

Part 14 of The King & His Kingdom – Lust

Matthew 5:27-30

Introduction

- How many of you have ever hit a deer while you were driving? PP How many of you have ever seen a deer carcass lying on the side of the road...perhaps bloated, festering, and stinking?
- Most of us live in Pennsylvania and New Jersey so we've seen plenty of roadkill. In fact, the reports from the Pennsylvania Game Commission show that thousands of deer end up as roadkill each year in PA, far and away more than any other state.
- And do you know the time of year there are more deer killed on the roads than any other? October, November, and December. I know we have plenty of hunters here in the congregation and any of them will tell you that those months are the rutting season for deer...the time when the bucks are so enflamed with passions and are chasing after the doe, overcome with the desire to mate, that they throw caution to the wind and end up in a ditch on the side of the road.
- Today, we're going to continue to learn from Jesus what it means to be his disciple as we study His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and we're going to be studying Christ's warning against lust.
- I know that topics dealing with sexuality tend to make people uncomfortable; but Jesus talked about proper sexual relations throughout His ministry, so it's something that we can't ignore and must engage with if we're going to be wholehearted followers of Jesus.
- On top of that, everyone here knows that we live in a highly sexualized culture: PP
 - TV and movies treat adultery and fornication as no big deal – even glorifying it – as sex has become a constant presence in just about every form of entertainment
 - Clothing – especially women's attire – is often designed to be suggestive and evocative
 - Marketing and advertising is saturated with sex appeal
 - Pornography runs rampant for both men and women, and is a socially accepted norm for many people
 - The traditional family system is mocked and laughed at as antiquated
 - And public policy assumes everyone from 13 on up is sexually active and, in fact, promotes such "experimentation"
 - In short, our culture encourages us to run around with enflamed passions throwing caution to the wind...just like the deer in their mating season.
 - Of course, this degree of sexual hedonism isn't new to our culture, it's always been around...it's simply more accessible and encouraged in our culture than ever before
- So today, we're going to be listening to a completely counter-cultural message from Jesus as He helps us to understand what it means to be His disciple apart from the deceptions and enticements of the world system. Please open your bibles to **Matthew 5:27-30** and as you turn there, I'm going to pray.

- We're going to be looking at this passage in 3 parts today, the Rule, the Reality, and the Remedy. And so we begin in **verse 27** with the Rule **PP**

The Rule

- **Matthew 5:27** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'"
- Now it's critical that we're reminded that Jesus is in the middle of teaching His disciples practical ways in which their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. Remember, the Pharisees were the uber-religious guys of Jesus' day who sought to uphold all the rules of the OT.
- Jesus begins addressing the "righteousness" of the Pharisees by picking out several areas where the Pharisees were practicing adherence to the letter of the law, but flagrantly ignoring the spirit of the law.
 - As we saw last week, the first thing He addressed was the rampant, bitter, slanderous anger that was present among them, and how this type of anger was no different than murdering someone.
- After addressing their anger, the second topic Christ addresses is adultery and He begins by restating the 7th commandment, **PP** you shall not commit adultery.
 - Now we need to know some of the historical context to see what Jesus is driving at here. You see, sexual promiscuity was rampant among the Jews for two reasons: 1) because of **Deut. 24:1-4**, divorce was a regular occurrence among the Jews, which Christ addressed here in **v31-32** and in **Matt. 19:1-12**, which we'll dive into next week, and 2) a common teaching of the rabbis was that sleeping with prostitutes was acceptable so long as they were not virgins.
 - The thinking was that this was merely a bodily function that was being met by someone paid to provide a service. Therefore, it did not violate the marriage covenant. And if one did want to violate the marriage covenant, then they should simply divorce their wife first and then they'd be fine. They were free to indulge their sexual desires so long as they followed the rules on how to do so "righteously"
 - It was exceedingly common for a Jewish man to either find a prostitute – whether he was married or unmarried – or to simply divorce his wife because he wanted to indulge his passions.
 - In fact, today, if you go over to Israel, you will find that prostitution is still legal in the country – a fact I was surprised by when I was over there recently. Most of the women are dressed very modestly and then you'll see these bars or nightclubs with red lights and these signs advertising prostitution that are all over the place.
 - So sexual promiscuity was and is an accepted practice among the Jews, including the law-keeping Pharisees.
 - They had taken the 7th commandment forbidding adultery and justified their sexual sin by defining the letter of the law very narrowly and making it a

simple rule that they could follow to continue to consider themselves righteous.

- But Jesus wasn't interested in their religious rules and the dead religion that they produced. Jesus was interested in His disciples being transformed by the power of the Spirit helping them to live pure lives obedient to the reality of God's expectations for His people.
 - Remember, Jesus had just taught in the beatitudes that the pure in heart would be blessed as they would see God.
- The Pharisees had created a bunch of rules they could follow, indulge themselves, and still feel fine about it, and now we turn to the reality **PP** of truth that Jesus exposes for His listeners.

The Reality

- Jesus continued in **Matthew 5:28** "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."
- Remember that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is giving his "yoke", his interpretation of scripture. The Greek for "I" here (I say to you) is emphatic, which means that it's emphasizing Christ as the center of the teaching as opposed to the rabbinic tradition He is speaking against.
 - As disciples of Jesus, we are to follow and adopt His understanding and teaching of scripture. No other presentation of truth matters...not what the world says is true nor what other faith systems say is true. Only Jesus Christ leads us to the truth. And Jesus immediately dispels with the narrowness of the rules concerning adultery and broadens the conversation to lust.
 - Lust **PP** (Gk. *epithymeō*) means a strong, longing or desire to possess and control. It's an inner compulsion that consumes you even as you seek to consume whatever you have set your heart upon.
 - Jesus says true faith isn't about a system of rules that you can manipulate so that you can gratify your fleshly desires and still feel good about yourselves. No, true faith means understanding the lust that's in your heart so that by the power of God, you can overcome it and submit more fully to God.
- This isn't about the mere act of adultery, it's about the far more universal problem of the rampant lusts of our heart. Just as Christ addresses the heart of anger that produces murder so he addresses the lust that leads to all kinds of sexual immorality.
 - Last week Pastor Tim told the story of the bike ride that he was on where the riders noticed an attractive woman and started making lewd comments about her.
 - After recognizing that PT didn't respond, they asked him what was wrong with noticing the beauty of a woman.
 - Well, the direct answer to that question is that recognizing someone's beauty isn't sinful. I can look and see someone and think they're

attractive and if it ends there, there's no issue. God made them beautiful, praise God!

- But the problem is our sinful desires don't want it to end there; our sinful desires want us to dwell on whatever we find attractive about that person and begin to desire to possess and control them for our own pleasure. That's lust.
- Now, the word "Look" **PP** here (Gk *blepō*) is written in a form (present participle) which means an intentional and repeated gazing. It's not a quick glance, but an ongoing and mindful stare. This type of looking coupled with lustful intent is a recipe for disaster, and, Jesus says, is no different than actually going and sleeping with the person.
- Interestingly, in the Greek the phrase "looks at woman with lustful intent" can also be translated as "looking at a woman so as to cause her to lust"
 - So it's possible that Jesus was not only addressing those who went around lusting after others, but also those who were going around and trying to seduce others to lust after them.
 - Either way, a desire to possess and control the object of our attention is taking place as we're sinfully desiring something that isn't ours to possess.
- Now I want us to notice that the lustful looking does *not* itself cause the sin in the heart; the lust proceeds from the sin that has *already* been committed in the heart
- Read **verse 28** again, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has *already* committed adultery with her in his heart."
 - The adulterous desires were already present in the person's heart and resulted in the longing gaze which only enflamed the lustful desires even more.
- Sin is always rooted in the heart – scripture makes clear that what's in the heart will come out through our speech, conduct, thoughts, desires, spending habits, time management, etc. These things will give us evidence of the lusts resident in our hearts. **PP**
 - The heart moves the eye, the eye enflames the heart, and soon looking and thinking is not enough and the hands get involved too.
 - Well, Matthew, you might be asking, what happens when these thoughts pop into my mind, have I fallen into lustful sin?
 - The answer there is another question: what have you done with those thoughts when they popped into your head? If a thought comes, which again is originating from the sinful desires of our hearts, do we dwell on it, indulge it, and fantasize over it? Or do we recognize the temptation and put it away?

- It's not sin to be tempted, we'll all face temptation. Jesus was tempted and overcame sin (**Heb. 4:15**). But temptation will draw out sin that is resident in our heart if we're not walking by the Spirit of God (**Gal. 5:16**) and taking those temptations captive and obediently following our Lord (**2 Cor. 10:5-6**)
- Do we see the distinction there? If someone puts a billboard of some scantily clad woman on the road while I drive, or some obnoxious guy thrusts a phone in my face with an image of a naked woman on it, is it sinful for me to see that? The answer is no.
 - But if I start fantasizing about the woman on that billboard or if I stare at that phone and indulge my fantasies, I've committed sin. This is how temptation works, it draws out the evil desires in our hearts and entices us to let them take control of us, rather than the Spirit of God having control of us.
- **James 1:14-15 PP** "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." (see also **Job 31:1, 7, 9**)
- You see how this works? The evil fleshly desires are in our hearts due to our sin nature, and those desires then lead to our falling into lustful adultery.
- Now here's the thing, you may be listening to this today and thinking to yourself, "Well, I've certainly never cheated on my spouse, and sexual sin isn't my struggle. So this doesn't really apply to me."
 - Well, my first response would be to praise God that He has preserved you from sexual sin.
 - But my second response would be to ask if you're certain you've never committed adultery even though you may not struggle with sexual sin? Now, you might be thinking, "adultery is an inherently sexual act, even if it's not physical and takes place in the lustful heart, it's still sexual, right?"
- Well, let's peel one more layer off here of what Jesus is driving at when He's addressing adultery and lust. The reality is that while adultery, in the strictest sense, is sexual in nature, the bible gives us a deeper insight. You see, **PP** in scripture adultery isn't just sexual, it's also spiritual. And for those who say they are following after God but instead lust after the things of the world adultery is spelled I D O L A T R Y.
 - **James 4:4 PP** "You adulterous people Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (see also **1 John 2:15-17**)
- If we say we've submitted to God through faith in Jesus Christ and yet we continue to lust after the things of this world - we're adulterers. And we can lust after far more than just sexual things. We can just as easily lust after material things, power, approval, security, relationships, and many more...things that aren't sexual but that make us adulterers nonetheless.

- All of these desires reside in our heart, and while Jesus is making a point about sexual lusts specifically in the Sermon on the Mount, His broader message is that if we're lusting after anything other than submission to our God, then we're idolaters who have committed adultery against our God and that deeply grieves Him.
- **Ezekiel 6:9 PP** "...how I [the LORD] have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols...."
- So even if we don't struggle with sexual sin, the reality is that the capacity to be an adulterer is resident in every single one of our hearts, and any time we lust after anything in this world to the exclusion of God we have committed adultery.
- So what do we do about this? We've seen the rule the Pharisees made as they twisted scripture, then Jesus exposed the reality of lust and adultery in all our hearts. **PP** Now, Jesus is going to give to us the remedy of how to deal with this.

The Remedy

- **Matthew 5:29-30** "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."
- Well hold on a minute, if the sin issue is in our hearts, why does Jesus say the remedy is to tear out our right eye and cut off our right hand? Aren't those just the outward means through which our lust is realized?
- Well, yes they are...the issue is still what's in our hearts. In fact, we know Jesus isn't simply advocating addressing the physical because even if you pluck out your right eye and cut off your right hand you'd still have the left side of each and you'd still be able to lust through each of them. In fact, by Jesus's definition of adultery, even if you had no eyes and no hands you'd still be able to commit adultery while lusting after anything apart from God in your mind.
- So what is Jesus saying here? Well, the key is recognizing that Jesus specifies your *right* eye and *right* hand. **PP** In Jesus day, the right side was the dominant side and represented anything that was favored, anything that gave someone power, anything that was precious and valuable to someone.
 - Now, it's a very wise thing to remove those outward things that tempt us to sin. Put software on your computer or phone if you struggle with porn, don't go to a bar if you're an alcoholic, etc. And a willingness to do those things could be evidence of a heart that is turning toward God.
 - But, Jesus isn't merely suggesting that we remove the outward implements of our sin and stop there. He's stating that we've to get down into our hearts and recognize anything that's competing for our affections for God and do whatever is necessary to get rid of those idols in our lives.

- Now, scripture like **Jeremiah 17:9-10** tells us that our hearts are deceitful and that we can't see our own hearts clearly. Therefore, it's not a simple matter of peering into your heart, seeing the adulterous lusts resident there and removing them.
 - Our passions are too crafty for that, our power to rationalize and justify is too strong for us to do that on our own. The reality is that we need the Lord to do this for us.
- And this is the real remedy that Jesus is driving at. **PP** With all these examples of the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, Jesus is showing us that we need Him and we need the Holy Spirit convicting us, empowering us, and leading us into deeper and deeper submission to our God as He transforms our hearts.
- It's only when we turn to the grace and mercy of our God that we'll receive the power through the Holy Spirit to overcome the lustful desires of our hearts.
 - It's at that point that He'll begin to show us what's coming out of our hearts in our speech, in our conduct, in our thoughts, etc. and then give us the power to confess and repent and remove those things so that we can walk by the power of the Spirit and not by the power of the flesh and remain faithful and true to our God.
- Remember, Jesus called us to hunger and thirst after righteousness – to hunger and thirst after Him, promising that when we do so we'll be satisfied. And Jesus is the only thing that will ever truly and completely satisfy us. All the other things in this world that we lust after will ultimately leave us empty and broken.
- And make no mistake, this is a matter of life and death. This isn't something that we probably should consider doing, this is the difference between being a saved child of God who is following Jesus as His disciple and someone who is a deceived, whoring idolater who indulges themselves in the next fleeting pleasure the world entices them with.
- I'm sure you've all heard the stories of the hikers like Aron Ralston **PP** who either got their arms or legs trapped while they were out alone on a hike. Some of them simply waited around to die not able to separate themselves from the trap they were in. However, some of them took the drastic and gruesome step of cutting off their arm or their leg...but you know what? That saved their lives.
- Are you aware of the things that you lust after, sexual or otherwise? Are you rationalizing and justifying your sin? Have you narrowed God's expectations for His disciples to a couple rules that you can follow so that you can feel good about yourself while chasing after the pleasures of this world? Have you accepted the lies of this world to indulge yourself and do what pleases you and disregarded Christ's call to submitting to Him?
 - If you've done those things you're as trapped as a hiker by a boulder and you're as filled with your desires as a buck in the middle of mating season chasing after a doe on the other side of the highway.
 - And no matter how pleasurable something may be, how precious and valuable it is to us, it's not worth going to hell over.

- The remedy is turning to Jesus. **PP** Repenting of those lustful pursuits and asking the Holy Spirit to help you to both outwardly and inwardly cut off the things that have become more precious to you than the Lord. It will be painful, but it will save your soul.
- Discipleship under Jesus not only means being saved by Him, it also means being transformed by Him as He remakes the desires of your heart, and it means being invited into the work of His ministry of redemption and restoration in this world as we're given a purpose and pursuit in this broken world, and it means looking forward to Jesus' return when He'll fully and completely restore all things.
- This is discipleship and this is the message of the gospel. Friends, we can't remain trapped hikers and passion driven animals. We can't love the world and God at the same time...we can't remain adulterers any longer. By the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, ask the Lord to show you the lusts of your heart that by His grace you may repent of them, remove them, and replace them with a deep hunger and thirst for Jesus Christ alone.
- Instead of being like deer in the heat of mating season, let's be like deer in the parched and dry desert of this world longing after the life-giving waters of our God.
- **Psalm 42:1-2** "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."
- Amen. Amen.