

THE IMPORTANCE OF ALWAYS TELLING THE “THE TRUTH”

Presented by

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In several of my previous sermons I have mentioned some of the truly important lessons that Tyler and I have learned in our Sunday-morning Bible class, “A Journey through the Old Testament.” For example, as we looked at the visual aids on the wall of our classroom, and saw the terrible sadness on the faces of Adam and Eve as they were ejected forever from the beautiful Garden of Eden, we quickly came to realize just how important it is to **always** obey God. As Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 11:26-27, “There will be a blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, and a curse if you refuse them.” Adam and Eve learned that lesson the hard way.

As Tyler and I witnessed the terrible mess that Samson made of his life when he broke his promise to God to abide by the Nazirite vow that he had made as a young man, and as we saw the once-strong-but-now-blind judge of Israel pushing a millstone 'round and 'round in a never-ending circle like a common farm animal, we realized just how important it is to honor each and every promise made to God. Speaking for the Lord, the prophet Zechariah warned the people of his generation about this very thing when he wrote, “Do not love a false oath, for this is among the things that I hate” (Zechariah 8:17).

When we saw the Israelites stoning Achan to death because he had stolen treasures reserved solely for God’s use, and then had tried to hide his sin from God, we realized how foolish it is to try to hide **anything** from God. Moses was absolutely right when he said in Numbers 32:23, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” Achan tried to deceive God, and ended up causing the destruction of his entire family.

As Tyler and I observed the Lord’s people suffer repeatedly at the hands of their wicked Canaanite enemies during the period of the judges because the Israelites freely chose to worship pagan gods, we learned how important it is for people to admit their sins, repent of those sins, and seek God’s forgiveness. As God Himself said through the prophet Ezekiel, “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and obtain for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit” (Ezekiel 18:30-31). Time and time again the Israelites fell into idolatry, endured decades of bondage under ungodly oppressors, eventually repented of their sins, and found deliverance at the hand of their great God. Yet, as Judges 2:19 informs us, “They did not cease from their own doings or from their stubborn ways.” How sad is **that**?

But perhaps one of the most-memorable lessons that Tyler and I have learned in our Old Testament studies is the importance of telling the truth. We know for certain that God places an **extremely high value** on truth because Proverbs 23:23 teaches us, “Buy the truth, and do not sell it.” This one verse shows us just how important “the truth” is to God. It also helps us understand why God commanded His people, “Speak the truth to one another!” (Zechariah 8:16), and why God said through the apostle John

that “all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). If not telling the truth is enough to send a person to hell, that one fact alone should tell us how important the truth is to God—and how important it should be to us, too.

But perhaps you are wondering which specific Old Testament character it was who ended up teaching Tyler and me the importance of telling the truth. Maybe you are thinking it was someone like the world’s first murderer, Cain, who, when asked by God, “Where is Abel, your brother?,” responded with an outright lie when he said, “**I do not know**. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9). Or, maybe you are thinking that the person in the Old Testament who taught us the importance of telling the truth, as opposed to the evil of telling a lie, was Israel’s first high priest Aaron, who, when asked by Moses to explain the origin of the golden calf that the Israelites were worshiping at the base of Mount Sinai, told what may have been the world’s most-ridiculous lie when he said, “I threw the gold into the fire—and out came this calf!” (Exodus 32:24). Or, maybe you are thinking that the person who taught us the futility of lying was Saul, Israel’s first king who, at various times during his reign, had tried to kill David, yet lied over and over to the young shepherd when he falsely said, “Return to me, my son David. I will harm you no more” (1 Samuel 26:21).

It is true, of course, that each of these people lied. It also is true that, by lying, each of these people sinned, since one of the Ten Commandments was “You shall not bear false witness” (Exodus 20:16). But if you think that any one of these individuals was the person who taught Tyler and me the most-powerful lesson in the Old Testament about lying, you would be wrong. As odd as it may seem at first, the person who provided us with the best example of what can happen when we do not tell the truth is one of the best-known characters in the entire Bible. His name was...**David**—Israel’s most-beloved king.

But again, as odd as it might seem to you at first, the lesson that Tyler and I learned so well about the sin of lying has nothing to do with the transgressions for which David is most famous—the adultery he committed with Bathsheba, and the murder he perpetrated against her husband, Uriah. In fact, the story I am about to tell you happened quite some time **before** David became king of Israel after the death of Saul, Israel’s first king, and after the assassination of Saul’s only surviving son, Ishbosheth, Israel’s second “pseudo-king.” Here is what happened.

As I said earlier, at various times during his reign, King Saul tried to kill David because he had grown envious of David’s popularity among the people of Israel. In fact, Saul’s hatred of David grew so intense that he even assigned thousands of Israelite soldiers to hunt him down and kill him so he could be rid of him once and for all. But, thanks to God’s help, David always was able to evade the spiteful king’s evil intentions.

Unfortunately, however, Saul’s continuing efforts to kill David began to take a serious toll on the young shepherd’s faith. One day, in a moment of utter desperation, David said to himself, “I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the

Philistines; then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand” (1 Samuel 27:1). **Can you believe this?!** David, the future king of Israel, was considering going to live with **the Philistines**—the Israelites’ mortal enemies! And, believe it or not, **that is exactly what David did**. But to make matters worse, David took with him to Philistia not only his own family, but also the 600 men who considered him to be their leader, plus all of their families.

David decided to go to Achish, king of the Philistine city of Gath, and say to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, give me a place in some town in the country so that I may dwell there” (1 Samuel 27:5). Achish had heard of Saul’s attempts to kill David, and knew that it would be a great triumph for the Philistines if he could turn David into an **enemy** of Israel and a **friend** of the Philistines. So, Achish honored David’s request by giving him the city of Ziklag as a home for him, his family, and all of his followers. But the king’s gift came at a steep price. Achish commanded David to carry out raids against the Israelites who lived across the border from Philistia. In other words, David was supposed to kill his fellow Israelites, seize their possessions, and give them to the Philistine king!

What did David do? The text of 1 Samuel 27:8-11 tells us that, yes, David did indeed carry out raids. **But they were raids against groups who were friends of Achish**. David then gave their possessions to the king—all the while telling him, “I have carried out raids against the southern area of Judah, or against the southern area of the Jerahmeelites, or against the southern area of the Kenites” (vs. 10). But those statements were all lies, since David had not attacked any Israelite city.

Then, of course, David had to do something to keep his lies from being discovered. He knew that if just one person from any of the places he attacked was able to get word to Achish about what had actually happened, he would be in **big** trouble. So, David not only lied to Achish, but also “left neither man nor woman alive...to bring news to Achish of Gath” (vss. 9,11). David killed every living soul in each of the towns and villages that he attacked—just to hide the lies he was telling to a pagan king. And what was the king’s response? Verse 12 tells us when it says, “So Achish believed David, saying, ‘He has made his people Israel utterly abhor him; therefore he will be my servant forever.’” David propagated a lie, murdered people by the hundreds to ensure that no one told Achish about his lie, and then allowed the king to continue believing the lie.

Yet this horror story is not anywhere close to being over. One day, Achish and other Philistine princes unexpectedly declared all-out war on Israel. Achish called David to his throne room and said, “You know, of course, that you and your men are expected to go out with me in the army” (1 Samuel 28:1). Yeow! Now David and his fellow Israelites were in the position of **having to go to war against their own people**. Worse still was the fact that Achish appointed David as captain of his personal body guard “for life!” (vs. 2). What a **mess** David had caused for himself and his followers! There seemed to be no way out of this dreadful predicament. David and his men had no choice but to join the thousands of Philistine troops marching toward Judah to wage war against all of Israel.

During the trek toward Judah, however, something unexpected happened. A group of Philistine princes came to Achish to complain about David and his fellow Israelites being included in their war party. As a result, Achish had no choice but to send David back to Ziklag. Can't you almost see in your mind's eye the expression of relief that must have come over David's face when he heard this incredibly good news? He would not have to fight his fellow Israelites after all!

So everything was OK—right? Hardly! When David and his 600 men returned to Ziklag, they discovered that their city was in ashes, having been burned to the ground by Amalekite raiders during the Israelites' absence. And, worse still, all of the Israelites' wives and children were gone, including David's. There was not a person to be found alive in the entire city of Ziklag! What effect did this have? The text of 1 Samuel 30:6 answers that question when it says, “David was greatly distressed, **for the people spoke of stoning him** because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters.”

Look at where all of David's lies got him! He had to murder people in order to live in a land where he should not have been living in the first place. He had to lie to the king who had given him a home—so that the king would continue to be deceived about the fact that David's **real** loyalty lay with his fellow Israelites. David almost ended up having to go to war against the nation for which he one day would serve as king. His treachery and deceit caused the capture and subsequent removal from Ziklag of his own family and the families of all of his followers. And then his own men were about to stone him to death! Now we know what David's son Solomon meant when he wrote, “One sinner destroys much good” (Ecclesiastes 9:18). At this particular point in his life, David could have served as the “poster boy” for that biblical verse!

Fortunately, however, the story does not end there. As 1 Samuel 30:6 goes on to tell us, “Then David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.” David realized his mistakes, turned to the Lord in penitence, sought the Lord's forgiveness, and, with the Lord's help, was able to rescue all the Israelite women and children who had been taken captive by the Amalekites at Ziklag. Eventually, as 2 Samuel 2:1-2 explains, David left Philistia and returned to Hebron in Judah, where eventually he would become king over all of Israel.

So what lesson did Tyler and I learn from the things I have shared with you today in this sermon? To sum it up, we learned this: **Always tells the truth!** As the apostle John would say many years later, “He who says, ‘I know the Lord,’ but does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). If we “know the Lord,” we will not lie because God commanded us not to. And, as the story of David proves all too well, liars never win—either here, or in the hereafter.