

Genesis 37:17-33

Honesty and Integrity

#1 Sermon in a Series on Wholeness

Sunday November 4, 2012

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Our theme for this program year is “Who is Jesus and How Does His Life touch Mine?”

Last month we examined Jesus from four different perspectives: Rabbi, Healer, Revolutionary and Savior. Those sermons are online. This month we will look at the meaning of his life in terms of how it affects us. Jesus was a marvel in many ways. He never had power in the ways the world assesses power, but yet he influenced multitudes of people to follow him. He never was trained as a physician or psychiatrist, but yet he healed physical and mental illness so consistently that he is arguably one of the greatest healers of all time. He never left the little patch of land called Israel, but yet he had the greatest influence of any man in human history. How did he accomplish so much with so little?

Jesus was wise. He had wisdom. Though he had no wealth, he knew life’s greatest riches, the kind that no money can buy. Though he fathered no children, he created a community among his disciples where everyone felt like family. Though he lived in an occupied land, Jesus was a free man, and his freedom had nothing to do with politics. He lived among the poor and belonged to a servant people but He had mastered life.

He did what we are all trying to do. Though we rarely think about it, we are all trying to master the game of life. Whatever our profession or education, our politics or religion, in the

end we are all trying to figure out life. What can Jesus show us? He embodied wholeness, each day, he showed his followers how to run this race as well. That is the goal of life ... isn't it? To figure out how to run this race as well as you can.

This month our sermon topic is Wholeness. The dictionary says to be whole is to be complete, integrated, balanced. To be whole is to find and hold everything you need. Jesus had figured out how to be the best **Jesus** he could be. Wholeness involves being at home in the world. The Bible contains lots of wisdom about wholeness and what makes life good. This month we will look at 4 qualities of wholeness: integrity, balance, gratitude and spirituality. Today we will address honesty and integrity. The Bible contains many stories about honesty. So it has a lot to tell us on this topic. What can we learn from the Bible about integrity for our lives today?

In the first place, honesty begins at home. There is a story about a boy who stole a pencil from school. Actually, he stole it from the boy who had a desk next to him. The teacher discovered that the boy had stolen it and she sent a note home to his parents. The boy's father was angry. He said, "How could you do this? You have brought shame on our whole family. What were you thinking taking someone else's pencil? Don't you know that if you need a pencil all you have to do is tell me? I can get a whole package of pencil for you from my office."

Today's story was about Joseph and his brothers. Now, Joseph came from a large family of 12 boys, and he was number 11. But not too worry, Joseph did not get lost in the shuffle because his father doted on Joseph, and liked him better than the others. When Joseph was a child, his father showed his favor by giving him an extravagant gift, an ostentatious coat of

many colors. Joseph wore it proudly, but every day he had it on his older brothers were enraged at the coat and all it symbolized of Joseph's favored status. So they took the expensive coat and ripped it, and put their brother away in a deep pit. Their rage was murderous and they fully intended to kill Joseph, but cooler minds prevailed so they sold him into slavery when a caravan passed by on the way to Egypt. They then went to their father and took the coat, spilled goat's blood on it and told the old man that Joseph had been slaughtered by a wild beast.

How could they do such a thing? They rationalized their behavior.

1. Joseph was insufferable in that coat.
2. He did not know his place and had this coming.
3. He deserved to die but they were sparing him by selling him into slavery.
4. Then they said – We can't break father's heart so we have to lie to him.
5. This is kinder than the truth.

Dan Ariely is the James B. Duke Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics at Duke University and the author of a book about how people make decisions, called Predictably Irrational: The hidden Forces that Shape our Decisions. Ariely studies decision-making. He has discovered that cheating has nothing to do with morality, or getting caught or how much money is to be gained. It has to do with rationalization. Most people, he found, think of themselves as good people who deserve to have something that they have not earned, so they

cheat a little. Many people cheat a little, more creative people cheat more, because they make more creative rationalizations.¹

One of the reasons that Jesus had so much integrity was because he was honest with himself. Honesty begins at home. It starts with our ability to be honest with ourselves.

We see that in the very first story in the Bible – the story of Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they realized they were naked and so they hid. God called out to Adam and asked him why he was hiding, and then God said, What have you done? Adam replied – The woman that you gave to me gave me fruit from the tree and I ate it. Adam tells God that he is not responsible for his dishonesty but this woman who led him down this path. Furthermore God gave him this woman so God bears responsibility too.

Integrity is simple and it is also really hard. It is the ability to look at ourselves in the mirror and to like what we see. Jesus says –Strive to be whole as your Heavenly Father is whole. Notice how he never tells them to be perfect. He does not judge us; he challenges us to evaluate ourselves as honestly as we can, and then strive to be better tomorrow than you were today. Integrity starts at home.

Finally, **we need the church.** Dishonesty is actually really costly. Let's look at some statistics. In 2004 armed robberies in this country resulted in a loss of \$525 million annually. Most robberies average about \$1500. Then consider this - employee theft, fraud and larceny

¹ Dan Areily delivered a lecture at Chautauqua on Monday August 6,2012. The theme for Week #7 was "Cheating" The podcast of this lecture, from which I took these notes, is at The Chautauqua Institution website.

amounts to \$600 billion annually. The number is so huge that it well exceeds what all the career criminals might do in a lifetime. Then add to that the fact that insurance industry estimates that there are \$24 billion in bogus claims. The IRS estimates that we lose \$350 billion in lost taxes or underpaid taxes. Add it all up that is a lot of waste because of dishonesty.²

Let us look at one more bit of interesting evidence from the studies of Dan Areily. He does a lot of studies with college students, and when he gives them a simple math test, people cheat about 33% of the time. But if he asks them to write the 10 commandments down before they take the test, then the cheating evaporates. Even if they don't know the 10 commandments but strive to remember them, no one cheats. It seems the mere mention of the commandments has an edifying effect on people's honesty.

Given this information, you should get a tax break for belonging to a faith community where people study rules like the 10 commandments. It might help our fraud and larceny problem. You should get a reward for belonging to a church or synagogue or mosque.

One day Jesus saw a man in a tree- Zacchaeus, a tax collector, who had defrauded lots of people. Jesus invited him to eat with him. The man was so transformed by that invitation that he gave back all the money he had taken and turned his life around. No one expects us to be perfect. But Jesus invites us to come break bread with him. Break bread with him and see our lives more clearly in the light of Christ's own integrity. He invites us to a new life- where we can get up each morning and know that whatever happens that day, we can look ourselves in the mirror and not look away.

² Ibid p. 271