

Jesus: Let me clarify this 'adultery' thing ...

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[0:00] Well, we have an epidemic plaguing the American evangelical church. I'm not sure if you're too familiar with the statistics regarding pornography among brothers and sisters in the evangelical church, but it is wreaking havoc.

Some statistics say that 80% of Christian men regularly dabble in pornography. That 50% of Christian men are actually addicted to sexual sin.

20% of Christian women are struggling with pornography. 64% of Christian families have an acute porn problem in their home.

And 40% of Christian pastors regularly consume pornography. If these are true, we've got a problem. I was recently at a pastor's conference, and we get this alarming statistic that of those pastors staying in hotels, there was this amazing renting of explicit sexual videos among these men.

Do you know why pornography is such a problem? It's true, pornography is widespread.

[1:27] It is easily available. You just have to click, and it's there. The real reason why pornography is causing such a problem within the church is this.

We have an appetite for it. There's something within us that craves pornography.

That craves what God forbids sexually. There's a reason why pornography is so prolific.

It's because within the human heart, there is a radical problem. Sexual lust is deeply entrenched in the human heart.

And what Jesus will tell us this morning is, a radical problem requires radical action. Brothers and sisters, if it's not pornography, it's something else sexually that you may be experiencing the devastating effects of.

[2:39] But praise be to God, He addresses this. He has grace for you. He's not intimidated by this.

In fact, He wants to deliver. He wants to transform. And so let's turn back to Matthew 5, verses 27-30.

And I'd just like to read through this passage one more time. You've heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. Remember, this is Jesus at His inaugural address.

You've heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say, I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

But 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 your whole body be thrown into hell.

[3:41] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it's better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

This morning, what Jesus is telling us, if I just sum it up in one sentence, it would be this. Our sexual lust, your sexual lust, my sexual lust is a radical problem requiring radical action.

And if what Jesus is saying is true, then the majority of us in this room are adulterers at heart. He gets right at it.

This morning, I want to make four points. The first point and the fourth point are pastoral. It's my love for you. And then the second point and the third point are right from the text.

So the first point is this. I want to give you kind of a big sweep of your Bible to kind of frame our sexual desires. And then we'll go right to the text and see what Jesus has to say.

[4:49] And he says, sexual lust is a radical problem. That's the second point. The third point is sexual lust requires radical action. And then the fourth point is, I'm going to make a plea this morning.

A pastoral plea to you. So let's dig into this first point. It's pastoral in nature.

It's the big sweep of Scripture. I want you to know that your sexuality is good. God created sexuality as a good gift.

And for us to see that, you've got to go way back to Genesis 1. If you turn back on your Bibles, Genesis 1, we read this in verse 26 and 27.

Then God said, let us make man in our own image. And then down to 27. So God created man in his own image.

[5:52] In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply.

Fill the earth and subdue it. And so, when we do this sweep of the Bible, I want to show you three things. God created your sexuality. Sin distorts your sexuality.

But Christ came to redeem your sexuality. So God created it. In Genesis 1.27, we read that God made male and female in his own image.

And then he tells Adam and Eve to go, be fruitful and multiply. You've got to realize, God didn't make a mistake in the formation of the male body in the female body. God designed our bodies the way they are, both male and female.

And what I just want to make explicit is, God formed us male and female. And he doesn't value one over the other. He doesn't think that the male body is better than the female body.

[6:58] The female body is better than the male body. Both male and female were created in the image of God. Therefore, we have equal value in God's eyes. But as we all know, there are some major differences between men and women.

And in this point, I just want to show you that our bodies, the male body and the female body, are intentionally designed, and God created us as sexual beings.

It's not a mistake. He designed us this way. And that we're both image bearers of God. And so by the end of the sixth day, God looks at Adam and Eve, what He's created.

Do you remember what He says? That's good! He's not embarrassed by our sexuality. He designed our sexuality. It's a gift to us all.

And later in Genesis 2, God provides the only context for human beings to enjoy sexual fulfillment, and it is called marriage.

[8:08] Remember Genesis 2? God says to Adam, it's not good to be alone. He puts him in a deep sea, pulls out a rib, forms Eve, and then in the first wedding ceremony, God brings Eve to Adam, and He hands her over to him.

It's like a dad walking a bride down this aisle to the groom, and God hands this bride over to Adam, the first groom, and He says, she's yours.

You enjoy. And it's in Genesis 1, verses 24, that we read the institution of marriage. Chapter 2, verse 24.

Adam receives the woman from God, and God flips around, and He's the first pastor, marrying the first couple. And He's saying, what I have joined together, let not man separate.

This is good. And so we read in 2.24, therefore man shall leave his father and his mother, and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

[9:18] God has given humankind the institution of marriage as the exclusive place to enjoy sexual fulfillment.

And just to clarify what marriage is, we need to be circling back to this regularly in our culture.

Biblically speaking, marriage is an exclusive, lifelong union between one man and one woman for life.

And it's all before God. An exclusive union between one man and one woman for life before God. And it's in that context of marriage, in that relationship alone, God says, enjoy this good gift I've given you called sexuality.

What I want you to see from Genesis 1 and 2 is that from the beginning, God designed sexuality to be something to enjoy and something that served a wonderful purpose, and God said it was good. And He provided marriage to enjoy it. But we're all wondering what went wrong. What happened? [10:45] Why is there pornography? Why is there sexual exploitation of various kinds? Why is there rape? What went wrong?

Well, God created sexuality, but sin distorted our sexuality. When Adam and Eve sinned, Genesis chapter 3, they ushered into the human experience sin.

And it infiltrated every aspect of the human experience. It didn't make us as bad as we possibly can be, but it affected everything that we do and everything that we think, including our sexuality.

So here's what happens. When someone, a sinner, rejects God, they're going to want to live for something. And oftentimes what happens is this good thing called sex takes the place of God in somebody's life.

And so in Romans 1, verse 24, when God hands people over to the desires of their flesh, that's what happens. God is rejected. Something else will be worshipped.

[11:57] And something that is enjoyable is often worshipped. And so you see this distortion of God's good gift that sin brings about on our sexuality.

This is why there are things like pornography. This is why there are this deep lust in our hearts to want things that are forbidden by us, by God for us.

Sin is in our experience. It's ushered in. This is why we have to fight. That's not the end of the story, biblically speaking.

God created our sexuality. Sin distorts our sexuality with devastating effects. But Christ came to redeem it. Jesus came not only to forgive the penalty of our sin, but to rescue sinners from the power of sin.

To transform them. To transform a sexuality that was lived for sin and now to exercise a sexuality lived for the glory of God.

[13:16] If you want a really good place in your Bible to go, Romans chapter 6 is a wonderful treatment of how we are to fight sin now as believers.

But what I want to do just with this little step is to help you to think about your sexuality. As a Christian, your sexuality is a good gift from God, but your sin distorts it.

But your Savior is looking to redeem it. And so every Christian in the room, you can count on it, God is looking to sanctify your sexuality.

He wants to make you more and more holy in your sexuality. And as you get more and more holy in your sexuality, there's more and more joy. You experience God's goodness in greater and greater measure.

So that is the first point I wanted to make. The big sweep. Your sexuality is made by God, distorted by sin, and being redeemed by Jesus.

[14:30] But now, let's hear what Jesus has to say about sexual lust. Would you look at Matthew chapter 5, verses 27 through 28.

You've heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. He's preaching the Sermon on the Mount.

This is his inaugural address. And if you remember, chapter 5, verse 17 is the main point of the sermon. And he's saying, I came not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them.

The Old Testament's about me. And I came to make sense of it all. And he goes on to say in chapter 5, verse 20, he calls his followers to live a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

And what follows is what that looks like. What that looks like when it comes to murder. And this morning, what that looks like when it comes to adultery.

[15:38] And so last week, he talked about the sixth commandment. This week, he's addressing the seventh commandment. And the seventh commandment is, you shall not commit adultery.

And Jesus, as in his messianic role, is saying this to us, let me clarify for you this adultery thing. What we're going to see here is that Jesus is going to say that the seventh commandment not only

forbids the physical act of adultery, but it forbids the sexual lust at the root of adultery.

The seventh commandment addresses the radical problem of sexual lust. And so we see that in verses 27 and 28. Jesus making a huge clarification.

Jesus even correcting the teachers of the day. The Jewish teachers of the day were limiting the scope of the seventh commandment to just the physical act of adultery.

It was what they were doing with murder as well, just limiting it to the shedding of blood. And Jesus came to knock down the walls that were built up around that commandment.

[17:02] And so what Jesus says here, he's not denying the sinfulness of the physical act of adultery. That's wrong. And by the way, what makes adultery, the sinful act, the physical act sinful, is that it breaks the marriage covenant between a man and a woman.

It breaks that exclusive lifelong union between one man and one woman. So when a husband seeks sexual gratification with someone other than his wife, he separates what God has joined together.

He breaks the exclusive union between one man and one woman before God. And so Jesus isn't denying the seriousness of the physical act.

He's actually upholding that. What he's doing is he's taking his 10-pound messianic sledgehammer and he's smashing down the walls people build up around it to say this only applies to the physical act of adultery.

He's saying no, it doesn't. The seventh commandment gets at the root cause of adultery. It's much, it goes much deeper.

[18:15] But I say, whoever looks at a woman with lustful intent has committed adultery with her in his heart. Jesus is shining the piercing light of the seventh commandment into the deep depths of our hearts, even into our imaginations.

So if you're following Jesus here, what he's doing is this. He's locating the root cause of adultery not outside of us, but inside of us.

He's exposing our sexually explicit and sinful thoughts. He's exposing our imaginations. When Jesus says, whoever looks at a woman with lustful intent, he's locating sin within us, in our desires. in our hearts. Now remember, a Jew living in the ancient Near East thought of one's heart as the seat of your emotions and your thinking and your will.

It was the control center of your life. And so for Jesus to say these words, the heart includes your imagination. We tend to think of our imagination between our ears.

[19:37] Jesus would locate it in the heart. So the lustful intent that Jesus is talking about is an outworking of your heart.

It includes your imagination. The lustful intent Jesus is speaking of is sexual lust. And when you sexually lust after someone not your spouse, you commit adultery with your imagination in your heart.

Years ago, I gave a talk on this subject at a church. And after the service, I had a man in his mid-80s come up to me.

And he was unable to physically enjoy sex with his wife. But he came up to me and he said, do you know what the most powerful sexual organ of the human being is?

And I was like, what? He said, the imagination. Your heart. Your heart. Let me make a couple clarifications.

[20:57] Sexual lust is not simply attraction, being attracted to someone. It's very possible to be attracted to someone else without lusting after them.

That's not what Jesus is talking about. Another clarification is this, and this is something you've got to cut finally. Sexual lust is not the temptation to lust.

Let me talk about it in terms of taking a second look. Have you ever been somewhere and someone catches your eye and you're kind of like, if I look again, it's not going to go well.

And so, you're being tempted to take a second look and you're being tempted to engage someone with your imagination and bring them to yourself sexually.

You know what I'm talking about? Taking the second look? There is a difference between being tempted to take a second look. That's not lust. And then actually taking the second look.

[22:04] That is lust. You see the difference? Sexual lust is conceived in your heart when you yield your imagination over to gratify your sinful sexual desires.

That's when lust takes place. And if you're like me, you're thinking, that happens much more than I care to admit.

So Jesus is saying that if there's a guy who takes a second look because he wants to sexually engage a woman with his imagination, that guy has just committed adultery in his heart and he may be on the highway.

He may be walking out of Menards. He may be walking with his wife into a restaurant. It takes place in the heart.

Are you picking up on the radical nature of what Jesus is saying? Are you feeling this?

[23:14] The word radical comes from a Latin word which literally means the root of something. The root cause, the essential nature of something.

And what Jesus is saying here is that the essential nature of adultery is sexual lust which resides in the heart of men and women.

Your imagination generates your imagination. You need to be careful of what you set your imagination on.

Because not only are you aware of your imagination, your God is aware of your imagination. So let me say it this way. Proverbs 5.21 For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord.

For a man's ways both externally and internally are before the eyes of the Lord. God sees everything.

[24:24] So think about it this way. At this moment, our God is completely aware of every thought of every heart of the 7.4 billion people on the planet right now.

He doesn't have a hard time processing things. He's fully aware of it. He's fully cognizant of it right now. He knows the thoughts of your heart.

And so what Jesus is doing, he's making an extraordinary claim. He's saying even your thoughts you will be held accountable for before God.

Your imagination will be held accountable on that day. He knows the ways of your heart.

But here's the good news. He's in it to purify your heart. Blessed are the pure of heart. He wants to purify your heart.

[25:29] And so far we just looked at sexual lust as a radical problem. It's deep within you. Jesus is exploring our imaginations.

But now let's turn to verses 29 and 30 where we see sexual lust requires radical action. It's a radical problem and it requires radical action.

Look at verses 29 and 30. If your right eye causes you to sin tear it out and throw it away. That's pretty extreme don't you think? Look at verse 30.

And if your right hand causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. That's pretty extreme don't you think? Is Jesus actually calling his followers to self mutilation? No.

But he is using extreme language to make a really important point. And we cannot miss that important point. And so what Jesus is using with this very extreme language, these radical commands, is that he's saying do whatever you got to do in order to deny sexual lust from taking root in your heart.

[26:52] Do whatever you have to do. And so that's the cut off language. That's the gouged out language. That's the throw away language. Do whatever you need to do to keep your heart from sexually lusting.

From breaking the seventh commandment. This is radical and extreme. The key phrase here is cause you to sin.

You see that in verse 29? If your right eye causes you to sin. Verse 30, and if your right hand causes you to sin. That word cause you to sin. We get the word scandal from that word.

Scandalized. Scandalous. And its original meaning was a trigger to a trap. That's what a scandal was. The trigger of a trap. And so what Jesus is saying here is don't let your right eye trigger the trap of lust in your heart.

Don't let your right hand trigger the trap of lust in your heart. Do whatever you need to do to keep that from happening. The extreme problem requires extreme action.

[28:10] Jesus is saying don't look at or touch what will cause you to sin in your heart. In fact, you've got to get rid of it. He's soberly recognizing how our eyes and our hands can provide opportunities for our hearts to lust.

lust. So let me give you some examples. Let me help start you think, okay, where this might show up in your life. And I'm going to ask you to a humble honesty right now.

Be as honest with yourself as you can. Because that is a poverty of spirit. It will result in you mourning, but you will be comforted.

Have you ever thumbed through and looked at a magazine or a book that is sexually explicit, that turns your heart to lust?

What Jesus is saying is get rid of it. Don't put your hand on it. Don't put your eyes on it. Get rid of it. Are you pressing the remote control to go to channels to set your eyes on things that God forbids and will just entice you to lust sexually in your heart?

[29:30] What are you watching on demand? What are you watching on Netflix? You got cable? What are you doing? Where are you going? Get rid of it. If it's causing you to stumble, get rid of it.

That's what Jesus is saying. Are you clicking on websites or apps that are pornographic in nature or that tempt you to lust?

You know, it might not be explicitly pornographic, but you're there and when you're there, it stirs lust in your heart. Get rid of it. Be honest. Get rid of it. What Jesus is getting at is this whole idea of starving out sin from your life.

Don't feed it. Don't give it an opportunity to flourish. Don't fuel it. Starve it. And so if these are areas or other areas that you know of, you're going to with your eyes in your hand and are fueling lust, get rid of it.

This is the radical repentance Jesus is calling his citizens to. So starve it out. But there's another thing, another radical act that I want to point you to right now that has another effect.

[30:52] There's one thing to starve sin out. There's another thing to crowd sin out because your heart is delighting in something wonderful.

And when you delight in something wonderful, you start to limit the space for lust to take root. And so in order to help you not only starve sin out, but to crowd sin out, I want to point you to another radical action that was done for you.

If you think gouging out your eye or cutting off your hand is extreme, how about this for extreme? How about this for radical? The sinless son of God going to the cross to bear the penalty and power of your sin.

How's that for extreme? How's that for radical? That the holy God of the universe would take on human flesh and die in your place to set you free.

[32:03] That is an extreme radical kind of love. In fact, that is a radical power unleashed for people. You may have been sitting here for the last 30 minutes thinking, Jesus, if this is true, if this is true, what you're saying about the nature of sinful lust, if this is true, I'm undone.

I'm shown to be what I am. I'm an adulterer at heart. If that's you, if you're realizing this, that even your imagination condemns you, you need to hear this.

Jesus died for you. Jesus went to the cross and he suffered all of God's wrath for all of your sexual sin. All of it.

And then he was raised from the dead to give you the power to overcome sexual sin in your life.

That is a radical love and it's a radical power unleashed by the living God at the cross.

His extreme act of grace on your behalf enables you to live an extreme life for his namesake regarding your sexuality.

[33:30] So in light of this extreme grace, God has shown us in Christ, when you think about giving up cable or Netflix or romantic novels or seductive clothing, you start realizing that's nothing.

If this means walking in holiness with Jesus, getting rid of that stuff is nothing. Get rid of it and experience the sweetness and joy of walking with your Savior.

So we've looked at the problem, the radical problem, we've looked at the radical action that we must take but what our God took on our behalf, and now a pastoral plea.

I know you're out there. I know you're out there. I know you're out there struggling with sin, struggling with lust.

I know. I know you are feeling distant from your God. That's the fallout of this kind of sin. I know that you're afraid of your spouse, that you don't know what to say, that you fear the worst.

[34:35] I know. I know that if you have children, that this area of sexual sin in your life just deflates you. It limits your influence in your home.

You're like a dog walking around with a tail between your legs, or you're just grouchy all the time. I know. And I also know this, that you tend to live on the periphery of the church, that you tend to not get involved because you don't want to be fully known.

I also know this, you're miserable. You're isolated. You're ashamed. And here's the nub of it. You're afraid.

You're afraid that if people find out who you really are and what you've really been doing, you're going to be shunned. You're going to be cast out. You don't think that people will love you and accept you if they know the full truth about you.

It's not true. God doesn't love us this way. And God calls us, His followers, to love each other with the same extreme kind of love.

[36:00] love. We've been talking as elders about this for the last couple days. And I just want to let you guys, everyone know on behalf of them, there are no stones to be thrown.

We want those struggling with sexual sin to be released from their sexual sin. To find freedom in Christ.

Christ. So if you're feeling isolated because of your sexual sin, if you're hiding because of your sexual sin, if you've been living in the shadows because of your sexual sin, if you've just grown to live with the fear of being found out because of your sexual sin, think about it this way.

Jesus is calling you today to say, come into the light. Come out of the darkness. Come out of the shadows. come into the light. Let me free you.

Let me deliver you. Come, be honest and find and be met with grace and kindness. There's a proverb that has served me so well.

[37:15] Proverbs 28, 13 says, whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. Brother or sister, if you have been hiding because of sexual sin in the darkness, come into the light and find mercy.

We're going to close this morning by singing two songs. And during these two songs, I'm going to ask the elders to come forward. Dave Barnard is out of town.

He and Leslie are out of town. But I'm going to invite Lou and Bev as well as Rick and Jasmine to come on down. Jenny and me will be down here. Matt Sear and his wife Elise will be down here. Billy and I and Jess will be down here. And we're here to pray. We're here to welcome you. And so as we're singing, if you are feeling God's convicting work in your life, that's good.

So come on down. We'll pray with you. We're here to help you. But I also know this. If there's just too many eyes this morning, if it's too much for you this morning, email me.

[38:33] Andy, do we have my email set up? This is my email address. Email me. Take the first radical step by emailing me and put on the subject line, help.

I'm ashamed. I'm sick of this. I want to walk in the light. We're going to meet you with help. We're going to meet you with love. We'll walk through whatever we need to walk through together.

But I just want to make sure you know we love you. We are glad you're here. We want to help. So let me just close by saying this. I'm going to invite Matt and the worship team to come on up.

There's just too much at stake. There's just too much at stake. Brother or sister, don't stay in the shadows. Come out into the light.

We're here to help. God's grace is all powerful. Let me pray. God in heaven, would you set the prisoners free?

[39:41] Whether it's right now or throughout this week or for the months to come, God, would you unshackle men and women shackled by the sin of lust?

God, would you free our brothers and sisters who are ensnared by pornography? God, would you make a salt and light in this city? And would you sanctify us so that we are more salty and shine more bright?

In Jesus' name, Amen.