

Acts 5: 1-11

“Vows”

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“... And we are about to open Your word now, it’s a grand word that You have given us. It’s a holy word that You have presented to us. We are asking for You to be our Teacher Lord, we pray that You would interpret the stories and the words that we’ll be looking at today. We pray that Your presence will be so evident and so powerful that our lives will be changed as a result of this experience with You. We pray and we ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

When I was 10 years old, I was fascinated watching my Father. He had a blue cylinder with a, I’ll just called it a spout, on it, and it is a propane torch. And he had it working, you adjust it with a little knob and you can hear this little “chirr” sound, and it’s just fascinating for a 10 year old to watch somebody play with one of those, or to work with one as my Father was. My Father had a fishing spear. Now the spear was about 6 maybe 7 feet high. It had a shaft that came down to a head that spread out 10 or 12 inches wide with 7 other little shafts, and very, very sharp ends, bard ends on it. And my Father liked to ice-fish. He liked to spear fish through the ice. And the way that it worked, we lived up in Northern Michigan, so the ice would get very thick. You cut a hole on the ice; you put a fishing shanty out over the hole, and obviously, the hole is smaller than the shanty, for those who are wondering that, and there is a whole in the floor in the fishing shanty. You line those up, when you shut the door of the fishing shanty it’s like putting on a mask, all of a sudden, you can see, you are a part of the water. You can see all the way down to the bottom, it’s very clear.

So my Dad would take a sucker, about 10 or 12 inches, he would put a hook in it, and he would lower it down into that hole and watch it swim. The spear would be attached at the end with the loop to a very thin but strong line. And we would just sit there and wait and watch. And my Dad, as skilled as he was, could tell when a larger fish was coming around. The other fish down there got very nervous acting. And my Father would quietly, he’d tell us, “Boys sit still, watch, don’t say a word.” He’d bring the spear, and he put it just slightly in the water. And then when a big Northern Pike or a Musky came along, my Father would thrust it down into the water. He, as I mentioned, was pretty skilled at it, we had a number of meals right from that practice.

Now, it was Summer time, and my Father was heating up the shaft of his spear and he was melting lead on to it. And he wanted to make it a little heavier right at the head of it, and he thought he would have more accuracy. But I was just fascinated with this torch that he had, you could hear it, whoooo, and you watched this torch, and you watch the shaft, it would turn red, and white and blue, and the flame would be yellow, and all this different colors dancing around, and he is dripping the lead on it, and when he was done, he turned it off. And we watched it; it came back to the normal color, and Dad stayed there for a few minutes, and then he had to go upstairs for something. He said, “Jerry, don’t touch, that it’s very hot!” Yeah... and he started to walk upstairs, and he said, “Jerry promise me you won’t touch it, it’s very hot.” “I promise Dad!”

He was upstairs, I was down there by my self. What is it about promises that make them so hard to keep? 10 years old, staring at this thing, my father and I had agreed I wasn't going to grab it. I wasn't going to touch it. But he was upstairs, and I was down there, and so I reached out to see if it was hot, just curious. I grabbed it, and he found out I grabbed it because I screamed so loud, and he came back down. And I had a pretty healthy burn on my hand. And it hurt for quite a while.

What is it that makes it so hard for us as human beings to keep a promise? I'd like to study that with you today, look at Acts chapter 5. The importance of keeping a promise is what we are going to look at today. I am going to read quickly through Ananias and Sapphira. This is a study that we had last week, we are building on to it again this week.

“But a certain man name Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostle's feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about there hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?’ She said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ Then Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.’ Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.”

Great fear fell on them. And if you are half listening, great fear falls on us as well. You know, Ananias and Sapphira, perhaps they are warmed by the preaching of the apostles. They hear about Jesus, and they understand about their Savior in a new and powerful, and exciting light. Perhaps, the Holy Spirit had spoken to their heart, and in this experience of a sacred glow, or a sacred aha, the spiritual moment, they make a vow, and they say, “you know maybe we should take that property across town and sell it, and we'll just bring all of it to God and to His church. Let's do that.” And so once the sale is over, they are not listening to the sermon of the apostles anymore. Once the sale is over, they don't have that sacred glow or that aha moment. And you know, hey, you got all this money, hum, you got to retire some day, and on and on, they begin to rationalize until they keep back part of it and give it as if it's the entire amount.

We have all made vows to God that we have not kept. That's why this is fearful. Those two people lost their life. You know, it's kind of like the man, he was in the religious meeting, and he decided he was going to sell his house, and everything that he sold it for he was going to give it to God. So he made a vow to the Lord. And that week, he put his house on the market and that week his house sold. And so the fellow had a little time to

think. And he told the people that are buying the house, “I just want you to know there is one condition on the purchase of this house.” They said, “What is it?” “The cat goes with it.” They said, “Well, okay.” He said, “You must understand the house is selling to you for \$1 and the cat costs \$100.000.”

It’s hard to keep vows, hard to keep them. Vows fall down into several areas. If God would do something for us then we would do something for Him. Or He has done something for us, and consequently we would do something for Him. Sometimes there is a conviction that comes upon us, a conviction to change, a conviction to do something, or not to do something. A vow is a solemn promise made to God. And I am telling you brothers and sisters, we have a hard time keeping our vows. Statistically, those in our denomination, who have been baptized, the majority of us, do not even attend church anymore. It’s hard to keep vows. Statistically, marriage vows, the majority of people in our denomination, their marriages are ending in divorce. It’s hard to keep vows.

What does the Bible teach about vows? One of the first things I want you to note, nowhere in the Word of God, does God demand from people to take a vow. Nowhere in the Word of God does He demand us to take a vow! But, He does require us to keep it, if we do take one. Let’s study that, let’s turn to Numbers chapter 30. Numbers chapter 30 will be our first passage this morning. Numbers chapter 30 beginning with the verse 2, by the way, the entire chapter here is about vows, you might find it interesting to read, especially if you are a lady because there is a different category for ladies and vows than there is for men. Chapter 30 verse 2: “If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.”

So the Bible says, if you make a vow to the Lord, that you are to do all according to what proceeds out of your mouth. Let’s look at Psalms 26, verse 11. Here the author of this Psalm says, “Make vows to the Lord you God, and pay them; Let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared.” If you make vows to the Lord your God, pay them! That’s what is being said there. Look at Ecclesiastes 5 verse 4. “When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed- it is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay.”

Vows, promises, why are they so hard for us to keep? I want to show you 3 examples of vows that are kept in the Word of God. First one, Genesis, chapter 28, you have the story of Jacob. Jacob is 77 years old when he deceives his father. Jacob is 77 years old when he has to flee his home. He is alone, he is in the wilderness, he feels condemned by his family, he feels condemned by himself, and he feels condemned by God. And on the second night out, on his trip to uncle Laban’s he is laying there, and God blesses him with a vision of salvation. A picture of a ladder, with angels going up and down on that ladder, it’s a picture of Christ, his Savior. And he is so moved, and so affected by the presence of God, and what the Lord has indicated to him, that in verse 20 of chapter 28, he makes this vow: “ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone

which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”

So here you have a heart filled with gratitude, and from that position, Jacob makes a vow. “Lord, you bring me back here; I'll give you a tenth of all that I acquire.” 21 years later, he will come back. 21 years later he'll be a multi millionaire, and he will keep his vow to the Lord. First Samuel, chapter 1, this is the story of Hannah. Hannah is married to a man named, Elkanah. Elkanah had another wife, named Peninnah; she is called Hannah's rival. Peninnah is able to have children, Hannah is unable to have children, and that creates tremendous stress upon her. And Peninnah is there, ragging against her, and telling her she is worthless, and she feels worthless, and in that society and culture, a woman who couldn't bear children was considered worthless.

And so in anguish, she goes up to the temple to pray. First Samuel, 1 verses 10 and 11: “And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, ‘O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.’” She is promising, “Lord, if You will do this, I will do this for You.” She is saying “If you give me this child, I'll give that child to you,” she made that vow. And when Samuel was 3 years old, he was brought to the temple, and indeed she followed through on her vow. He was raised there at the temple, and became a prophet of God.

Another example found in Acts chapter 18, an experience with the apostle Paul. Acts chapter 18, verse 18, it says here: “So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.” When you first read that, you think, “Oh that's the vow, I'll get my hair cut off, and that will be the vow.” No, it's the completion of the vow. Paul participated in a Nazirite vow. You can read about this in Numbers, chapter 6. A Nazirite vow could be for a certain period of time, or you can dedicate yourself as a Nazirite for your entire life. Samson was a Nazirite. John the Baptist was a Nazirite. We just read that Samuel was presented to the Lord with no hair being cut. “No razor should touch him,” he was dedicated to God as a Nazirite.

But what it happened over time is that in the Jewish culture, when you wanted to do a special time of praise to God, of separation of being holy and thanking Him, you would take a Nazirite vow. And the way that it would work, is that during time you would have no contact with the dead, you would drink no wine, no grape juice, no vinegar, you would eat no raisins or grapes, and no razor would come to your head. Women could be Nazirites as well. You can read about that in Numbers chapter 6.

So Paul apparently has taken a Nazirite vow and he's come to the end. At the end, he shaves his head. Because what you are supposed to do at the end of your vow, you are supposed to shave your face, shave your head, keep the hair and bring it along with your

offering to the temple and it would be burned along with the offering that you brought. All this, to show God that you were committed to Him.

So thus far we've looked at a few types of vows that had been made. Jacob is so pleased with what God did, he makes a vow. Hannah is asking God to do something, and saying she will do something in return. And here you have Paul apparently so grateful and thankful for what is going on, he submits himself to a time of sacrifice.

Do you realize that there are many Christians around the world that still do this? Some of you know I was raised in the Church of Rome. And 40 days before Easter every year, we'd have leant. And during that time, to show respect for Jesus, and to enter into His time of sacrifice, we would sacrifice something. So as a small child, I can remember thinking of big things that I would sacrifice during that time. Usually my mother would do something, like she would say, there will be no chocolate in the house for 40 days, and things like that. One year I got really, I was going to be wrenched up, and I wasn't going to watch television for 40 days, just a little 6 or 7 year old kid. You know, it's hard to keep a promise. But I remember the look on my mother's face, she was so proud of me. You know, making a commitment like that. But by the second day, I can still see myself, I can see the vision through my eyes, of sitting behind my Dad's chair where my Mom couldn't see me and I was watching TV with the family.

It's hard to keep vows. There are some vows that come across very strange and difficult to understand. I want to show you a difficult story in Judges chapter 11. In Judges chapter 11 there is a story that's hard to explain, and it's related to vows. In the commentary that has been produced by our denomination, it calls this a rash vow, one that shouldn't have been kept. Other commentaries and commentators, have other things to say. In chapter 11 beginning with verse 30 it says: "And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, 'If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.'" Now back in those days, the upper level of the house was for the people, the lower level was for the animals. Apparently Jephthah is imagining some animal is going to walk out and he is going to offer this animal as a burnt offering.

So Jephthah comes home. Look at verse 34, "When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it." He made a vow. He would sacrifice his only child.

Now I tell you, this is a difficult passage. Number one, I mean, you can not imagine God being pleased with human sacrifice. But there may be a way out in thinking that that's exactly what happened. If you continue reading the story, she mourns her virginity, she goes off for number of days, and then, they even sat up a calendar event where they

would remember her throughout history. He may have taken her life, I don't know, it was strange time back in the days of judges. Or knowing, that she is the only child, he may forbid her to marry, and she was a virgin all her life, and in essence, that sacrifice is cutting off his name. That's what some scholars believe. One thing is true, one thing is sure, he made a vow, and he kept it.

Now before we get crazy about that, it may truly have been in the eyes of God a fanatical expression, an off the wall, out of line, out of filter, a rash vow. I've met people who prior to becoming a Christian, they made a vow. And when they became a Christian, they felt like they should keep that vow because, you know, they made that vow, even though that vow would incorporate bad behavior. Get rid of that vow, don't be foolish! Don't be ridicules, talk to God about it, look at it in the light of holiness and walking with God.

This story is here, and I wish I could explain it in such a way where we all would be satisfied. But I don't know! It reminds us of another vow that is taken in Psalm 22. Can you turn there please, Psalm 22. As many of you are aware, much of the Psalm 22 is quoted by Jesus, or quoted about Jesus in his experience of dying on the cross. Psalm 22 verse 1, Jesus said when He was on the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" There are expressions here that describe how he felt. In verse 7 they laugh Him to scorn, they say in verse 8, "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him;" they actually said that at the cross. Verse 13, is how Jesus felt, "They gape at Me with their mouths," verse 14, "I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax;" "My strength..." in verse 15 "is dried up like a potsherd," verse 16, "For dogs have surrounded Me; They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones, they look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, for My clothing they are casting lots." Do you get the picture? Look at verse 25: "My praise shall be of You in the great congregation, I will pay..." and notice the end here is capitalized, these are the words of Jesus, "I will pay My vows before those who fear Him."

Here you have a picture of Jesus Christ. He took a vow. He took a vow that He would come to earth, He would become a human being, and no matter what the pain, no matter what the cost, He would go to Calvary, for you and me, He kept His vow. That's a powerful picture. Jesus talked about vows, in Matthew 5, let's look at it. Mathew chapter 5 verse 33, the great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says: "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'" The New American Standard Bible says, "You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord." An oath, a vow, a promise, same, same family! Jesus says, "Don't swear, don't make these false oaths, these false vows."

He says in verse 34, "I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;" you see, human mind is very creative when it comes to religion. And the people that Jesus is working with were the most creative people when it came to religion. And they would come up with all kinds of methodologies, and practices regarding vows, if you vowed by the temple, that is one level. If you, and they swore by it, "My vow, I swear in the name of temple," another one, "I swear by the gold in the temple," that was the higher one. "I swear by the earth," that was a high one, "I swear by the heavens

above,” that’s a higher one, “I swear by a name of God” that’s the highest one, and they had figured out loop holes. How to get out of vows, how to make some more important than others and you don’t actually have to keep this one when you do that, and Jesus would take them on, head on, in Matthew 23. Keep your hand here because we are coming back to it.

Jesus would talk to the religious leaders in Matthew 23 and He is pointing out the ridiculousness of how they do vows. He says in Matthew 23 verse 16: “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’” In another words, if somebody says, “I swear by the temple,” “no, that’s nothing, don’t worry about that one, no” oh, but if you swear by the gold that’s in the temple, now, now we got you! You got to follow through on that one.

“Fools and blind...” Jesus says, “... For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, here is another thing He says: “‘whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?” And another one, “Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he, who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.” Jesus is saying, “Look, you got all these levels, and it’s all ridicules, it all comes back to God. When you make a vow, keep it!” That’s what He is saying.

Now come back to Matthew chapter 5. He says in verse 34, “But I say to you, do not swear at all.” Now that’s not talking about standing in the court of law and saying, you know, with the hand on the Bible, saying, “I promise to tell the truth.” That’s not what that’s about. It is this thing that they were playing with about, whether you are keeping your vows you know. And Jesus says, “Look, don’t say I swear by the name of God, or I swear by the temple,” that’s just something like somebody beating their chest up sounding like a very important person. “Why I swear by the heavens I’ll do that!” And Jesus says, “Don’t do that! Let your “yes” be “yes,” verse 37, “and your “no” be “no,” and follow through with it. You either are going to do it, say “yes,” if you are not going to do it, say “no” and stick with it.

Why is it so hard for us to keep our vows? One thing I learned as a child, and I discovered it is true spiritually as well. It’s a lot easier to keep your promises when your mom and dad heard you make those promises and when they are there. As soon as my dad left, it was fairly easy to break that promise. Brothers and sisters, in this battle that we are embroiled in, every purpose of Satan is simply to separate us from the presence of God. To separate us from the realization that He is there. Because if we realized He was there all the time, it becomes very difficult, very difficult to break our promises. There are very few people, who cheat on their spouse in the name of the Lord, very few people who cheat in business in the name of the Lord. Hard, to keep a promise, but it is imperative that we do. That’s what the Scripture say. I don’t have to ask you to raise your hand, I am going to make a statement, and is going to be true. Every one of us in

this building has broken a vow to God. Let me ask you a question, and you can raise your hand if you want, how many of you remember your New Year's resolution? You know, I don't even do those any more. I've got enough failure in my life. You know what I am talking about? Have you ever been, you've heard a song, a message, a prayer, something stirs up within in you, and you say, "You know, I am going to stop doing, XYZ", or "I am going to start doing, ABC." And we make these vows, and you get away from that sacred goal, you get away from that feeling, and that sense of the presence of God, and before long, you know, we forgot about it, or we consciously decide "You know, God, you know I got little excited there, you know how it is," and we just fall right back into it.

Brothers and sisters, there is good news today for you and me. We have a Savior who keeps His vows. He keeps His vows. He said He would die for us, He did. He said He would rise from the dead for us, He did. He said He will come back for us, He will. He keeps His vows. And when it comes to Jesus, it is "Yes" or "No," there is nothing in between. His either our Savior or He is not. We either say "Yes" or we say "No." That's why He says, "Let your answer be "Yes," or let it be "No." What is your response to Him today? Do you need a Savior today? Do you want a Savior today? If you do and you want to say "Yes" to Him, I am going to ask you to stand right where you are at.

"Loving Father in Heaven, here we are. I do not want to harshly say we are liars, but Lord we have the hardest time keeping our vows to You. Thank you for Jesus forgiving us. And we are asking now for Him to come into our lives anew, and in a powerful way. And by Your grace Lord, we are asking that we would be faithful to our promises. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen."