

Well, we're looking at the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus is kind of turned the corner.

And as I mentioned last week, they're not just speaking in generic terms about true righteousness, kingdom righteousness, but now he's starting to step on toes.

and he's getting specific with individual topics.

Last week it was anger that Jesus called murder of the heart.

I wonder if anybody had a temptation this past week to just really blow up and you didn't.

No?

testimonies?

All right.

Today we're talking with something else of the heart.

Jesus

calls it adultery of the heart, and it's a common issue everywhere, and that is lust.

And here's not just the big idea today, but the big warning, Proverbs 11, 6, the righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their lust.

You know, it's easier than you think to be taken captive by lust of any form.

And so the big idea this morning is this, that lust is not just an eye issue, it's a heart issue.

And the memory verse this morning is this, above all else, guard your heart, for out of it flow the issues of life.

That's everything.

Flows from your heart.

Proverbs 4.23.

Well,

Jesus, fully human, was a single man that the Scripture says was tempted in every way, yet without sin.

That means Jesus was tempted to lust, to not just notice beauty, but to dwell on it, to objectify it.

And yet He did not.

He did not sin.

We know that in this greatest sermon of Jesus,

that this thing of lust must have been a big enough deal even in his day that he saw the need to address this in this sermon.

Think about it.

Back then, no movies, no social media, no online porn, and yet it was a big deal even back then.

How much more today do we need to guard ourselves from lust of any form?

we're going to be talking about lust because lust isn't just sexual lust.

It's lusting after things.

It's lusting after food.

It's lusting after convenience.

It's lusting after power.

It's lusting after ease and blessing and the easy path, the wide Rd.

Well, we're looking at Matthew chapter 5 this morning, verses 27 through 32.

So open up your copy of scripture or turn it on.

I'm going to read it for you this morning, beginning in Matthew 5, 27.

You have heard that it was said, Jesus is making the contrast by what they've heard from the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, the scribes, interpretations of the law.

And he's going to say, but I say to you, Jesus had the authority as the living word to speak the written word.

You have 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.

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.

Wow, I think Jesus is pretty serious here.

He's using a very severe illustration.

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 your whole body go into hell.

It was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give a certificate of divorce.

But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife except on the ground of sexual immorality makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

We'll unpack that in just a moment.

But the truth about lust and adultery, according to Jesus, is that first of all, a person can commit adultery without touching anyone.

That isn't what the scribes and the Pharisees taught.

They taught that adultery is an external act.

Remember, Jesus is bringing them and all of us back to character, not just conduct, to the heart, not just action.

To the scribes and the Pharisees, it was stepping out of a marriage relationship to have sexual

relations with someone else.

And in the Old Testament, as Bible students know, it carried the death penalty.

Why?

Because of this dishonor it caused to God, to His holy institution of marriage, to the family, the spouse, the community.

They saw it as a community thing.

that God would bring punishment for that.

And so there was a very serious consequence.

They also taught that it was sinful for a single person to have relations with another single person outside of marriage.

Young women were to present themselves pure and holy as virgins to their new husbands.

Purity and honor were sacred

aspects of the holy marriage, and it was something to be guarded by everybody, by everybody.

By the way, in case you might, surely you don't believe this, but you hear it right, things have not changed.

God still has the standard for purity in sexual relationships.

Nothing has changed despite all you see in films.

And despite the stats that you read and all you see on social media, they have fallen away from God's true standard of purity and beauty and holiness and the joy of A1 flesh relationship with one person for life.

Instead, we're bombarded by broken relationships

and sex degraded to an activity, causing emotional scarring and mistrust in marriage, temptations from past relationships, broken people, broken marriages, broken families.

Sexual relationships were designed by God to be between one man and one woman.

Why?

Because it creates A1 bond, one body, one flesh relationship.

Why?

Because it also protects the family.

It protects health.

It reflects the holy relationship between Christ and his bride, the church.

I mean, that's what Jesus said, right?

The marriage supper of the Lamb and the church is the bride and Jesus is the groom and it's holy.

That's one of the reasons that marriage is so holy, because it's a picture of Jesus and the church.

It's part of God's beautiful design and better story.

And yet the religious professionals in Jesus' day taught an external, superficial holiness.

For them, adultery was a sinful, external action.

But Jesus corrected them.

He pushed back by teaching them that someone could perhaps never touch a woman, but still commit adultery against her in his heart.

So lust.

is a very serious sin issue with Jesus.

And so he gave this example of the eye and the hand, of plucking the eye out, cutting the hand off.

He wasn't telling us, oh, today, let's go

dismember ourselves, he was making a point of how serious we should take this thing of lust, whether it's lust after a person or your favorite idol or something else in your life.

And he gives the consequence.

He says it's better that you lose one of your members than your whole body go into hell.

Jesus knew

that it was various forms of lust and idolatry that would pull people's souls away from God, their hearts away from God.

And they might have intended one day to focus on and get right with him, but they never did.

They were enticed by their false lovers, by their false gods, their false idols, their idols of the heart.

And so ended up in a Christless eternity.

Lust is a very, very serious issue, and we can't blow this off.

We can't just say what's something that every guy or girl does.

It's natural.

Well, what if consuming lust keeps you or someone you know from ever giving their life to Jesus?

What if lust keeps you from fulfilling God's purpose?

What if you miss God's purpose because you're so caught up in one form of lust or another?

What if you have serial broken relationships because of your lust?

What if you can never be satisfied with your spouse because of lust in these false images?

I asked for some responses one time to this topic and I want to share some of these anonymous cards.

This one says, it's my heart's desire to love my wife

But my thoughts are hard to keep in line with holiness.

I read the Bible every day, but sometimes my thoughts

How about this?

God, I need your grace in dealing with the besetting sin of lust and looking at things on the internet and in movies that I should not watch.

Honesty.

God found me lacking with a true heart change.

When I thought I had such a deep relationship and respect for God, I faced temptation that affected my marriage.

Never did I once think I would look at another person other than my husband, but I did.

And I confessed to my husband out of conviction.

But that made me realize where I really was at.

Last one.

God, this week I want to leave the signature sin of pornography.

I want to grow in my walk with you.

Maybe you cannot relate to those.

Maybe you very much can relate to those honest statements of confession.

But whatever it is,

We have to understand that lust is a very serious sin issue, whatever form it takes.

It'll pull our hearts away from true kingdom living.

We will not experience God's blessing, his favor, and it might just pull a person away from making a commitment to truly follow Jesus before it's too late.

Well, third thing about lust, and this is obvious, lust often leads to adultery in marriage and then to divorce.

Jesus follows this teaching about lust and goes right into divorce.

Did you notice that?

Lust, divorce.

Because divorce doesn't just happen.

It occurs over time.

After one's wounded or disordered heart begins to long after other lovers, it's a downward spiral of not guarding one's heart.

James tells us in James 1, 13-15, don't let anybody say, I'm being tempted by God.

For God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.

But listen to this, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Then desire when it is conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Somebody give me an amen on that.

Sin's going to kill something.

I can't play around with it and get away with it.

It's going to kill something.

Same for you.

And so Jesus continues his teaching in verses 31 through 32.

We already read it.

Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

That's what it was said in his day.

But Jesus says, I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife except on the ground of sexual immorality makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery, if in that situation, of course.

Now the warning is we shouldn't take this out of biblical, cultural context.

So what is that?

The rabbis in Jesus' day came from two schools of thought.

Perhaps you've heard this before.

There was the good Rabbi Hillel, and he says that a man can divorce his wife for any reason at all.

And it was literally any shameful thing.

This is hard to hear, ladies, but it could be her looks.

her performance, how much she burned the food, anything that he considered shameful, he could divorce her.

Can you imagine that?

How sick and evil that is.

Rabbi Shammai

interpret it this way.

A man could divorce his wife only on the grounds of adultery.

And even then, it must be an official thing.

He must get a certificate of divorce.

So obviously, by what Jesus said, Jesus was in this camp, not the former camp.

And by extension of what other scriptures teach in the New Testament, we can put abandonment in this category with adultery.

Paul says that a believing spouse can let an unbelieving spouse leave if they want.

I personally believe that abandonment also applies to the abandonment of marriage vows due to physical abuse.

Well, let's remember that Jesus never commanded divorce in the case of adultery.

He focused on unconditional love, forgiveness, reconciliation as the first and best approach in any conflict.

Divorce was permissible in the case of physical adultery, but not encouraged.

Adultery was an exclusion if there could be no reconciliation.

Man, I have been a pastor long enough to see God do some miracles.

Can I just give you 2 examples?

random names, right?

This couple were going through some pretty tough marriage issues.

I'd done some counseling with them.

And one day I heard that they were going to go ahead and file.

And they filed for divorce.

And then it came down to one day where the woman in this case, who really wanted the divorce, but so did her husband,

She was going to take the next step and finalize everything.

And God gave her heart some hope.

She talked with her husband.

Then they moved away a bit.

And fast forward, I'm not exaggerating, it had to be at least 25 years.

I'm at the Sight and Sound Theater in Branson, Missouri.

Ever been there?

Our ladies are going, right?

And I'm in that huge lobby and I bump in to Jim and Donna and they're together after 25 years.

And they told me that they were one day away of making this decision final and God softened their hearts.

And they were happily married 25 years, still 25 years later when I stumbled upon them in Branson.

Another couple.

I was at the gym and I'm there in the locker room and there's a guy named Monty and he says, Pastor Steve, I haven't seen, he and his wife used to come to our church.

I haven't seen you in ages.

And we caught up a little bit and he said, my wife and I are going to go on our 30-year anniversary, a trip to Italy.

That might not mean much to you, but you see, I had walked through them through infidelity in both their situations.

A crazy, stupid, open marriage thinking that would solve anything, which only made it disastrously worse.

and all kinds of dysfunction over years.

I was so frustrated with them.

And then I didn't see him anymore.

And years later, in the locker room, he told me that God had healed their marriage.

This stuff really happens.

God can do miraculous things when two people want to put him first in their lives and commit to holy

Holy marriage.

It's a big deal.

So there is hope if you're struggling.

There's people who can help you.

There's a church behind you.

Well, if we get back to this thing about divorce, you see in Deuteronomy 24, we see that the divorce that Moses permitted was actually a severing of the original marriage relationship.

God permitted the woman to marry again

And her second marriage was not considered adulterous.

The second man that she married was called a husband and not an adulterer.

So what was happening that a man would put away his wife when he wanted to get rid of her and not divorce her?

Maybe this is what Joseph was tempted to do with Mary, is just put her away privately, sending her home for Mary to live with her parents or some relative somewhere.

What was happening is men would put away their wives, not divorce them, not give them the courtesy of divorce, but just put them away.

So they were in limbo.

So if they ever married another man, they were committing a divorce because they were still married.

That was going on in Jesus' day.

How evil is that?

The law of Moses permitted an official divorce that gave, included the right to remarry without committing adultery.

But Jesus again,

not looking at the externals, looked at the heart.

And Jesus was for redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness in any relationship.

That's his priority.

So again, lust is not just an eye issue, it's an issue of the heart.

And that's what it was for Israel.

So when you read the Old Testament prophets, so many of them, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,

The minor prophets, all in the deal, Hosea, deal with the problem of idolatry and a term, they term it with words like lust, lusting after Babylon, right?

Lusting after these other nations and their kings and the way they do things.

These prophets called it lust and it was truly idolatry.

Idolatry.

In Jose and Ezekiel's day, for example, lust wasn't a sex thing.

It was a stuff thing.

It was material possessions.

It was power.

It was money.

It was comfort.

It was safety.

from other armies.

It was ease, it was abundance.

It was being like the other nations.

Why do we have to follow Yahweh?

Why don't we follow these other nations and their gods?

Because they're doing better than us.

We're having some famine, some drought.

We've been conquered by nation after nation.

And they lusted after the conveniences of these other nations.

So it was a heart issue of lust for them.

So how do you do that?

How do you deal with that?

Let me give you some ideas here.

First thing is just make a decision.

No matter what you're lusting after, make a decision.

Do you have an old nature only or do you have a new nature?

And is your new nature your true nature?

Paul says it this way in Colossians 3, put to death, therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry, there it is, because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived.

Paul's saying, yeah, BC, before Christ,

You might have thought with these patterns, walked in these ways, but you have one true nature now.

You're a son or daughter of God.

You've been forgiven and redeemed.

You've been given a new nature that sets its mind on the Lord and not on the world.

So make the decision.

Who are you?

It's all about identity in fighting lust.

It's not, oh, I'm going to do better.

It's not woe is me, I messed up again.

It's claiming your identity in Christ.

John the Apostle in 1 John 2 says this, for all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of a life, is not from the Father, but it is from the world.

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

I mean, the question is, have you been born from above?

Have you been born again, a new birth where you have a new nature, a new identity, and you don't have to think everything that other people do?

You don't have to say everything.

You don't have to do everything that you're truly, your mind is set on things above.

So who are you to identify your false lovers and idols of the heart?

I mean, hearts are idle factories, yes?

And we get to fight it all the time.

Who are your false lovers?

Your false idols?

You got to be brave enough to deal with them.

You have unhealed wounds from past abuse.

Or maybe you lust after things because you grew up poor.

I mean, there's reasons we do things.

Maybe it's family of origin issues.

Maybe it's a craving for true intimacy with God and with someone else and you've replaced it with lust instead of real intimacy.

Maybe it's past sexual abuse issues.

Whatever it is, the Bible warns us, guard your heart because everything's going to flow from your heart.

Third, set your mind on things above.

Colossians 3 says this, since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

You've died to your old self.

Set your mind on things above, those things of Philippians

4, 6, 7, 8.

whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are right, whatever things are pure and lovely, and of good repute, if there's anything excellent or worthy of praise, set your mind on these things.

Set your mind on things above, not below.

Don't be conformed by the people around you.

Romans 12, 1-2, Paul reminds us that

We present ourselves as living sacrifices to God, and we're not conformed to this world, but rather we're transformed by the renewing of our mind.

How do we do that?

We immerse ourselves with God's people, not people who discount God.

We immerse ourselves in the Word of God that gives us strength for our souls.

We immerse ourselves in Christian music, in Christian activities, in serving people, in the body of Christ, in a set-apart lifestyle.

That's how we set our mind on things above.

It isn't just removing something from our lives.

You know that parable that Jesus taught about the demons?

It's in Matthew 12.

It says, when an evil spirit is driven out of a man, that's a good thing.

The evil spirit leaves as Jesus set many people free.

He says, it goes through

arid places, seeking rest, doesn't find it.

Then it says, I'll return to the house I left.

When it arrives, it finds the house empty, swept, clean, put in order, but it's not been replaced by anything good.

So the demon says, I'm going to go.

He gets seven other demons more wicked than itself, and they go in that house and they live there, and the final condition of that man is worse than the first.

This is how it will be with this wicked generation, Jesus says.

See, it didn't matter of just, you have a list.

Okay, I got to get rid of this, I got to get rid of this, I shouldn't think anymore, shouldn't watch that anymore, and you have your list.

Well, that's good, I suppose, but what are you going to replace it with?

Our hearts have to be set, our minds have to be set on things above, things of God and God's people.

And so really Jesus said, take the steps to pluck out your eye or cut off your hand.

No, not literally, but I wonder what steps he would have you take to get rid of the idols of your

heart.

So it's like a checklist, okay?

If your lust happens to be in the sexual realm of things, remove access to porn.

Alcoholics don't hang around in bars, do they?

Get accountability.

Have somebody else have a password, right?

Use media in a careful manner.

Maybe there's some apps you should remove.

Maybe guys, your wife should have the the four digit passcode for you to be able to download an app on your smart TV.

Maybe you don't need that.

That's one way that I've chosen to have have some protection.

A little bit of protection is Susan has that password, not me.

What are you watching?

What are you streaming?

Who are you texting and chatting with?

I hope it's not people of the opposite sex other than your spouse.

Are there any relationships that you just need to break off?

Maybe it's not sexual.

Maybe it's material.

Maybe it's coveting what other people have.

Maybe it's you.

cutting off that hand that shops on Amazon when you have no need for anything.

You just want to shop.

Maybe it's buying only what you can pay for.

There's a novel thought.

What if it's not that?

What if it's a mental or emotional lust that you can't walk past?

Oh man, this is preaching to me now.

You can't walk past the cookie and cake aisle.

What if it's breaking away from fast food as a lifestyle?

What if it's dealing with the cause of why you're eating your emotions?

What if it's stop getting intoxicated, just stop it.

In all areas, it means asking for accountability.

Well, we could go on, there's different types of lust.

But Jesus chose to talk about lust on purpose even in his day.

He knows how powerful it is when combined with any form of brokenness or idolatries of the heart or lack of true intimacy with God or another person.

I've been, I'll close with this, I've been reading, I think I mentioned this last week maybe, I don't know, confessions, St.

Augustine's confessions.

And I don't know why I'm reading it now.

I just am, you know, it's that thick.

And I read a quote the other day because Saint Augustine, the thing that kept him from Christianity much too long, he squandered his early years.

But the thing that kept him away from true faith was lust.

He was consumed by lust.

and he couldn't break away.

And he wrote this in book 3, chapter 11.

This is the quote, O my perverse soul, why do you go on following your flesh?

Instead, let it be converted so that it will follow you.

What a great statement.

How about for once,

allowing your flesh to follow your soul instead of your heart following your flesh.

So what does that mean for you today?

Maybe it means some confession.

Maybe it means some accountability.

The Bible says we're healed not when we confess our sins.

We're healed when we confess our sins one to another.

When somebody else knows about it and you're talking about it, that's when healing takes place.

deeply examine your heart.

What are the little idols, the false lovers that are keeping you from living out God's better story for your life?

Is there anything that just needs to be cut off this week?

And how will you fill that void with true intimacy, with
godly people, godly things, God's word, worship, service.

So let's pray that God will keep us from any false lovers that will sabotage anything good that he wants to do in our lives.