

"Lust"

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's good to see you here. As we turn to God's Word, we are going to be talking this morning about sexual righteousness. I want to start by saying this is not a hobby horse of our church that we pick on. We're preaching on this passage because it's the next one in the series. We're looking through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 through 7, and this is the next passage and the topic that Jesus brings to us this morning. But I'm not going to apologize for preaching on this either because we need to be talking about this. We live in a culture which is increasingly and intensely sexualized. I am a reader of the New York Times. It is remarkable to me the topics of articles that I can read in the New York Times about things that I don't even want to speak about here in this building, about sexuality and the different ways in which our culture is embracing diverse and, may I say it, destructive expressions of sexuality. I don't think our culture is particularly more sexualized than other times in history. If you go back to the first century, you look at the practice of temple prostitution.

This is not, there's nothing new under the sun. This has been true of humanity since humanity was created and fell into sin. But certainly we live in a day where particularly with our technology, we have a particular kind of pressure in our world to be thinking about sex and lifting up the value of sex all the time. So that's the first reason why we need to be talking about this. The second reason we need to be talking about this is because the church has failed in its calling to be different. You can read the statistics. Oh, they're marginally better in some surveys. Don't be completely distressed by this. But it's nowhere near distinctly different than the world around us. The headlines continue to be filled with spiritual leaders in the church and not the church out there, in our tribe, people that we know, sometimes people that we've personally known or followed or read who've fallen in to sexual sin.

The last reason why we need to talk about this is because of the context of this passage this morning. If you want to turn with me to Matthew chapter 5, page 760 in your pew Bibles. We're looking at Matthew 5, verses 27 through 30. But you remember the context. If you've been here the last couple of weeks, you remember back in verses 17 through 20, Jesus said, I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. And what we read in that was that Jesus was saying, I am the thing to which the Old Testament law points to, and I am now putting myself in the center of what is the new kingdom that God is bringing.

[3 : 4 0] And I'm going to teach you what it looks like to be in my kingdom. And Jesus comes to us as a king this morning to say, this is how to take hold of kingdom life with me.

These are the patterns of how you live. This is what it looks like to have, if you remember verse 20, a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees. And so, we need to hear this word because Jesus has spoken it to us.

So, with that, let me pray. And then I'll read God's word. And then we'll look at it together. Lord, help us this morning. We confess that our hearts just want to flee in this moment.

Lord, we don't want to sit under your word. We love our independence too much. And Lord, some even now are feeling as well the enemy of our souls throwing accusations of shame and guilt.

Lord, I pray this morning that by your Holy Spirit, you might help us to see the high calling and the greater grace that you give us as we talk about these things.

[5 : 0 8] Lord, be with me. Help me to speak your words. May we sit under your word together this morning, we pray. In Jesus' name. So, Jesus, in verse 27 of Matthew 5, says this, This is not a radical summary of this, but here's the big idea.

Jesus calls us, his people, to a radical kingdom, sexual righteousness. Why do I use this phrase?

Because I just don't want to keep saying sex, sex, sex all the time. I want to broaden it out. I want us to be thinking more broadly. It's a kingdom sexual righteousness that has to do with how we relate to our king.

And it's not just about avoiding sin. It is a righteousness, a path that God has laid out for us of right living that we would follow it. And it is about sex.

So, let's get into it. Here's my outline for those of you who are outline takers. We're going to talk about Jesus' definition of kingdom sexual righteousness. We're going to talk about the significance that Jesus gives to sexual kingdom righteousness.

[7 : 02] And then we're going to talk about Jesus' power to live kingdom sexual righteousness. So, firstly, verses 27 and 28, Jesus' definition of sexual righteousness.

It is a pattern that we've already seen and we're going to keep repeating. The heart of this command is an internal thing, not an external thing. We see this throughout this section, starting in verse 21.

Jesus says, You have heard it said, but I say to you, you have heard it said. This is an external practice of religion that the Pharisees in the first century embraced and lived on.

And Jesus is saying, But I tell you that the heart of my kingdom has to do with the heart of humanity as it relates to God. And so, Jesus says, There is a seventh commandment.

Do not commit adultery. You can read it in Exodus 20, part of what God gave to Moses. And, you know, the Pharisees in the first century said, That's it.

[8 : 01] The physical act. If you don't commit the physical act of adultery, then you can say, I've kept this commandment. Oddly how thankful we might be if we could even do this.

Before we go on to talk about the heart center, we might want to talk briefly about why did God give this command at all? Because this is very different thinking from our culture today, right?

But here's the thing. Our sex life is woven into this beautiful tapestry throughout Scripture of what God has created human beings to do.

And in Genesis 1, He created humanity, male and female, and He said, Be fruitful and multiply.

Guess what? That means they had sex. So they could have babies.

So they could fulfill this. But it wasn't just for that. It was more than that. It was also for their companionship and for their complementary. That is, in two different bodies coming together, this beautiful picture of a oneness.

[9 : 07] So God said, The two shall become one flesh. And this is true in our heart and in our soul and in our lives as well as in our physical actions.

And God gives us beautiful gift to humanity in Genesis 1. And yet we see in Genesis 3 that humanity rebelled against God and rejected His ways.

And we see throughout the whole rest of human history, certainly biblical history, that humanity misuses sex to its detriment, to its harm. There are lots of examples, but they're descriptive.

And there's, with the exception of maybe Ruth, I couldn't think of another good example where maybe there was a picture of something beautiful about human sexuality.

Usually it's the aberration that is depicted in the Old Testament. But we do see this thread of marriage and sexuality being woven through the Old Testament.

[10 : 09] Oh, I forgot. Song of Solomon. The Song of Solomon is also there to tell us about the glories and the joys, the delight and pleasure that sex in marriage is meant for us to have and to enjoy.

But we also see this thread where this marriage between man and woman, this picture, isn't the end in itself for humanity. But God created us with this picture of two becoming one, this marriage, so that we might actually understand God and His love for us.

And so we read in places like Hosea that God loved His people like a faithful husband, like a spouse who pursued in love and grace, an unfaithful wife who broke the covenant again and again and again.

And we see as we go to the New Testament, God brings these ideas together in Ephesians 5 and says that the coming together of a man and woman in marriage is meant to picture God's love for the church and the Savior's love as He lays down His life to serve and to save the church and for the church to be one that responds to this loving action with devotion and submission.

And we see as we get to the end of the storyline, John prayed about it earlier, and sorry, I get choked. There's a day coming when we, the bride of Christ, will be made new and sin will be gone

and Jesus will know us completely and fully and we will know Him and we will worship Him and we will experience at the, what is called in Revelation, the end of Revelation, 19, 20, 21, the wedding feast of the Lamb.

[12:04] We will come and be the bride and He will be our bridegroom and we will know that the greatest sex we've ever encountered here is just a foretaste.

It's a nibble of the joy and delight and intimacy of knowing Jesus and being known by Him and being loved by Him. And this is what God created it for, a signpost for something far greater and our culture has made it the end.

This is why the Bible talks about sexual sin because its purpose is glorious and our sin stains it and corrupts it. And Jesus says it's not just about the act.

He says if anyone looks at a woman with lustful intent, he has committed adultery with her in his heart. What does it mean to look with lustful intent?

Well, there's this process, isn't there? There's a seeing, there's an activation of our senses. And in response to that senses, lots of commentators brought this up, I thought it was really, there's an imagination that arouses in us.

[13:24] There's a something that arouses in our minds and in our hearts that we want, that we desire. And then we take this desire and we apply it to something we see or someone that we see with lustful intent that is a passion that is not pure, that is not loving, that is not serving, but it is a desire to covet for oneself.

It is selfish in orientation. It is to control the other person for one's own pleasure. It is to use the other person to objectify them to gain what we desire.

And this is what Jesus means by looking with lustful intent. There's a great story in the Bible about this. Look at 2 Samuel 11. David, who should be out to war, but he wasn't, he was up on his roof and he saw the woman.

And the scripture says he saw her and she was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman and David sent messengers and took her and she came to him and he lay with her. He saw her. She was someone else's husband. But David said, I don't care about that. I want her for myself. I'm going to take her and I'm going to make her mine and I'm going to use her for my pleasure.

[14:47] This is the picture of lustful intent. And David did it physically, but we do it in our minds, don't we? And our imaginations may go in different places because we're all different.

But in the end, it's this sinful desire to have and control that is at the center of it. And Jesus says, when we do this, when we think in these ways, we've committed adultery in our hearts.

We are just like those who have done it physically. Now, some of you may be thinking, well, Jesus is just talking about a man looking at a woman and this is about adultery and I'm not married, so this isn't about me.

This is about someone else. Well, John Stott argues this and I agree with him. He says, to argue that the reference is only to a man lusting after a woman and not vice versa and only to a married man and not to an unmarried since the offender is said to commit adultery, not fornication, is to be guilty of the very casuistry, that is the very kind of thinking that the Pharisees used to limit the effect of the command, the very casuistry which Jesus was condemning in the Pharisees.

His argument is that any and every sexual practice which is immoral indeed is also immoral in look and in thought.

[16:19] Jesus says, you need a righteousness that is greater than the Pharisees and this is for all of us, single, married, widowed and we see it throughout the whole New Testament.

It's in Romans 1, it's in 1 Corinthians 5-7, it's in Galatians 5, it's in Ephesians 5, it's in Colossians 3, it's in the passage that Richard read earlier in 1 Thessalonians 4.

Repeatedly over and over again, the kingdom commands is to avoid this way. Now, I want to give some clarifications here.

First of all, it doesn't mean that all attraction is lustful intent. It is actually possible to look at something and appreciate a beauty without desiring to control it and use it for your own selfish good.

In our sexualized culture, it feels almost like a pipe dream, but it is actually possible to do. And secondly, we need to recognize that not all sexual desire is inherently sinful.

[17 : 25] Certainly within a marriage, it is a glorious thing, right? And to recognize that you have a desire for this that you don't allow to control you and that doesn't affect the way that you perceive other people, there can be an honest desire for that that can be righteous when you don't use people to get it.

And thirdly, we need to recognize that there's a distinction between sin and temptation. Martin Luther famously was quoted as saying, you can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair.

What does that mean? It means that you may see things that will begin to tickle your imagination and lead you down this path, but you can stop it there.

You have not sinned where you recognize, oh, that's a temptation for me to do more. But when you say, oh, well, now that I've seen it, what else can I do? I'm just gonna, I'm gonna cherish that thought for a while.

I'm gonna let it marinate. I'm gonna ponder on, I'm gonna meditate on this thing that I'm seeing and I'm gonna let it capture my heart and let it lead me down this path of destruction. There's a distinction between the moment of temptation and the falling into sin.

[18 : 46] And this is where the battle is fought. And I wanna say to you that there is an alternative. It is possible with the gospel to look at men and women and to say, they are people made in God's image worthy of honor and dignity.

They are, as men and women, under the fall, worthy of compassion and grace and truth. As men and women, they are in need of God's love and grace.

We can show them. One of the best things you can do if you find yourself falling down this trap is look someone in the eye. Look at them in their face and that will remind you that they are people and not objects to be longed after and lusted after.

But they're people made in God's image. Jesus says to us, if we look at another with lustful intent, we have committed adultery in our hearts.

So we have to ask ourselves some uncomfortable questions. How do we look at other people?

What do we feed with our eyes? Not just the really bad stuff, but what do we feed that's commonplace?

[20 : 14] Where do you see your own heart and your own imagination wandering? Is Jesus' kingdom sexual righteousness characteristic of your life in your heart as well as in your actions?

Jesus goes on, verses 29 through 30, to talk about the significance of this as he sees it. Jesus in these two verses talk about the weight that this is carrying because he says, if something causes you to sin in this way, that there's, in context, it's saying, if these things, if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Now, despite a few possibly apocryphal stories from church history about people who actually literally physically did this and did things like castrate themselves in order to not sin, I don't think that's an appropriate application.

He's not talking about self-mutilation. Martin Lloyd-Jones has a great image in his commentary on this where he says, how far do we have to go to cut off our members that cause us to sin?

We end up like the guy in *Mighty Python*, just a torso saying, I think I'm getting better. Sorry, if you don't know that, it's a random, but we can't cut off our body enough to remove it because the sin resides in our heart.

[21 : 50] So this is a metaphor. He's using a figure of speech to say that it's something different. And for Jesus, he says, the stakes are eternal.

If we continue to be drawn down this path, if we continue to cherish these things more than God and his kingdom, then we are walking away from Jesus.

We are walking away from his kingdom. And that path leads us to hell. It leads us to a place of condemnation because we have loved something else more than we have loved God.

So Jesus says, we need to give this weight, the weightiness of our eternal destiny. so what does it look like?

Well, friends, there is not enough time today to get through everything I could say about this. There is lots of practical wisdom out there. I actually found John Stott in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount to be immensely helpful.

[23 : 03] So much of what I'm about to say is in his words. I'm just not going to quote him all the time. But he has a couple of things. He said, you know, what Jesus is saying is not that we're to be

physically self-maiming, but he says we're to be ruthlessly morally self-denying.

That is, we are to take this so seriously that not physically pluck out our eye, but to behave as if we don't have an eye to see something that will lead us into temptation.

To cut off our hand that is to behave in such a way that we can't touch those things that we might touch that would lead us into falling into this violation of sexual kingdom righteousness.

Now here's the hard part. It's not a list of rules. Oh, we've tried over time to create new sets of rules. We end up looking a lot like the Pharisees.

Here's a checklist. If I don't do these, these, these, these, these, I should be okay. But interestingly, Jesus puts all of these, both of these verses in a conditional. If this causes you to stumble, radically respond.

[24 : 20] If this causes you to fall into sin, don't do it. So we need to recognize that there isn't a, there isn't a playbook that says in every circumstance you must do this, this, this, this, this.

Christian life is about knowing our heart and knowing Jesus. And so for us to flee from this means that we must know what our particular weaknesses are, what our particular temptations are, where our imagination goes.

And it could be very, very different for different ones of us. It's also why we need to be careful not to judge one another about I do this and they do that. I watch Game of Thrones.

I don't watch Game of Thrones. You know what? Before God, are you pursuing this kind of kingdom righteousness? Do we play around with temptation?

Do we feed our eyes with filth? In our pride, do we think, I can handle this? In our desire to not feel weird, do we flirt on the edges of sin so that we can connect with others around us?

[25 : 38] Jesus says, no, be strong, be decisive, be brave. It's worth losing much to gain the kingdom of Jesus.

Now I'm going to quote Stott. This is a little long, but I think it's worth listening to. To obey this command of Jesus will involve for many of us a certain kind of maiming.

He puts that in quotes. We shall have to eliminate from our lives certain things which, though innocent in themselves, either are or could easily become sources of temptation. That is, we shall deliberately decline to read certain literature, see certain films, visit certain exhibitions.

If we do this, we shall be regarded by some of our contemporaries as narrow-minded, untaught Philistines. What? They will say to us incredulously. You have not read such and such book.

You have not seen such and such a film. Why, you're not educated. And they may be right. We may have to be culturally maimed, again in quotes, in order to preserve our purity of mind.

[26 : 48] The only question is whether for the sake of this gain, we are willing to bear that loss and endure that ridicule. Friends, we might need to do something different with these.

We might need to get a flip phone without a screen. We might need to change the way we hang out with our girlfriend or our boyfriend.

We might need to think about the films and the art and the books that we read. I don't want us to be prude, but you need to know what is it that leads you into temptation and are you willing to flee from that no matter what it is?

Practically, if you feel like you're caught in this cycle, if this is so common for you, looking, seeing, the Bible talks about our growth and sanctification, I believe, in, it has sort of two levels because there's a, there's a surface level of you need to stop sinning, right?

You need to stop doing things that you know are against what God has told you to do and this is where personal discipline and self-denial and knowing your own self and setting healthy boundaries and getting accountability and support are all good, but we also need to know that's never enough because the surface, what we do when we, when we manage to do that to a certain extent is we clear space in our lives for the heart work that Jesus wants to do to transform us so that we can, so that our hearts are renewed in ways that we will love other things more than the sins that we, listen, if we every day drink Coke and eat Cheetos, we're not going to want anything besides Coke and Cheetos, maybe some of you will because you're like, oh, that sounds terrible, but if we keep eating junk food all the time, our diet will never improve, we need to stop eating those things and then we need to find out that pears and apples and cheese and bread and whatever else that is healthy food is good for you this is true with our appetites as well.

[29 : 18] As Jeremiah 2 says, we need to turn from drinking from cisterns with poison water of sin and rebellion against God and turn and be drinking from the fountain of Jesus who is the one who

springs up to eternal life in our hearts.

when we do this then we are able to look at others not in lust but in love and we are able to gaze upon Jesus and know his beauty and this is distinctive Christian living.

All right, I'll be honest with you, I don't know where these next three little tidbits fit in my sermon so I'm putting them in here now. One, pornography is pernicious. It's a pandemic in our culture and it is in direct violation to Jesus' command here.

It is exactly designed to do what Jesus says we should not do. And I'm so thankful that in our church we have a group of men now in our freedom group who are saying, I don't want that and I want to change and they're able to help one another do both levels of growth and if you need that kind of help, if you need that help, come talk to me.

Talk to a friend. Get connected to the group. And if you're a woman, we can connect you with external groups that also exist if you are caught in this kind of sin or if you're dealing with the hurt and betrayal of your partner or your spouse.

[31 : 03] Secondly, I want to recognize that some here may have experienced sexual abuse or assault. And this whole topic gets really, really warped, doesn't it?

Because something's been done to you and yet you feel guilt and shame about it. I want you to know that Jesus looks at you with a heart of compassion and of love and of acceptance and he invites you to come to him to find healing and to find wholeness and to find redemption.

You are not stained and scarred forever by what has happened to you. My heart as a pastor breaks for you and I hope that our church can be a part of helping you heal.

Finally, we need to recognize that one of the enemy of our soul, Satan's devices, is to bury us in shame and guilt in this area.

Some of you are sitting here and you're thinking, I'm going to hell because that's what this verse says. You're thinking, I don't know any other way to live and I'm stuck and sometimes the church has been the worst place for you because the church has metaphorically passed out their scarlet letters.

[32 : 44] You're the worst sinner. You're the unacceptable one. The lie is that sexual sin is the unforgivable sin and Satan whispers it or he yells it in our ear every day.

But friends, the gospel has good news. Such good news for us. This is my third point. Jesus is able to, Jesus has power to help us live lives of kingdom sexual righteousness.

There are three ways as I close in this. First, Jesus has made it possible for the forgiveness of our sins. He came and lived a perfect life so that he could go and die on the cross for our sins.

He bore the punishment and the shame and the guilt for the sins that we have committed. The sins that we are committing.

Even the sins that we will commit for those who have placed their faith in Jesus. He has covered us. And however stained we may feel by sexual sin, Jesus says, I've washed it away.

[34 : 08] And however long the list of offenses is, Jesus says, I've erased the record. And there's freedom from shame and guilt. There's freedom from the hamster wheel of saying, if only I can be good enough, maybe I can get out of this.

Freedom from the insecurity of thinking we are unworthy of God's love because of our sin. Jesus at the cross says, I've died for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

Come to me. me. And there's more than that because not only has he forgiven us and declared us forgiven, but he's also given us a new heart and a new spirit so that we can follow him.

Jesus rose from the dead to eternal life so that he might impart to those who have faith in him eternal life as well. and with that eternal life is this rebirth, this renewing of our heart and soul so that we can actually love God.

Our old heart, it just loves to feed on the feast of sin. But God's given us a new heart to feast at the banquet table of the riches of God and his kingdom so that we're spiritually alive where we once were dead and where once we were enslaved to sin, now we are free to choose not to sin, free to love Jesus with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, freedom to seek a new life joyful in righteousness.

[35 : 48] This is why the New Testament writers repeatedly say, put off, put off the old man, put off the old practices, put off the old lifestyle, put off the old patterns of your heart and your mind and put on, put on something much better, the kingdom of God.

Jesus has invited you into it and he has given you a new heart so that you can increasingly love it more than the world. And there's so much joy when we don't have to fight that battle because our heart has actually been changed and things that once seemed inescapably tempting to us have lost their power because we found something greater to love than that.

Because the greatest love of all, sorry, that's a Whitney Houston quote, let me rephrase that. The love that transforms us and changes us is the love with which Jesus has loved us and he calls us to gaze upon him in his beauty and his majesty and his glory.

We are transformed as we behold him and meditate upon him. And that precious promise that one day in Christ we will be free.

we will be free from sin, we will be free from this battle that we fight today for kingdom, sexual righteousness. We will be free instead to feast at the wedding table, at the banquet of the Lamb of God.

[37 : 34] We will be his bride, he will be our lover, the lover of our souls in ways that we can't even imagine now.

And friends, is that not worth it? The kingdom of God to be with him forever. This is the gospel hope and this is the call to kingdom sexual righteousness.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we come to you this morning. I just pray.

Holy Spirit, do the work you need to do. Healing some, convicting some, calling some.

Oh Lord, I pray that we would not hide in the darkness. But Lord, help us. Help us to confess our sin. And help us to take hold of the life that you've given us in Jesus.

[38 : 44] Help us to know your power doing in us what we can't do for ourselves. Help us that we might live distinctly for your glory in this world.

We pray this in Jesus' name. God moment 1 poetry in Jesus' name.

There we have a hope that you will transcend the high- chatbot and langs.