Briefing Document: Sermon on the Mount – "Liars" Lesson 90

Sunday AM-November 22, 2026

Executive Summary

This briefing document examines the lesson on Matthew 5:33–37 titled "Liars." In this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus confronts the scribes and Pharisees regarding the deceptive nature of their hearts, which they attempt to mask with external self-righteousness.

Key Takeaways:

- **The Human Condition:** Human society is built on a framework of lies originated by Satan (John 8:44). People are born with a inclination to lie, requiring truthfulness to be taught.
- **The Role of Oaths:** Oaths were instituted because human sinfulness creates distrust. An oath is an invocation of God to witness the truth of a statement and to bring judgment if the speaker lies.
- **Divine Teaching vs. Human Tradition:** Jesus dismantles self-righteous confidence to instill a "Beatitude mentality"—driving individuals to realize their spiritual poverty, mourn their sin, and seek the imputed righteousness of God.
- **The Lesson Framework:** The study analyzes three central themes:
    1. The principles of Mosaic law
    2. The perversion of Jewish tradition
    3. The perspective of divine teaching

Jesus' Purpose and the Human Condition

Breaking Self-Righteousness

Jesus exposes the religious leaders of Judaism to strip away their self-righteous confidence. His goal is to produce a "Beatitude mentality," in which individuals recognize themselves as:

- **Desperate Beggars:** Crying out to God for mercy.
- **Mourners:** Grieving deeply over their own personal sin.
- **Meek Servants:** Standing humble before a holy God.
- **Hungry and Thirsty:** Seeking a true righteousness that they need but cannot achieve on their own.

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A World Built on Lies

The lesson emphasizes that daily society operates within a network of fabrication:

- **Origin of Falsehood:** Satan is identified as the father of lies (John 8:44). Humans do not need instruction on how to lie; truth-telling must be actively taught.
- **Manifestations of Lying:** Society routinely shades the truth, cheats, exaggerates, breaks promises, flatters for personal gain, betrays confidences, makes excuses, tells half-truths, and relies on white lies.
- **Systemic Collapse:** If every person told the complete truth for just one single day, human social and economic systems would collapse into chaos because they are built on dishonest foundations.
- **Rarity of Truth:** Quoting Daniel Webster: "There is nothing as powerful as truth and often nothing as strange, unusual, or rare."

Detailed Examination of Main Themes

1. The Principles of Mosaic Law

In Matthew 5:33, Jesus references traditional teaching:

“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.’”

- **Origin of the Statement:** This specific sentence is not a direct word-for-word verse from the Old Testament. Instead, it is a composite summary of Jewish tradition built upon Old Testament concepts.
- **Linguistic Connections:** In the original language, the terms "oath," "swear falsely," "perjure," and "swear" all share a common root.

2. The Definition and Function of Oaths

- **Core Definition:** An oath (horkos) is a formal statement in which a person calls God as a witness to confirm that what they are saying is true, while simultaneously invoking a curse from God upon themselves if they are lying.
- **Modern Parallels:**
    - Courtroom proceedings where a witness places a hand on the Bible and swears to tell the truth under penalty of perjury.
    - Marriage ceremonies where individuals make lifelong vows "before God and these witnesses."

3. Biblical Foundation and Divine Accommodation

Scripture demonstrates that God permits and utilizes oaths to accommodate human weakness:

- **Hebrews 6:16–17:**

“For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath.”

- **God's Oaths:** Because no one is greater than God, He swears by Himself (e.g., “‘As I live,’ saith the Lord, ‘I will…’”). God does not lie, but He uses oaths to emphasize the absolute certainty and urgency of His promises.
- **Divine Emphasis ("Verily"):** When God uses statements like "Verily I say to you" or "Verily, verily I say to you," it serves to highlight the supreme importance of the message. His words are equally true whether or not these emphatic terms are used.

4. Old Testament Mandates and Historical Examples

God explicitly permitted oaths in the Old Testament to bind people to the truth under a God-fearing system:

- **Direct Command:** Numbers 30:2 states:

“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.”

- **Patriarchal Examples:** Key Old Testament figures who made binding oaths include:
    - **Abraham:** Genesis 24:2–3
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5. Negative Case Study: Peter's Denial

A prominent example of the misuse of oaths occurs during Peter's denial of Jesus in Matthew 26:69–75:

1. **First Denial (Matthew 26:69–70):**

Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, “You also were with Jesus of Galilee.” But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you are saying.”

2. **Second Denial with an Oath (Matthew 26:71–72):**

And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, “This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.” But again he denied with an oath, “I do not know the Man!”

3. **Third Denial with Cursing (Matthew 26:73–74):**

And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, “Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you.” Then he began to curse and swear, saying, “I do not know the Man!”

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Analysis of Peter's Action:

Peter's progression demonstrates a worsening spiral of dishonesty:

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- **Fear of Hell:** Understanding the severity of divine judgment for sin.
- **Humility:** Recognizing that human effort alone cannot achieve righteousness.
- **Repentance:** Turning away from sin to be rescued and forgiven.
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Greek Terms Glossary

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