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Keep It 100!

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So it was 19 years ago February 2001, I met a senior at Howard University who caught my eye and her name before I gave her mine was Erica Johnson. And the details of that encounter vary depending on who you ask so don't ask, I don't want you to be confused by the discrepancies. But as destiny would have it, I got the digits. I will spare that story for you as well. But we've been married now for almost 17 years. And yeah, you can clap right there. Yeah, that's an accomplishment.

But one of the things that I don't know I became proud of over the years is one little thing that Erica said to me. She said, "You know, you were the first guy who consistently called me when he said he would." And I was like, wow, you know, like, man, this is like, we start feeling real good about yourself, you know? But then at the same time, you're like, wow, like who are these like losers you were talking to before? Like, what? I mean, like, man, the bar is set pretty low here, you know, like, man. But I've thought about this, and I've processed this and you know, I'm not saying that I always do everything that I say that I'm going to do. I try. I'm not saying that I haven't shown up or said I was going to show up and I did it. And, you know, I'm not saying that there aren't people in my life that will regularly call that out, their names are Jayla, Jocelyn, Isaiah and Journey, those are my kids. They're in your life; I think to humble you a little bit.

Now I know I'm kind of making light of the situation of my wife and I meeting but in that conversation, what I really heard Erica say to me was, I trust you and I trust your character. And that's simple and also fascinating to me, at the same time, because I know deep down, that's what we all want, right? That's, that's what we're looking for in life to be able to trust one another's character, to not be fooled or tricked, or played, right. But it's hard to extend that kind of trust. It's hard, it's unsettling, it's unsafe, because it puts us in a vulnerable place. So, we tend to adopt the nomenclature and these practices of masking ourselves with inauthenticity, in the name of winning, self preservation, or whatever else we think benefits us or protects us. And it's sad because the meaning of our words are then diminished. And sometimes even the things that we say we don't even really take it seriously is more like rhetoric. And then we're often disappointed, or we come to expect to be disappointed, let down or lied to. And we tend to experience moments of what I call disorientation when that is not the case. Like when people say who they are, and you see it or you see their actions lining up with their words. It's both refreshing and a little bit unreal at times.

But can I tell you what that's called? That's called integrity. It comes from a root word, integer, which literally means whole. And that's what I want to talk about this weekend as we continue this series, 'Disorientation', which Jesus is giving in Matthew, chapter number five; you can meet me there in just a moment. And we'll be zooming in this weekend on verses 33 through 37 as we continue navigating or processing these sayings that Jesus is talking to us about in reference to the law.

So, let's pick this up in verse 33. Here we go. This is Jesus talking. He says, “³³ Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancients, ‘You must not break your oath, but must keep your oath to the Lord.’ ³⁴ But I tell you don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it's God's throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, because it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Nor should you swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. ³⁷ But let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more than this is from the evil one.”

I want to use for just a short time this weekend, I want to tag these few verses with this little short subject, 'Keep It 100' Now, you know the way we say it, we say keep it 100 you know, you got to take the R out at the end, you know?

And so, as we were thinking about what Jesus is saying, and I'm tagging this, you know, these few passages or these few verses 'Keep It 100' on the surface this seems pretty straightforward, right? Pretty simple, don't swear which the relation here is about profanely using God's name in vain and just saying yes or no, right. And in a basic sense, that is true. But in the Jesus way of doing things, he's digging just a tad bit deeper here.

First of all, we need to understand the context or the fuller context of what's being said here. So, we need to zoom out a little bit and we need to really drill down on what Jesus is referring to here. Now, he's saying, hey, you may have heard or as I would say, 'the word on the street is' this is really just a mash up of one of the four mosaic laws that Jesus is referencing when he's speaking in verses 33 to 37. So I just want to put these up for you so we can go through what he's actually referencing.

- Number one, he's talking about the third commandment in the Ten Commandments; do not misuse the name of the Lord, your God. That's in Exodus 20:7.
- Then he says, Do not swear falsely, by my name, profaning, the name of your God; I am the Lord. This is Leviticus 19 to 12.
- Then, when a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to put himself under an obligation, he must not break his word; he must do whatever he has promised. Number 30:2.
- And then the last one. If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to keep it, because he will require it of you, and it will be counted against you as sin, Deuteronomy 23:21.

So, this is a summary of what Jesus is referring to, and the intention of the commandments and the laws is already what I said, don't swear, don't lie, basically, keep your word. It's just that simple. But there was a Pharisaic distortion here that little phrase is what John, theologian John Stott would say it's a Pharisaic distortion of this. And the distortion had to do with a couple of things.

The first one was a redirection of the focus away from the original intent and putting a focus on profaning God's name and so basically using God's name like you weren't supposed to do that. And so they're putting more emphasis on that as opposed to the overall idea of keeping the vow.

The second was this elaborate or these elaborate rules that they made up for vows that were binding and vows that were non-binding. Now that kind of sounds crazy, right? Because if it's a vow, right, I mean, it seems like it would be it would be binding, right? But they came up with these elaborate rules. And Jesus addresses these rules right here in Matthew five, but then he also addresses them in greater detail in Matthew 23:16, through 22. You can write that down, you can read that a little bit later in your reading. But in general, this is what Jesus says in those verses, he says, "*Woe to you blind guides, and blind fools.*" And then he talks to them about swearing by the temple or the gold in the temple and which is greater and which is lesser. And at the end of the day Jesus is saying listen, all that stuff is ridiculous. And woe to you that means some bad stuff is going to happen. It's like back in the day when my mother would look at me and say I'm gonna whoop your butt. Now I'm not advocating corporal punishment, that's just how I grew up, but I knew what that meant. So this is what Jesus said, "Woe to you, some bad stuff is going to happen." And all of this stuff is basically ridiculous.

And then he goes on to say, the reason why is because even if you don't use the Lord's name, in vain or profanely the things that you swear by, belong to and were created by him anyway. So don't swear by Heaven, because it's God's throne. Don't swear by the earth or anything in it because it's his footstool. Don't swear by Jerusalem, which now Jerusalem was the holy city; this was the center of Judaism and people held it in high esteem. But he said don't swear by Jerusalem either because God is the king of that city. And then he says, don't swear by your hair, which apparently that's what people would do in those days. Not sure what that means, it means nothing for me. You don't have the power to make them black or white or change the composition of your of your hair. So basically don't swear at all because it's unnecessary. And at the end of the day, it's all binding period.

Now, I need to just pause right here because I thought about this, during worship and this just popped in my head as I was studying our Quaker brothers take this, our Quaker brothers and sisters take this very literally. And they don't swear oaths like if they're under oath or they don't believe in any of those things like when it comes to testifying. Now, Jesus Himself testified under oath when he was questioned before He was crucified and at the end of the day like I respect that stance from our Quaker brothers and sisters. And I'm not saying that that's right or wrong. I'm saying that that's not the overall point that Jesus is making.

So let me just give us the point, alright. Jesus concludes this whole thing, and there's no need for me to repackage it to make it sound better or jazz it up or anything it's just pretty straightforward. When you say yes mean it, when you say no meaning it and anything else is coming from a different motivation. So that's all you need to say, is yes or no in a modern nomenclature or vernacular, just keep it 100

period. So that's it. Now you can go home and you have a nice weekend. I mean, that's, that's pretty much it.

But before you do, before you do, and before we just brush this off, as yeah, that's true. That's a good moral reminder; something we need to strive for really need to work towards let's zoom in on the implications of not doing what Jesus is saying. I mean, it's the kind of falsehood and foolery that we have to deal with on a regular basis. And I don't know about you, but it's exhausting, having to navigate through these things.

I just picked three kind of metaphorical categories to kind of give an example of how we're experiencing this falsehood on a regular basis, and at times, seemingly content with it. I call these three categories just marketing, monogamy and mayhem.

So when I say marketing, I'm talking about messaging that we are constantly bombarded by the media, social media, internet, co workers, neighbors, companies, political figures, leaders, friends, even the church. And here are the questions; is it real? Is it true? What's the catch? What's the real cause? What is the fine print? It's like that medicine or whatever they said it's going to do all these great things and its 25 disclaimers that they're saying real fast. And that's how we are processing these things. And as a result, we then become pessimistic. And we live in this pessimistic world, about truth. And we say to ourselves, or we've adopted some of these things like, well, truth is your own, or you can create your own truth. And Jesus is saying to the Pharisees and to us now, we don't roll like that. That's just not, that's not how it is and that's not how we're supposed to live.

And I love the way Paul kind of summarizes this in one of my favorite passages as he writes to the Christians in Philippi, you got to understand what Paul is writing. He's really he's writing to a group of people helping them figure out how they're supposed to be Christ-like in a culture that is not following him. And it's very difficult for him to do, but I love what he says, as it relates to what we're talking about tonight. And he's talking about emulating Christ humility, he says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interests of others." Some translations even elevate the interests of others above ourselves.

Now, you can't tell me that ain't disorienting when someone is more interested in you and more interested in helping you and investing you then they are themselves. That's this disorienting and sometimes even uncomfortable for us.

When I say monogamy, I'm talking broader than marriage, I'm talking about how we constantly contend with people who were not sure, are really for us, really want to be with us, for us. And whatever the relationship is a friendship or romantic or whatever the case may be. And we know that there are people who really want something from us, or they're looking for a benefit for themselves. And what happens

with the implication of this in our world again, we began to get very pessimistic and we adopt this mindset that Beyonce sang about in one of her songs, 'It's Just Me Myself and I'. I mean, that's what I found out, that's all I have in end it's just me, myself and I. And that's how we roll.

But what's so disorienting about Jesus is Jesus says, I want nothing from you but everything for you so I'm going to lay down my life on behalf of you. Who does that? Who does that? In what world is this true? But this is what Jesus is saying we are called to. This is the standard.

When I say mayhem, I'm talking about what Kim Scott in her book, Radical Candor talks about. She says there are people who are front stabbers, they're not backstabbers, they're front stabbers. And these are people who boldly try you in your face and dare you to call them out on it with the intent to harm you while presenting themselves otherwise. Now I want you all to know call these people enemies. That's what I call them. And I graduated from the Michael Tyrone sermonette school of leadership. And that means you get what's coming to you because you are an enemy. But Jesus said, there are no exceptions here. There are no categories where some of these things are acceptable, and they're not. But we have made categories that make that when we say, oh, that's acceptable, oh, I understand. Jesus says, no no, no, there are no exceptions here. You cannot lie. You cannot present yourself in that way just because your enemies do, that's not the way it works. That's why Dr. King says, war begets war.

So let me just see if I can just bring this in for a real quick, bumpy landing this weekend. What Jesus is saying, just keep it 100. Just have integrity is such a problem that MTV back in 2012 came up with a show called 'Catfish'. And some of y'all heard of this show before, and it's still running eight seasons later is this still running, apparently is good for TV. And the whole premise of the show is people showing up in people's lives, typically via the internet. Attempting to be in relationship with them, but they're hiding details about themselves or they're not who they really say they are. And they're suspicious things that are happening that's causing the person on the other end to believe that wait a minute, something here is not right and so we've adopted this nomenclature in our in our culture of being catfished. Basically, you've been tricked, you've been fooled. Someone says that they were something and they were not.

Now this seems like its funny and again, you know good for TV and good ratings, but listen current generation is really on edge about this. They're really on edge with exactly what Jesus is saying, In Matthew 5:33 through 37. 82% of young adults around the world on average, according to Barna research says we have a crisis in leadership. And corruption is one of the top things that they're concerned about. This is believers, non believers and people who are just don't even know they just haven't even marked themselves either or. We have an integrity problem is what they're saying.

And so the implications are this, either a) we adopt this mindset that, hey, nothing's going to change and that just perpetuates the pessimism that's already in the world. Or b) I'm going to take matters into my own hands to protect my own future. And I believe what Jesus is saying and what he's calling us to is a

wide open opportunity to disciple a wide open opportunity to go against the grain. A wide open opportunity to create a level of disorientation that is good in the world. And all we need to do is be people of integrity. We need to honor our word, show up when no one else is showing up, looking for ways in not ways out because that's what the Pharisees were doing. They were making sure that they didn't get caught up. They were making sure that there was always a way out. And they basically said, Hey, as long as you don't put God in it, as long as you don't swear by God, then it's not really you know, something that you could be held to.

And I think that there's a door of disorientation that the world is banging on, screaming behind, wondering if someone will answer, wondering if there is reality, wondering if there is authenticity. And you know who should be behind that door, ready to answer, ready to open? It should be the Christ followers. It should be the Jesus followers. It should be the church. We are the ones to be setting the example because the world around us they're looking for something different. They're looking for something authentic. They're looking for what is true. And Jesus says to these Pharisees, who are so concerned about their self interest and protecting themselves, he's saying, "Just say yes, and just say no". That's it. That's all you have to do.

So this weekend before we close, and before I pray for us, hey, maybe you are a Christ follower. And you're processing you're thinking, how do I show up? Am I a person of character? Am I a person of integrity? Do I do what I say what I want to do? Do I follow through? And this is not about perfection, because we all fall short. But this is about the orientation of your heart and the intention to show up in that way. And so if for some reason along the way, you have adopted some of these principles in our culture that go counter to what Jesus is saying, and you've made some exceptions that you should not be making, or you've been okay with certain things that are not okay. This is an opportunity this weekend, to say you know what, I need to let my yes be yes and my no be no.

Or maybe you're not a Christ follower, you've been searching and you've adopted these principles, and this just way of survival in the world. But it's exhausting and you're really looking for something different. Well, here's the thing. Jesus invites us to follow him. Yes, it's a vulnerable place. But he's empowered us to do it. And he's with us. And he came to redeem us to make us whole again, which is synonymous with integrity, not perfection, again, because we're gonna mess this thing. But he's with us along the way.

Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for who you are. Thank you for the standard that you called us to. There's so many examples around us of loopholes and ways we can escape or ways we can find our way out of certain things. Well, God help us to be people who take showing up the way we should show up and our yes, being yes, and our no being no seriously. The world is crying out that there's a crisis of leadership. And the very people who you've equipped and call to step into that gap and to lead the way are the people who have aligned themselves with you, the Christ followers. So God empower us and help us to trust more in that empowerment that you given to us to lead us than the concern we may have

about what is going to happen if we do tell the truth if we do say yes, when we mean yes and no, we mean no. Because the truth of the matter is that oftentimes we don't because we're worried about what's going to happen or we're worried about protecting ourselves. But Jesus remind us that you said you would be with us. And so let us be known for our integrity. Let us be known for our wholeness. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.