

You ever had anyone do something for you and you just knew they were going through the motions? A few years ago, I had some warranty work done on my car and when I asked a clarifying question about what would be done, the guy just sort of stared at me and said “Yup”. If you are a parent, you know this feeling. Ask that a room in the house get cleaned up, come back and it’s not done, ask, and one of them self-righteously says “I picked up my stuff.” Technically they did what you asked, but it sure didn’t feel that way. They did what was necessary, but their heart just wasn’t in it.

In Jesus day, there was a group of religious leaders called the Pharisees. They lived this way. If you observed their life, you’d say they followed all the rules, but that didn’t satisfy Jesus, because their heart wasn’t in it. In fact, at one point, he called them whitewashed tombs. They were clean on the outside but dead on the inside. Just like them, we can be guilty of going through the motions, appearing to follow Jesus externally, but not having our hearts in it. And in the Kingdom of Heaven, that just won’t do.

Last week we read Jesus saying that if our righteousness didn’t exceed that of the Pharisees, we had no place in the Kingdom. Our response to that needed to be “I can’t do that”. Thankfully, our substitute, Jesus, could and did, living the life we couldn’t, paying the price for our sin, and taking his righteousness and putting it in us. But how should that righteousness manifest in the actions of our lives?

Jesus isn’t looking for a kingdom of rule followers. He’s building a Kingdom of Heaven made up of people changed from the inside out. That means [SLIDE] **Jesus doesn’t just want to rule our actions. He wants to rule our hearts.** To show that, Jesus is about to take on six commands the Jews, and we, would be familiar with, and up the ante in light of this greater righteousness and new life he came to give us in the Kingdom. This morning, I pray we all undergo a spiritual EKG to see what is in our hearts and ask God to deal with them.

[Matthew 5:21-26] ²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Jesus begins by saying “You have heard it was said”. He is referring to the Law of Moses and here unpacks the sixth commandment, you shall not murder. The Pharisees understood murder to be the unjust taking of another’s life, and if you didn’t do that, you were good. Check!

“But I say to you...” Jesus is giving a new interpretation based on the values of the Kingdom and his righteous standard. He’s not abolishing or changing anything in God’s Word. He’s telling us

we must get to the heart of things to really understand and fulfill the command. Yes, murder is wrong. But anger is the equivalent of murder in your heart. How is that?

Jesus is telling us two things. First, anger is sinfulness in our heart. There is such a thing as righteous anger (see Ephesians 4). But the anger Jesus is talking about is unrighteous anger. It includes pride, envy, hatred, revenge, resentment, contempt. One author defines it as “malice that is nursed inwardly.” **Anger does in our hearts what murder does to someone else.** Murder is the ultimate disregard for the value of a life. Now think about what happens when you get angry at someone. If someone cuts you off in traffic today? That person becomes less than. Your anger diminishes the value of a person eternally precious to God, one who bears his image, and one whom God was willing to send his Son to die for. When anger reigns in our hearts, we defame that which God created and called good.

Second, Jesus is showing us the progression of sin. That which starts internally manifests externally. It’s like a pot that boils over when it is constantly exposed to heat. Just look at what happens. Anger turns into insults. *Raca* means empty-headed, an idiot, and *more* means empty-hearted, a scoundrel. This is no way to think or talk about a brother or sister in Christ. It offends the God who made them and saved them and loves them. You keep running that out, murder.

Jesus says anyone who is angry is under judgment. If you are a follower of Jesus your sin was judged on the cross, but we’ll all give an account. This is a reminder that this is how sinners live. Jesus is calling us to live as Kingdom citizens.

So, murdered anyone lately? Feeling good about that? What about being angry? What do you do with that? Holding any grudges? Defaming anyone in your heart or out loud to others? Rehearse the hurt? This is destructive for you and the other person. It puts you in bondage and devalues that person in your eyes. So what are we to do? In the Kingdom, both the offender and the offeree are responsible for engaging. Jesus gives two illustrations from which we can take a couple application. **Pay up and reach out.**

Take the second illustration first. Jesus uses a financial debt as an example, but in general, do you own anyone anything? An apology? To hear someone out? Acknowledge a wrongdoing?

The other is that we cannot let division sit unaddressed. Jesus takes this so seriously that he says even if you are in the middle of worship and remember there’s something between you and a brother or sister, stop your worship, go be reconciled, and then come back and continue to worship. Why? Because of relationship. **If we worship God while divided from our brother, our worship is hypocritical.** It mocks the cross. Though we were due his righteous wrath, Jesus cleared the air between God and man, removing the relational boundaries our sin caused, reconciling us to him, AND TO ONE ANOTHER. To come to him and enjoy our right relationship while allowing our unright relationship with someone else to continue is an insult to Jesus’s work. We must engage and reconcile.

I wonder how empty our church would get if we decided to follow this command right now. I was convicted this week. I have one relationship highly conflicted, I have an apology to make, and I have some resentment I’ve been asking God to help me release. I wondered if I should

even preach this, but felt like I should, tell you what I'm doing this week, and ask for your prayers as I do. Where do you need to engage? Don't let anger and division sit. As far as it depends on you, do everything you can to live at peace.

[Matthew 5:27-30] 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. 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.

Jesus starts the same way. “You have heard...”, and he names the seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery. That was understood to mean not having sex with another man's spouse. The Pharisees taught that, held themselves to that standard, and said “Check!” But Jesus continues and says “But I say...” Kingdom standards go much deeper than that.

Lust, *epithymeō*, is a neutral word that needs to be contextualized. Jesus uses it when talking about his last Passover meal with his friends before the cross. It gets translated “I have earnestly desired to share this Passover meal with you.” In this context, it refers to the desire to have sex with someone other than one's spouse, to look at another for the purpose of feeding one's inner sensual appetite. We hear that and our minds can immediately go to ogling someone in public or looking at pornography, and that would be included. But Jesus is really speaking of sexual sin in general. That includes an image on a screen, a stranger, and even a boyfriend or girlfriend.

God's design for sex, his best for our lives, is that it is a tremendous blessing reserved for a husband and wife. Sex is giving all of oneself to another physically, and that is to happen in the context of a relationship where the two parties have already given all of themselves to one another spiritually, which is the covenant of marriage. God describes the marriage covenant as two becoming one flesh, and sex is a picture of that. Without it, we're just using one another. Without it, we're asking for something we ourselves are not willing to give.

Think about how God gives all of himself: in the context of a covenant. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Israel, David. And when Israel sins, God often uses adulterous language to describe it. And then, through the New Covenant, Jesus gives all of himself to his Church. God wills the same for us.

I officiated a wedding last night and said what I always say. “The bride and groom walked into this ceremony separately, but they will leave it united as one.” They have given all of themselves to one another spiritually, and it is within that union that God allows for them to give all of themselves physically.

Lust violates that. Lust desires to have someone God does not intend for you and who doesn't belong to you in order to satisfy your cravings. And just like anger, what starts internally manifests externally. Lust objectifies and exploits another in the heart, and it leads to actions that objectify and exploit another in the body. A sexual sin in deed is sinful in thought.

What is it for you? Pornography? 30.3 billion searches in 2018. Average age of first exposure is 11. 70% of men ages 18-34 visit a porn site monthly. 1 out of 6 women admit an addiction, and porn use is growing the fastest among young adult women. It's a lie. It's destroying your heart and damaging your marriage, whether you're married or not. Are you looking to others to satisfy a need that in you that can only be filled by God? 'Any man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God.' (Chesterton) Is it in relationships? If you are not married and having sex, Jesus is talking to you. If you are living together but not married, you've given a greater commitment to your landlord or bank than you have to one another. That's not a safe place for sex, and your desire for one another is lustful. I have no judgment for any of you. I want to give you hope.

Jesus offers a solution. He says rip out your eye and cut off your hand. Whoa. Literal? No. The point is to get to the root and cut it out. In the case of lust, the root in is our hearts, and we need God's help.

[Ezekiel 36:25-27, Colossians 3:5] ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules... ⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

When you put your faith in Jesus, you were washed clean of your sin and indwelt with his Spirit who gave you a heart transplant, united you with God, and enables you to live your new life faithfully. If you've never trusted in Christ as your Lord and Savior, I implore you to do so.

For the rest of us, we can read the Sermon on the Mount and think, that's impossible, and almost walk away from it. Or we can say, "OK, I'm going to bear down and strive to live this way", attempting to do it in your own power. Neither will work. It's only by the power of the Spirit that we can live this way. "I can't", but God can. It's not just an avoidance of sin but a heart aligned with the will of God. "I'm not allowed to do that" becomes "I don't want to do that." By the power of the Spirit, we can put to death that which has no place in our lives and no place in the Kingdom.

So how do we put these things to death and follow the Spirit? First, you've got to bring your struggles into the light. The dark is the devil's playground and anything left there will fester. Any time my boys got a diaper rash, our pediatrician said the best thing to do is to expose it to sunlight, because sunlight kills it. So we often had naked baby boys running around our backyard. Your sin cannot survive in the light. Confess it to God. He already knows, and he has grace and mercy for you. Take it to others. None of us can do it alone. And, given the stats, you're not the only one. You telling someone may give them the courage to confess it themselves.

I'm so thankful for Caleb's courage to talk about what he struggled with. If you are in the same place and you want to bring it into the light, tell another man or woman in your Life Group,

reach out to an elder, call our church office and come see me. I've got nothing but grace for you. I want to help you get free of it.

What are you watching? What are you letting your eyes see? For decades I have prayed "Lord, keep my mind and eyes from worthless things." Lord, help me not look at or think about that which will create lust in my heart and lead to sinful actions. What are you willing to give up for Jesus? **What are you willing to cut out in order to protect your heart so that you can live a faithful life?** Create some accountability with www.covenanteyes.com. And if you believe you have a problem, consider taking STEPS in 2022 or meeting with a counselor. We can help you find one.

Jesus is not raising the bar to make it more difficult to follow him and then bust us when we don't. He is a holy and good and loving God who wants us to live in perfect union with him and live the abundant life he has made possible for us.

And so we close with a celebration, a time of communion, with our God and with one another. Noah is going to play over you and I really want to encourage you do some business with God. Ask him to search your heart and show you where you need him to go to work. If you know there is division between you and someone else and you feel convicted to go and reconcile, go and do that. If you have resentment you need to give up to God, ask him to help set you free. If you need to confess lust in your heart and actions, he is ready to hear you and forgive you.