

EXODUS

תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה

40

Exodus 20:14

Adultery

The Seventh Commandment

We are continuing through Exodus with a slow walk through the ten commandments. So we will get to Exodus 20 verse 14 in a minute.

But today is Palm Sunday. This was the day that kicked off the week that led to Jesus' crucifixion on Friday and His resurrection on Sunday.

On this day, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey as a conquering king. Scripture had predicted that the Savior would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey to rule the world from sea to sea.

***Zechariah 9:9-10* 9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

And so Jesus rode in on a donkey, just as Zechariah had predicted.

And as he came into the city, the people were waving palm branches. In 141 BC, a guy named Simon the Maccabee drove Syrian occupiers out of Jerusalem and they celebrated by waving palm branches, which became a nationalist symbol and were used as the flag of Israel for 200 years. So they waved these flags and laid coats in the road like a red carpet. It was a patriotic parade, with everybody celebrating the fact that Jesus was coming to conquer. They shouted, "Hosanna," save us now, expecting a military salvation.

But then the parade took a surprise turn, and the conquering king did something totally unexpected:

Luke 19:41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

The conquering king comes and weeps over the city. You don't expect William Wallace to ride in on a horse and start crying. This is unexpected.

But he weeps because He knows the city has missed who He was. He was their God who took on flesh and lived among them. But the people who should have known Him and embraced Him for the most part didn't receive Him. They rejected God when He came into their midst. And he knew judgment was going to come as a result:

43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

So Jesus weeps over the city of Jerusalem, weeps over the fact that they missed their visitation by God, and that soon the city would be destroyed in judgment (which happened about 40 years later in 70AD.)

He isn't coming into town rallying the troops. He is coming into town with tears. His relationship with these people wasn't first and foremost the relationship of a general to his army, but of a husband to his wife.

In fact, the entire reason that God came up with the marriage relationship was to demonstrate what his love for His people is like:

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the

church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

So he says that marriage refers to Christ and the church. The husband-wife relationship was made to show what Christ's relationship to his church is like. Look how strongly he says this. He doesn't say that "marriage is a good illustration of what Jesus and the church is like." He is saying that marriage exists to refer to the Christ/Church relationship. It's as if God said, "I want my people to know what my relationship to them is like, so I will invent the institution of marriage to show it."

That's pretty strong. The marriage of a husband and a wife is a God-designed relationship whose primary purpose is to demonstrate to humanity what kind of relationship God wants with people. That's what marriage is for.

Which gives an extra weight to the seventh commandment that we're looking at today:

Exodus 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery."

This marriage union is so sacred and means so much, that to commit adultery is to violate one of the fundamental and root commands in God's moral law.

Marriage is a place where we reflect the faithfulness of God as we are faithful to our spouses. Just as God has a covenant relationship with His people, married people are put by God into a covenant relationship with each other. It's a covenant of total devotion, where you give yourself completely and totally to a person of the opposite sex.

When you get married, you say, “All I am is yours.” The Bible describes this relationship of one where you can be naked and unashamed - nothing is hidden. You’re fully known, fully surrendered - all of your plans, all of your dreams, all of your finances, your life, your body, all of you is given to this other person.

And your covenant with this other person is “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; and I promise to be faithful to only you until death parts us.”

To get married and to consummate that marriage in the marriage bed is to say that you are giving yourself to a person permanently, completely, and exclusively.

And to make a marriage official, there are two aspects: a public oath, and then the consummation. The sign of that union is the sexual relationship, and each time a husband and wife come together intimately they are renewing their marriage vows. That’s what sex is for.

And with your body you continually renew that vow in a husband/wife sexual relationship. You say with your body again and again what you’ve already said with all of your life.

So that’s a major purpose of a sexual relationship.

Christians follow biblical commands about sex not because it is a dirty thing. Christians don’t think sex is a dirty thing, they think it’s a powerful thing and a beautiful thing and a holy thing. And because its purpose is to renew the vows, it is reserved by Christians only for the marriage relationship.

And to take sex outside of that sacred union is to misuse it and to sin against God and your partner. When single people have sex they are essentially lying - they are saying with their body what is not true with their lives.

When you sleep together outside of marriage you are saying with your body “I’m all yours and holding nothing back,” but with your life you’re saying I’m not totally committed to you and I’d like a time period in which I can still opt out if someone

better comes along or if you prove to be deficient somehow. Not so romantic. And certainly demeaning.

It's being fully one with your body and uncommitted with your life, so sex becomes a lie and it's probably why people who live together before marriage are more likely to get divorced, not less. They get used to not going all in on each other and just using one another. It's a bad pattern for life.

So to say that the Bible has commands about sexuality is not to be just a legalistic traditionalist. It's to say that God gave us a powerful gift to be used wisely.

So single people who sleep together are misusing sex and sinning against God and against one another.

Hebrews 13:4 “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

It doesn't say God might judge them. But God will judge them. We misuse sexuality as single people and fall in this category of sexually immoral. Or we can misuse it as married people and fall into the category of adulterous.

And If you're married and sleep with someone who is not your spouse, or if you're single and sleep with a married person, you're committing adultery and breaking this 7th commandment. Even if it is 2019, because sex is still powerful and still has its original purpose. We haven't moved beyond all that.

And as Christians, we are supposed to be becoming more like the God we worship. And God is a promise making and promise keeping God. He is a God who enters a covenant and doesn't break it. And as a reflection of that, we enter into and keep our covenants, and only use the signs of the covenant in God-honoring ways.

Now already, if you're responsive to God's word and God's spirit, you may be feeling a weight of guilt. That will get worse before it gets better today. Because God's design for these commands was always that they be kept from the heart, not only on the surface.

Deuteronomy 6:5-6 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart"

God's commands are not only meant to shape the things we do, but the things we think, the things we desire, and the things we love.

He is a God who is going after the hearts of His people, not just the external obedience.

And in case there was any doubt that that's what God was after, God came and walked among us. And he taught us the heart of the commands. Jesus came and taught these commandments.

And this is important to say because sometimes we think that when Jesus came, He got rid of commands. He ushered in grace.

The law was the harsh teacher, but Jesus came as the cool, hip, young teacher. He was like Robin Williams character in Dead Poet's Society, John Keating, who comes and teaches the students to live with passion and rip the rigid chapters out of their books. Jesus comes along, we think, and stands on the desk and over throws the commandments to free us.

Sometimes we'll come to a command like this and say, "Yeah, but that's Old Testament. It's outdated. Thank God Jesus came to get rid of these commands and usher in grace. Well here's what Jesus actually said:

Matthew 5:17-19 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes

one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus didn't overthrow the Old Testament laws. He taught what they really meant and exposed the heart of them. He did exactly what you would expect God to do with his law - apply them with surgical precision to the heart, to use them to go far more deeply into our being than surface obedience.

And we said last week that the command to murder was concerned that we not only not murder, but that we don't have the heart of a murderer, where we treat people like human garbage.

And when Jesus teaches about adultery, he doesn't abolish the seventh commandment, he doesn't treat it like it is obsolete and old fashioned, he gets to the heart of it:

Matthew 5: 27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

The kind of covenant keeping he calls for is not only being faithful and pure outwardly, but inwardly. Jesus says, "But if you're lusting, it is just as bad on the inside of your heart as full-blown adultery is. You have an adulterous heart either way.

Now we don't define lust too narrowly. It isn't noticing the physical beauty or attractiveness of a person. It's not any degree of physical attraction - God made physical attraction. But it is doing with your mind what would be sin to do with your body.

So lust includes feeding fantasies, every form of pornography, sexting and sexual conversations with someone that is not your spouse, emotional affairs, erotic literature that excites through thoughts or images. It's all in that junk drawer of lustful behavior. And Jesus says what is in your heart when you engage in these

things is what is in the heart of a full-blown adulterer. It's the same heart - and God's commands apply to the heart.

So we would take all of those forms of lust as a violation of God's commandment for sexuality.

And one of the strengths I've seen in our church is that we are pretty good at transparency and confession. So it's certainly common when guys get together to have a Jesus-centered conversation that they will confess lust, or for women to do the same when they get together.

And certainly in the right setting we need to keep doing that.

James 5:16 "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

If our lust is as serious as Jesus said here (and we can take Him at his word!), then it's right to confess that, it's necessary to confess it, we need to not hide it. We're not fooling God, and we're not fooling one another by pretending not to be affected by what our culture shoves in front of us every day.

We should not be phony.

But we shouldn't replace a phony failure to confess this with a phony confession.

And what I mean is we can confess because it plays well with other Christians, but not change anything.

Or we can confess but half excuse our sin by saying, "Ah, we're all sinners anyways."

Or we confess but somehow leave that time of sharing believing that it is inevitable that we'll continue doing exactly what we were doing.

Look what Jesus says next:

Matthew 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

He says if your eye or hand causes you to sin, remove the eye or hand. Now Jesus isn't speaking literally here - there is no evidence that any of his followers who first heard this went away and maimed themselves.

But he is saying that if we are really confessing sin in any kind of effective and real way, it has to be accompanied by war against that sin. And if not, the confession is phony.

Look what is at stake in fighting lust.

Jesus says hell.

Which doesn't mean we earn our way to heaven by fighting lust.

It means that those who know God will fight sin.

There should be a war within all of us for cleanness of thought and action.

And if there is no war - if there is no aggressive attack of this sin in our lives, it is giving evidence to the fact that we don't know God. If you will not fight lust then your destiny is the fire.

Our commitment to not commit adultery, to honor the marriage covenant, and to fight even adulterous thoughts is evidence of our knowing God.

You don't know the covenant faithfulness of God if you don't fight for your own covenant faithfulness. The reason we're OK with adultery or OK with porn or OK with sex outside of the covenant of marriage is because we don't know God.

Don't Christians struggle with this?

YES. They struggle. They don't accept it.

You're not unpacking your boxes moving in w girlfriend and "struggling." That's what you do when you stop struggling. That's what you do when you are committing to a path against the words of Jesus because you don't believe Him.

A struggle is a struggle.

I've hiked a few small mountains in my life, a few of the high peaks in the Adirondacks. And to climb a mountain can be a struggle. To struggle up a mountain looks sometimes like moving slowly. It can look like a fall that sends you rolling down part of the mountain. It can look like a broken leg or a sprained ankle. But you're working on that mountain.

You can't sit on the beach drinking a drink with an umbrella in it and honestly say, "I'm struggling to climb the mountain right now." You're actually not struggling. You're not climbing at all.

You might feel guilty about not climbing the mountain. You might wish you were a mountain climber. But you're not struggling.
And so often what we call a struggle against lust looks more like *not struggling*.

Still putting ourselves in tempting situations, still ignoring the creeping distance in our marriage, still spending alone time with that other person, still living together, still watching that series on netflix that we know is laced with pornography. We sit on the beach and say, "I'm struggling."

Struggling to climb a mountain looks like struggling to climb a mountain. And struggling to fight lust looks like something - it looks like real change, and because the Spirit is inside you and the fruit of the Spirit is self-control, it also looks like real and frequent victory.

And please don't take my word for it, look at these words of Jesus - they are saying that if you don't struggle, it is safe for you to assume you are not a Christian. (Because Christians don't go to hell - and Jesus said those who don't struggle do.)

You can't be on a train headed east and a train headed west at the same time. When we choose the affair, we are not doing that alongside our choice to follow Jesus. We are choosing that affair over Jesus, not alongside him. We choose pornography over Christ not beside Him.

A real struggle, of falling, confessing, and fighting again is the normal Christian experience. And I wish that was all we saw here.

But it isn't.

All too often, we see someone who has an affair, persists in it with very little regret, but still mistakenly believes herself to be a Christian.

Or someone who has made peace with pornography and said, "we all have our issues" while still believing himself to be a believer.

Jesus talked like this stuff is way more serious than that.

And we so often see what might be God's Hebrews 13:4 judgment on our sexual immorality:

- Marriages destroyed by it
- Kids whose homes are ripped apart by it
- Pastors and ministers burning out because it'll be another week with hundreds of texts with white hot drama and emotions and hurt, and this for the tenth time with the tenth couple this year.
- And the dozens of people slowly losing their faith in the power of the gospel because they've given themselves over to sexual sin as a lifestyle, and you can't experience the fruit of the spirit while you're committed to sin.
- This is a rampant problem.

He said be aggressive. And that aggression against sin is the evidence of conversion. With no fight for purity and fight to honor the marriage covenant, we are exposing the fact that we don't believe in a faithful God.

Faith produces a fight.

And for some, maybe the fight involves getting internet filters and more accountability.

For some, maybe there's sin that you've made peace with that now you need to confess to God and begin making war on it.

Some have sinned grievously and need to confess to your spouse your adultery.

I have no doubt that there are secrets here. Jesus said pluck and throw - Colossians 3 says put to death sin. You can't coddle it.

Treat it like an enemy trying to destroy our homes, our kids, our marriages, and our wives and husbands. How do you handle the thief breaking it trying to destroy everything you love? Not with a hug and a noogie. With aggression.

But doesn't Jesus accept the broken sexual sinners?

Yes - He very much does.

But there is a difference between a a repentant broken sinner and a defiant one.

James 4:6 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

The proud, those who say, "My life is mine and God doesn't tell me how to live it - accept me the way I am" can't expect to be accepted by Jesus. But the humble, who say, "God I've sinned," can expect radical mercy.

Proud people demand that God accept them the way they are, and shouldn't expect to be accepted.

Humble people admit the way they are, but confess, and fight, and can expect mercy from a God who abundantly pardons.

Which is great news because this text confronts just about all of us. Perhaps not a person here will come to this text and this topic and not sense our failure.

On a heart level, we've broken the seventh commandment. And God will judge.

We are sinful, adulterous people. For some despite best efforts, for some because of mediocre efforts. But we are defiled and unfaithful.

Our shame is great. We have so much to be ashamed of.

We need a Savior.

But we have a good Savior.

Who was always only completely pure inside and out. But who was naked and ashamed for us on the cross. If we'll repent and trust Him, we can have confidence that he bore all of our guilt. All of our defilement. All of our sins.

We had broken the covenant, but he was a faithful husband. Who stuck with us, and pursued us, and gave himself to forgive us.

We've sinned. But Christ died for your sins. Christ washes you white as snow.

And the deepest, darkest, most shameful thoughts and actions, the secrets that are rotting you from the inside, are no match for the cross of Jesus. You haven't outsinned his love, you haven't gotten so defiled He can't cleanse.

And if you'll turn and trust him, confess and renounce your sin, you can have confidence that He pardons.

This is an area where, for many, it feels harder to get rid of the sense of guilt and shame, even after we've recognized our forgiveness by Jesus. (The bible talks like sexual sin is not worse than others, but does affect us more significantly - 1 Cor 6:18.)

We feel guilty and carry that guilt with us, but we are paying for our sins a second time if we do because Jesus died to take our guilt. We feel shame, but we need to believe in Jesus who became naked and ashamed on the cross so that we can be free from our shame.

He has freed you from the condemnation that should be yours - he was already condemned for you. And he calls you to live as someone who has received that freedom from sin by living freely from it.

There's more to say about this, and more that Exodus will say about it in the months ahead. But for now we'll be reminded of God's grace to us by confessing our sins in silence and then praying together.

Scriptures Referenced:

Zechariah 9:9-10

Luke 19:41-42

Luke 19:43-44

Ephesians 5:25-33

Exodus 20:14

Hebrews 13:4

Deuteronomy 6:5-6

Matthew 5:17-19

Matthew 5:27-28

James 5:16

Matthew 5:29-30

James 4:6

Notes:

Exodus 20:14 - The Seventh Commandment - Adultery

- I. God is God of Covenant Relationship
- II. The power and purpose of sex
- III. The destructive potential of sex
- IV. The grace of God for sinners

For discussion in small groups:

1. How does a marriage relationship reflect the relationship of Christ with His church?
2. How does adultery ruin that reflection?
3. Should adultery be forgiven by a spouse?
4. How do we practically wage war against sexual sin?