

I. Intro

- A. If you're a visitor with us this morning, what a cheerful passage you've chosen to explore with us.
 - A.1. *If you think about another person lustfully gauge your eyes out or you'll be thrown into hell.*
 - A.2. What a great time to explore City Life Church. Even worse are those of you who brought somebody today. You've already had to explain that I'm not the normal guy and now you're sweating bullets at the topic.
 - A.3. This passage, if you're connected to the heartbeat of the city at all, this passage is one of those passages in the Bible that your friends, your co-workers, family members say, "Ah ha!" This is what's wrong with Christianity. What an archaic, repressive, prudish view of sex. How ridiculous could you possibly be to believe this stuff? I agree don't commit adultery..."

- B. And I'll admit, that from the outside, yes, it seems pretty bad. It seems pretty disconnected from real life.
 - B.1. But here's my hope for the morning: we're going to be surprised, in a good way, if we dig into this passage:
 - B.1.a. There's something here for all of us. I don't care if you're married. If you're single. If you're young, if you're old, if you're hip or not hip, this passage has something to say to every single one of us.
 - B.1.b. And I also believe that we'll find a view of sex that's not repressive, like religious people are often accused of, but one that's just the opposite. Not a weak view but a strong. A view of sex that's powerful, that really speaks to us as human beings.

- C. This is important because sex is a big deal.
 - C.1. Every single one of us has been created with sexuality – it's part of our humanity.
 - C.2. Oftentimes traditionally religious people seem to say you've got to repress our urges. Bury them down.
 - C.3. The cultural majority tends to look at that and say "How ridiculous!" The proper way to deal with sex is to express it! Indulge it! Give into those desires! It's no big deal.
 - C.4. Christ is saying...neither one of those views is accurate, and you need to learn how to think about this subject correctly. How to channel your sexuality in a redemptive way.
 - C.5. And undoubtedly, some of us sit here this morning, and maybe nobody else knows, but you know that you struggle with this – maybe it's porn, maybe it's sleeping around. I can say that Christ offers some good news this morning, but he also offers a warning. If you don't pay attention, and you don't let him shape your thinking in this, you will destroy yourself. Sex, when mishandled, has the ability to bring decay and destruction into your life unlike anything else.
 - C.6. We've got to learn how to handle it appropriately.

II. TRANS: Okay, so this is a hard topic. It affects all of us. Let's dig in. Three things that Jesus does in this passage for you note takers. He...

- A.1. **Expands** – Expands our view of sex
- A.2. **Redefines** – Our view of lust. What it is and what it actually isn't.
- A.3. **Challenges** – Our actions. For those of us struggling to know how sex ought to play out in our singleness or our marriages or for those of us caught up in addictions he calls us to action. He also offers us freedom.

III. EXPANDS

- A. We've been going through Christ's SOM where he's talking about kingdom living – started with the character of (“blessed are the poor”) -- the calling of KP to be salt and light -- and now he's moved on to the conduct, the behavior, of KP in respect to moral purity.
- B. And it's interesting that he starts with anger and sex. He immediately goes for something relational! Barometer to measure your adoption of the SOM in your life, think about your relationships. You can talk a big game about being poor in spirit, and loving others and being kingdom-oriented, but your relationships are the real measure of this stuff in your life. If you're constantly angry at people, if you're constantly objectifying people for your gratification, then you're missing something. And that's what Christ is doing here – he's going straight for the heart and how we relate to others.
- C. Let's get in the passage. **[READ v 27]** – Some of you are thinking, “Hey, he doesn't even say the word ‘sex’ here so how could he expand our view?” Well, in just bringing up the topic he's alluding to the Bible's sexual ethic.
 - C.1. He's referring back to the OT law.
 - C.2. Adultery, broadly, means sex outside of a covenant; sex without security. In the Bible, sex ought to happen in the context of a covenant marriage relationship.
- D. The question we often wrestle with is: Why is sex outside of marriage bad? Like we mentioned, sex is mostly thought about in 1 of 2 ways:
 - D.1. Lots of traditionally religious people say that sex is somehow inherently dirty. It's for making kids, sure, but other than that it's a hindrance to our spirituality. They're in the camp that says, “Hey we've got to repress those yucky passions.”
 - D.2. The majority culture says something different. Sex is merely a physical act. It's an appetite. Follow your passions!
- E. Both of these share the same problem, Christ would argue, too low.
 - E.1. Cultural view of sex, sex is just an appetite. The problem with this is that it's not true and we prove that every day because we just can't live this way. Deep down, existentially, we can't hold such a casual view about it.
- F. **[MODERN LOVE STORY]**
 - F.1. “I hadn't romanticized my first time. I never thought we were in love. I never expected good sex. I never expected to have feelings afterward.

And I certainly didn't expect to feel rejected. I thought if I did everything right, I could control the emotions involved in physical intimacy. I was mad...because I assumed he had used me. In reality, I had used him...for a feeling of power, superiority and freedom...I thought losing my virginity would liberate me, and in a sense it did. I learned that no matter how calculating I am — right guy, right time, right place — I can't control other people's feelings, or even my own. And there's a strange freedom in that knowledge. It allowed me to let go."

- G. Here's a young modern woman trying hard to prove to herself that sex is no big deal, yet something won't allow it.
- G.1. It's just one example, but we all, on some level, know this to be true. Sex is powerful. It has a way of driving us. Controlling us. Consuming us. To say its just an appetite, not giving due respect.
 - G.2. An easier example might just be looking around us! Look at our culture's thoughts on beauty and the importance of sexual attractiveness! How many people in this room are miserable because of the way your body looks? How many of us are addicted to porn? We're constantly getting bombarded with sexual messages and images. Sex is powerful. People don't write hit songs about food. Sex is not an appetite. If you treat it that way you're not respecting how powerful it actually is. And in the end, it could destroy you.
- H. The Bible's sexual ethic tells us that sex has a higher purpose. Sex is supposed to be an act between two people committed to each other in a covenant relationship of marriage for the purpose of uniting them, body, soul, mind, and heart.
- H.1. In the act of sex – we're uniting ourselves to another person. We're supposed to be giving our whole being to someone (physically, emotionally, spiritually, economically) and it's incredibly vulnerable and it's got a cementing affect, that's why it calls for the security of marriage.
 - H.2. One of the more provocative things I've heard about sex in marriage it that's it's a lot like communion – the Lord's Supper. A symbol of an invisible reality. Saying, "I belong to you. Bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh." This is why sex, for a healthy married couple, can have a healing effect. It's recommitting.
 - H.3. If you take sex out of its context, when we try to make it a mere physical act, we're doing harm to our soul – we're hardening our heart, we're going against the way we're hard-wired to live and it brings bitterness, isolation, confusion, and Christ says, ultimately our own destruction.
- I. It's also selfish, by the way.
- I.1. You're essentially saying, "I'll be physically committed to you but not totally committed to you. I want your body but not your soul. Not your mind. Not your emotions. Why? Because I don't *really* love you. I don't want to lose my independence. I don't want to have to change my life for your sake."

- I.2. In other words, I'm not after you as a person – I'm after an experience and you're simply an apparatus.
- J. If the modern culture doesn't respect the power of sex, the traditional religious view doesn't respect the goodness of sex! Not a lot of time...
- J.1. It's worth nothing that the Bible doesn't actually say anything negative about sex within its proper context.
- J.1.a. Gen 1 God makes two people, a man and a woman, they're totally naked, God tells them to be fruitful and multiply. Have a nice time! And he declares it good!
- J.1.b. Then there's a bunch of stuff in Song of Solomon, it's in the Old Testament, a few books after Psalms.
- J.1.b.i. Dudes talking about wanting to climb my wife like a palm tree and grab ahold of their clusters.
- J.1.b.ii. Ladies saying let my man come into my garden and taste its delicious fruits. [SPICY]
- J.1.b.iii. It's full of this stuff – absolutely no suggestion that sex is dirty and primitive here.
- J.2. Not trying to get too explicit, but the point is that if you think sex is a hindrance to spirituality or dirty in some way – Christ would say you've got a view of sex that's as wrong as the cultural majority. It's too low.
- K. In this passage, Christ starts by reminding us that sex has a context. It's not carnal. It's not casual. It's sacred. He expands our view! He's redeeming our view. Let's keep going.

IV. REDEFINES

- A. Christ moves on to redefine our view of lust, and most all sin, really. Piggy-backing, he says, **[READ V 28]**
- B. Okay, if we ever hope to have control over our sexuality, we've got to get what he's saying here.
- C. First thing, what does he not say? And this is where a lot of people with the prude view go wrong.
- C.1. He doesn't say that "if you look at a woman and feel sexual desire" you've committed adultery. No.
- C.2. BTW, I know it says "man" but this totally applies to everybody both men and women.
- C.3. He's saying that anyone who looks at a woman "lustfully" has committed adultery in his heart. That's important. Some translations say "anyone who looks at a woman with inordinate desire."
- C.4. The idea is that you look at someone in such a way as to own them or possess them, to view them, in other words, as an object that exists to gratify yourself.
- C.5. Sexual desire, at its root, is not bad. He couldn't possibly be suggesting this in light of the Bible's view on sex.
- C.5.a. I hear men who are addicted to pornography say, "I wish God would just take away this desire!"

C.5.b. I get what they're saying, but that's misdirected. The root desire isn't bad, and actually it's not the issue. We all have it. Christ had it.

C.5.c. **The issue** is how you've taken this root sexual desire and you've modified it. You've made it selfish. It's no longer about love – pursuing intimacy, depth, unity with another. Now it's about lust – you want to use someone else for your gratification. That's the issue.

D. So what is Jesus redefining?

D.1. Jesus was addressing a group, right? Some of these people were part of the religious elite of the day and this meant that they followed the OT Law to a tee. Totally righteous outward behavior from these guys.

D.2. This particular group was skeptical of Jesus because they thought that he was against the Law because he was doing things like healing people on the Sabbath/ate meals with prostitutes...

D.3. He starts by saying, "You had heard it said that you should not commit..." and by doing that he's referring back to the OT.

D.4. And then he immediately shows that he's not against the Law at all but instead is reinterpreting it – this is how it was supposed to be interpreted all along.

D.5. He's saying, "You think the Law is concerned only about your behavior? You think God only cares about your actions? No. It goes way deeper than that – it's about your heart."

E. Now, the vast majority of us should be getting nervous here, why?

E.1. Because the heat is being turned up on us.

E.2. He shows up and says, "Hey these guys are wrong. God doesn't count you as righteous in this area just because you haven't physically committed adultery. I'm not primarily concerned with outward obedience. I'm concerned with your heart. I'm concerned with internal transformation. It's not just your actions I want – it's all of you."

E.3. Listen, God is not primarily concerned with your behaviors. They matter, yes. But he's chiefly concerned with your internal world. Your mind. Your thoughts. Your heart.

E.4. Proverbs 4 says above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it.

F. This reveals something really deep. The origin of our lust, of all sin, is the heart.

F.1. It is critical that we understand this – our actions are driven by the desires of our heart. In other words, there is a reason you do what you do.

F.2. I've been Christian for 15 years, lots of accountability groups...one of the most common things you're going to hear when people are sharing with one another is something to the effect of, "Oh hey, I messed up again this week. I over-ate. I yelled at my spouse. I drank too much. Look at porn. Masturbated. But, it's because, I was really stressed out. My wife was driving me nuts. My husband is inattentive. Work is crazy. Roommate is an idiot.

- F.3. One thing we learn here from Christ's is that most of us talk about our sin, the areas we struggle with, like it's a problem that exists out there. If I could just solve this issue with my spouse or my job or my loneliness, everything would right itself.
- F.4. When it comes to dealing with sin, our default is to say that something outside of us is the reason we acted the way we did.
- F.5. Christ is saying no. Your heart ought to be your focus because that's the engine that drives your actions. Until you realize this you're never going to take ownership and you're never going to stop blame-shifting and you're never going to be able to get to the root of why you do what you do.
- G. Christ speaks to this – the word Jesus uses for lust here, as we've covered, means an inordinate desire, it's an over-desire, if you will.
- G.1. Here's what he's getting at: *lust is an issue, we're over-desiring sex, because, at the end of the day, we're trying to get too much out of it. We're trying to get out of sex what ultimately needs to come from God. It's true of all our addictions.*
- G.2. This is why, no matter how hard, we can't "just stop it."
- G.3. Sex/lust is particularly tricky because our sexuality is so deeply rooted in who we are.
- H. How do these desires tend to play out in our lives?
- H.1. Maybe it's an addiction to porn. Maybe it's an addiction to relationships.
- H.2. So if you're single, maybe the thought it, "Hey, if I just get a spouse, if somebody would just love me for me, then I'll feel valuable. I'll feel lovable."
- H.3. Maybe you were like that and you ended up getting married, I bet there are problems in your marriage because of it. You've realized that your spouse doesn't have the ability to love you perfectly, like you wanted, and so you're controlling. you're angry. You've withdrawal emotionally, maybe physically.
- H.4. You drink too much. You eat too much. You're obsessed with your body and what you look like on the outside.
- H.5. All of these, Jesus tells us, are the misplaced desires of our hearts.
- I. Here's some good news.
- I.1. By saying a desire is misplaced, he's telling us that the core desire in and of itself isn't bad. It's not the root desire that's wicked, it's our misplacement of it.
- I.2. There is something in all of us that desires, rightly, to be loved. See beauty! To be cherished. To be lovable. To look at something or someone and take in and be overwhelmed by beauty and experience, because of it, in a hard, difficult world, find moments of peace, and rest, and transcendence.
- I.3. But for so many of us we've hijacked that innate, good desire, and we're looking in the entirely wrong place.
- I.4. You've got to understand this in order to get control of the sin in your life.

I.5. [MY STORY]

I.6. Until we realize what's underneath our sin. Until we deal with the desires of our heart. We're never going to thrive and the people that God has made us to be.

I.7. Christ comes and he tells us that until we channel our desires properly, until we can see ourselves how Christ sees us, until we allow ourselves to be loved and defined by him, we'll never live as we ought to live. We'll never be authentic. We'll never have freedom. We're going to come back to this idea. Let's get practical.

V. CHALLENGES

A. Christ expands our view, he redefines the issue, now he challenges us in our actions. Some of you are thinking, "please give me some practical advice for lust."

B. Three things here: 1) Take action; 2) Be known; 3) And be healed.

C. Take Action

C.1. As much as he talks about the heart as the root of the issue, Jesus is still telling us that we've got to have self-control/actions matter.

C.2. He says [READ VV 29-30]

C.3. Christ is speaking in hyperbole here. Doesn't really want us to pluck out our eyes or cut off our hand (even blind men struggle with lust). He's saying, "Hey, sometimes you've got to take drastic action in order to control the issues if your life."

D. What are some things we can do?

D.1. Back to the idea of lust and sexual desire, you need to understand that those are different things or you'll be in bondage.

D.2. We need to know that it's okay to find someone sexually attractive. And if you don't understand the difference between that and lust then you're always going to feel guilty.

D.3. Martin Luther said something like, "You can't stop birds the birds from flying over your head but you can stop them from nesting in your hair." He's getting at the point sexual desire is part of you. Not awful to think someone is beautiful. It's awful to lust after them. To fantasize. You can't help but find some people attractive, but you can have control over the thoughts about that person. You have to fight from fantasizing. Lusting after them. Wanting to objectify them. Don't take that second glance. Don't stare and linger.

D.4. But you shouldn't be wracked with guilt every time you walk down the street in Austin, TX and see an attractive person.

E. On another practical note, many of us could use to take inventory of what's in our lives and get rid of the unnecessary temptation.

E.1. What do you watch? TV shows or movies? I talk to a lot of people who have expressed some kind of struggle in the area of lust, and say

something about a TV show they love, “Oh hey have you seen this show? It’s one of the best ever. Tons of nudity though!” Seriously? Then why do you watch it? If you struggle then why are you putting yourself in that position? If you struggle with alcohol you shouldn’t be hanging out at bars. I’ve struggled with lust in my own life and I know darn good and well that, because that’s true, I’ve got to be careful with what I watch on TV. A show that’s routinely been described to me as “great but it has a lot of nudity” doesn’t sound like something that would be wise for me to do.

E.2. What’s your internet situation?! Do you have accountability software? Do people know what you do online? Is there any visibility to your browsing? Why not? I’ve heard from numerous guys who struggled with porn say, “Slows down my internet.” Seriously? Do you care at all? Some of us need to grow up, take ownership, give up some of our little comforts, and start fighting sin like we mean it. You think about the gravity of the situation Christ presents. Gauge out your eye. Better that than be thrown into hell. That’s serious language. Are you serious about it? If you say you’re really broken over your sin but you refuse to disable Safari on your iPhone I’m calling BS on you. You’re not broken. You’re not serious. You don’t really care. You’d rather be the little god of your life and you worship yourself and your convenience and your comfort. You need to wake up. Christ is telling you that you need to take action because you’ve started a fire in your life and it will eventually consume and destroy you.

E.3. “I know ‘take action’ is vague.” But if you’re struggling with lust in your life, you need to step back, think for a bit about where/what/when you feel tempted, and make some proactive effort to remove those things.

F. The next thing is “be known.” I am totally convinced that there are a lot of us in this room who are slaves to lust and porn and fantasies and flirting with your co-workers and people on Facebook because all of this stuff is in your life and not a single other person knows about it. When its in the dark it is so much more powerful.

F.1. What are doing? You show up here and you show up to CG and you pretend everything is cool, but I know that you’re miserable. Look, I’ve been there, and it’s exhausting. It’s such an exhausting way to live. And it’s empty. Because even if people like you, you know they don’t really know you so you can’t really feel loved by anyone. You know the whole thing is a sham.

F.2. Why do you pretend? You don’t trust what God has done for you? God is not glorified by how good we appear to everyone else. He’s glorified when we say, “I’m a total mess and yet he still loves me.” He’s not happy or glorified with you living a sham.

F.3. One of the things Christ calls us to is to just be honest. With him. With other people. To step out and be known. To bring our sin into the light of community and let the act of confession and repentance bring us freedom. If you keep your sin secret then you’re trading freedom for slavery and

you'll live a miserable & stunted existence. And you'll never be the authentic version of yourself that God created you to be.

- F.4. Choose freedom. Confess your sin. Be known. Get into a Fight Club where you can talk with one or two other people who can really get to know you and walk alongside of you and remind you of the truth that God loves not just some future version of you when you fix yourself, but you right now in this very moment.

G. Take action. Be known. Be healed. And this is where we'll wrap up.

- H. Remember how we said earlier that we will never experience true healing until we can see ourselves how Christ sees us? Maybe this is the only thing God brought you here to listen to today, but you will never experience freedom from lust, fantasies, porn, your crushing loneliness and discontentment with your situation in life until you allow yourself to be loved and defined by him. The first step to freedom is to open up your empty hands of faith and look up. Let go. And adopt God's view of you. Not because of who you are, but because of who Christ is.
- I. This is hard to do. I know. I'm one of those people who doesn't have a hard time believing that God has paid my debt and taken my sin away, but I do have an extremely hard time believing that he actually likes me. Much less that he actually loves me. I know myself. I know my struggles and my fears and my insecurities and my ugliness. Wilde!
- J. Yet, Christ, the maker of sex, beauty, love, intimacy, calls me his bride. It's odd language, but throughout Scripture we're given that metaphor to describe our relationship with Christ. We're told that we are the "bride of Christ." Eph 5
- K. Tim Keller, a pastor in Manhattan, explains this is a way that I found helpful.
- K.1. He says, "As a minister I do a lot of weddings/I stand in a unique place." – Bride walks down and every culture has some variation on the wedding dress...every culture has wedding garments that are worn.
- K.2. No matter what she looks like in reality, on that day she is beautiful because she is clothed in this wedding gown.
- K.3. The groom stands up there and he simply can't wait for her to be in his arms.
- K.4. When Scripture says we are the bride of Christ, it is telling us that we are clothed in the gown of the righteousness of Christ.
- K.5. If you are Christian, when Christ went to the cross, he not only took your sin but there was a great exchange of your sin for his righteousness.
- K.6. A status of righteousness before God so that when he looks at you he doesn't see your sin, your failings, your disbelief, but he sees you as perfect and righteous, because you were made that way in Jesus.
- K.7. Christ stands at the altar as our groom and says come to me my beloved! Don't stay back, come to me. I can't wait to be with you. You're good enough because I made you good enough.

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. This is the first step toward healing for all of us. See yourself how God sees you. See yourself how you really are. Make your primary desire to know him and be known by Him. To love him and to be loved by him. And he will slowly and surely break down and re-build your self-image, your self-worth, your sense of meaning, your entire heart.