said: remember the sabbath and keep it Holy...

the question then became, what can I do on the sabbath day?

In New York there are these elevators built for certain practicing Jews... and on the sabbath day the elevators stop at every single floor automatically...

because some Jews are under the conviction that they can't do anything on the sabbath, including pushing a button on an elevator.

But I wouldn't take that elevator. and right next to it is a normal elevator that skips the floors you don't want to stop in, if you are merely willing to push one button.

It was the same type of questions back then:

Can I cook a meal? Can I start a fire? Can I untie my ox or donkey from its stall and lead it out to get water? (Luke 13:15)

And some rabbi's yoke said "you can do absolutely nothing." and others held a more loose interpretations.

But whichever Rabbi you sat under, by their yoke, you were bound.

Because they are your spiritual authority.

That is what the Father is doing in the homes in Numbers 30... he is binding things from being loosed over their home before they become ratified.

Now, I hope that it is obvious that if something they say just goes against the word of God, obviously they are the ones in sin... not you.

but what this means is that because you have placed yourself under authority, which everyone is supposed to do, you are additionally bound to that authority as long as it does not go against the bible, and so suddenly you could have a burden placed on you that you now are obligated to carry out, and if not, you are the one who is wrong.

Here is another example... when I was much younger, one of the requirements for the people in the church that my dad worked for was that we couldn't go to movie theaters. For whatever reason, it was the conviction of the leadership that christians should not be seen in public going to things that movies, even if they were clean movies because it left all sorts of questions like "What movie are they going to? Is it rated R?"

and since then they have lightened up on that...

probably because today, most people would never sign a membership agreement that says that they can't go to the movies... but when you agree to being under that leadership and the things that they bind over your life, those things become ratified in heaven.

That is why we are so careful about what kind of covenants and different types of things that we ask people to sign here at our church. We are not against those types of things entirely because there is power in commitment, but we are very careful to make sure that we are not binding people to a bunch more rules that are not even in the bible, especially when they don't actually make sense for their life.

and when you are dealing with people who come from all different backgrounds, and upbringings, and you expect them to look just like you and act just like you when you know that everything about them is "not like you" it is so much better to find the common ground than to lay new burdens on them that are not necessary in *their* life, and *their* walk with the Lord..

If we aren't careful, we can put people in more bondage by our yoke than even the bible requires of them. But according to the bible, those people

are bound to the commitments that they make even if the rules go above and beyond that laid out in the bible.

Because your word is your oath.

It is a covenant. and what you commit to, you are bound to.

and it works like that in community, and it works like that in a your personal world. Because for the things that are not black and white in the bible, we have been given the Holy Spirit to discern what we need in our lives.

We have been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and what we bind here over our lives, automatically is bound in heaven, and we have to live by it. Because when we bind it on earth is ratified into law in heaven.

This is a good thing... not a bad thing.

Jesus is saying, "you can do this." I give you this ability because I trust that you are actually capable of doing it. Now remember, Jesus gives this to Peter... to the disciples... to uneducated men who it would seem never made good decisions, but Jesus says, "you can do it. I know you can."

Guys, there are plenty of areas in your life, where you know your history. You know your family. You know the consequences you have faced and the challenges you have faced and you need to bind some things in your life and commit that they will not be a part of you even though for others it may be ok. And you need to say, "others may, but I may not."

Because we have a moral standard that we all have to live by and it tells us right and it tells us wrong and it is called the bible.

and you have another moral standard beyond the bible and it helps you navigate circumstances and navigate right and wrong and it is called your conscience and it is guided by the Holy Spirit.

and some times your conscience may be clear about something that someone else's conscience is heavy about.

and for you it may be okay and for them it may be wrong.

Remember, we are talking about the gray areas. Not that black and white ones.

so we don't put heavy burdens on people when their conscience does not match our's, but the way that they follow the bible still does.

So we are careful with this at Courage.

In the area of binding and loosing in this church right now...

we bind guilt... and condemnation. and people holding things against other people. That is not something that we will tolerate in this place. And we can't always help what your own conscience does to you but we bind other people from placing those types of burdens on your life.

But we loose accountability. and balancing life to the word of God and applying your own convictions.

But it is something that has to be taken seriously.

Just like an oath. When you make one, you are bound to keep it.

And the reason I am telling you all of this is because I am trying to show you the power that we have in the heavenly realm. Binding and loosing and making oaths all move heaven and hell in the same way, and they all have the same type of affects on a Christian community. And both are incredibly powerful but if you don't understand them they can be incredibly dangerous.

Jesus is not telling us to not ever commit to anyone. He is saying be careful what you commit too. Be careful what yoke you sit under. Be careful what dotted lines you sign your name on. But you must commit. Commitment is important. Because community is important.

The entire sermon on the mount is about a new type of community.

It is about how we live in community together, and about how *together* we invade earth with the Kingdom of heaven.

What Jesus is showing us is, that if we say yes, we have committed to our brother. Whether we say it in Jesus' name, or in God's name, or in heavens name... or any other name... biblically, there are **NOT** ways in which you can commit to something without actually committing to it.

So he says that out of respect for God, just keep him out of it. He is in it anyways, but don't lean on him to gain a ground with someone else. Just answer clearly, and then act on it. and this is how he explains it:

(Matt 5:34-36)

“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.”

See, in that culture, What you swore **by** made all the difference in the world.

And so people would put God's name on their oaths because if his name were on it, it would certainly have to be believed.

Even God himself swore by his own name... The book of Hebrews (6:13) says that because there is no-one greater than God, he had to swear by himself when he made his promise to Abraham.

People always wanted to swear by something greater than themselves.

which obviously made God the trump card.

Initially, early yokes of the rabbi's taught that the third commandment had to do with swearing in God's name. That is still the yoke that we have in some circles come to accept in our culture,

The command is “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (Exodus 20:7)

but like we talked about last fall, The word “vain” is the Hebrew word “*shav*” and it means “to not be real.”

the third commandment literally says “You must not take the name of the Lord in *unreality*.”

It is a name that carries the weight of the whole world, and people were using it for their own good and manipulating it to get what they wanted, and not using it for what it really is.

But eventually, the Hebrew people got away from speaking the name of God entirely.

It could *only* be spoken in the temple and when they weren't in the temple they tried to find all sorts of ways to talk about God without actually using his name.

So eventually they began trying to find ways around using the actual name of God... but still swear on something that would still give your words weight so that you would be believed.

But like everything with the Pharisees, they always tried to find a workaround.

Remember, before Jesus gets into this whole set of passages we have been studying recently.... anger, lust, divorce and now oaths... he begins by saying “your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees.”

because the Pharisees always tried to find loopholes to everything.

For instance, the religious leaders taught that if you swear by “the altar” and you break that promise, there would be no consequences. But if you swear by “the gift on the altar” you were utterly bound to it.

It was their workaround. They could swear by the altar, and just not do it at all.

Jesus rebukes them for this teaching. In Matthew 23:18-22 (NIV) when he is listing the seven woes of the Pharisees, he says to them:

“You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’¹⁹ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

²⁰ Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹ And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. ²² And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.”

You revere God’s name enough to not speak it... but you blaspheme his name by finding manipulative ways to use it against people without actually saying it.

What Jesus is saying is, “you used to use God’s name to validate your oaths...” but I say, you will be held accountable for every word you speak.

What Jesus is saying is, not that you can never make an oath...

but that every time you say yes, whether or not you say it in God’s name, is an oath. He is saying “be careful what you promise” because you have heard it said that there are times when it is okay to not do what you say you are going to do, but I say, “you will be bound by what you commit to.”

There are not tiers to honesty. It doesn’t come in levels. There are no excuses for dishonesty, ever. The name of Jesus is the name above all names and if a Christian... a person who *already bears his name*... makes a vow he is making it representing Jesus and he had better hold to it.

and Jesus ends by saying:

“Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”

And this is where he simplifies the whole thing.

He says, you guys have all these excuses. All these ways in which you can get someone to believe you, knowing in your heart that you will never follow through... but I say to you:

simplicity.

yes. or no.

Can you treat people with the kind of respect that it takes to tell it to them straight?

We have been learning this every single week...

all of the problems that Jesus addresses in this here in the sermon on the mount come to life when you let what is in your heart be hidden, and mask it with your life. Mask it with your words.

and anytime you try and use something bigger than yourself as a way to get what *you* want from somebody, it is called manipulation.

it is using the Lord's name in vain. and it is destructive to community. That is why Jesus says it is from the evil one. Because it stirs up confusion. It lacks openness. It is not simple.

There is nothing more healthy than simplicity... and a simple person can look at their friend and they can tell them what is in their heart. They can tell them if the burden is too heavy or if they have it under control.

They can tell them, "hey, I am not okay right now."

and instead of judgment, it brings unity. Because we are a community who binds things together, and looses them together, and walks through them together when one person is having a hard time navigating and another is doing great in the same area, we don't judge the one who is not okay... we come alongside of them and help them get to where the other one is.

It brings oneness. and sometimes the other person may say "me too." and sometimes the other person may say "I truly can not even begin to imagine

how hard that must be for you, I have never stood where you are standing right now, but I am committed to standing with you until we figure this out.”

That is what honesty brings.

Openness is important to Jesus.

and whether or not you can keep it simple in the way that you commit to each other is a huge indicator of the health in a community.

Is it yes or no?

Is authority understood? Or do you have to play the God card?

Is accountability understood? Or do you have to play the God card?

Is community understood? Or do you have to play the God card?

Are you always using something bigger to elevate your purposes? Have you forgotten that you don't need to do that, and that attaching your purposes to something you think makes it more powerful only takes away its power.

Because you were given the keys to the Kingdom.

Is it yes or no?

because Anything else is from the evil one.

The gospel is simple. It is yes or no.

The same Jesus who gave us the most incredible sermon in the history of the world also demonstrated love in the most radical way in the history of the world when he lived a sinless life and then allowed himself to die on a cross for our sins.

and maybe you are here and you have been for the last few weeks, and you would say to me, “yeah, Jesus sounds great, but I have done EVERYTHING that you have been talking about.”

But the beautiful thing about the church of Jesus Christ is that along with the authority to bind and to loose, he also gave us the ministry of reconciliation... it is all about bringing people back to God through Jesus who the bible says "Does not count there trespasses against them."

One thing that we have been saying this whole series, is that Jesus meets us in the broken places of our hearts.

When we haven't kept our promises. When we have veered out from the authority that he placed us under... When we have used his name to manipulate people into giving us what we want.

He meets us in all the places where our lives have left us empty. In divorces and anger and bankruptcy. In manipulation and falsehoods and half truths and all the times that we let down everyone that we are supposed to be there.

and He says, "I will meet you exactly where you are, but I am going to show you a new way. Will you accept my way?"

Yes or No?