

## **The Way of Jesus: Radical Surgery Matthew 5:27-30**

### **Introduction – A Grimm Tale**

A long time ago, in a place, very far away, a young father and mother with two small children eked out a living near the edge of a forest. One day, sadly, the mother got very sick and died, leaving the young father devastated. But it wasn't long until he found another wife and the family once again found stability. But when a severe famine hit the land they found themselves at desperate ends. After the children were in bed, the stepmother told the young father that there was no way that they could continue on in the same way. She demanded that he take the little boy and girl into the woods and abandon them there. (Why is it always the stepmother who is the "bad guy" in these stories?) The little boy, however, had overheard the conversation and came up with a clever plan to save himself and his sister. Heartbroken by his new wife's demands, the father took the children deep into the woods. But while they were walking, the little boy dropped small white pebbles along the pathway. As he was told, the father abandoned the children in the woods, but the children found their way back by way of the shiny pebbles and the light of the moon.

Enraged, the evil stepmother demanded that the deed be done again, only this time, she came along. This happened so quickly that the little boy was unable to collect his pebbles to drop along the pathway. Instead, he dropped small pieces of bread that had been given to him. After the little boy and girl were abandoned, he had planned on following the crumbs of bread that he dropped all the way home. But, of course, birds and little critters had eaten the bread along the pathway. They were hopelessly lost and wandered for three days in the forest.

Hungry and very tired, they finally came upon a little house in a meadow in the forest. But this was no ordinary house. It was made of candy and cake and its windows were pure crystalized sugar. They could not believe the beautiful sight before their eyes. They were irresistibly drawn to it. Throwing caution away, the exhausted and famished little boy and girl feasted on the sweet treats that covered the house. But inside a soft little voice, called out: "Nibble, nibble, gnaw...who is nibbling at my house?" Then the door opened and a sweet little lady, as old as the hills, invited them in.

Well, you know the rest of the story. It is the tale of Hansel and Gretel. And the little lady was not sweet at all. She was, instead, an evil witch whose plan it was to devour the unsuspecting children.

It's the perfect story to introduce Jesus' words to us today. The lure of sexual temptation is as potent as a candy-covered house to a famished child. And the consequences of surrendering to that temptation are just like blindly walking into a witch's den.

### **Text – Matthew 5:27-30**

“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 that your whole body be thrown into hell. 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.”

### **Prayer**

### **Clarification – God is not a Prude**

Before we dig into the passage, I want to make one thing clear: *God is not a prude*, though we often act like he is. We have a hard time talking about sex. But God invented sex. In fact, the Song of Solomon, one of the Holy Spirit-inspired books of the Bible celebrates the joys of the intimate physical union of a man and a woman bound together as one in the marriage covenant. The Song affirms the wonderful gift of sex within marriage. Without Scripture's affirmation, we would be left to the shifting and distorted perspective of fallen human imagination. On the one hand, people are perplexed and embarrassed by the topic, keeping all conversation and mention of it in secret – leading to confusion and shame especially among the young. On the other side of the spectrum, sex becomes everything and every sexual expression and perversion is celebrated, as is the case in our culture today.

But the biblical view of sex is much more elevated and exalted than the secret shame or perverted promiscuity that distorts our way of life today. Because of its life-generating potential and soul-binding intimacy, Scripture celebrates sex within the marriage covenant of a man and a woman as the most profound expression of God's image in the human experience. That's why God's prohibitions against sex outside of marriage are so clear and strong.

### **Our Sex-saturated Society**

Today, we have traveled long and far away from a biblical view of sex. But we are not alone in our sexual distortions. People have always been prone to perverting God's good design for sex within marriage. Both the Old and New Testaments, if you read between the lines, refer to pagan practices that utilized all kinds of sexual perversions in the worship of idols. Ancient pornographic figures have been found on Egyptian manuscripts and the on the walls of the Roman city of Pompeii. They reveal a culture saturated with sexual obsession.

A lot like us. How did we get here? Like ancient people, the roots of sexual distortion have always been present within us. We can probably blame Hugh Hefner for launching our moral slide with the publication of *Playboy* magazine in the late 1950's. The advent of the Pill opened the door for the sexual revolution of the 1960's. We deluded ourselves into thinking we could have sex with anyone without having any negative consequences. It didn't last long. The emptiness of sex without boundaries was portrayed in the best picture of 1969, *Midnight Cowboy*. But our culture kept pressing on in its excursion deeper into sexual debauchery. The internet launched in the 1990's as stealth bomber bringing with it the deadly payload of private porn. It was no longer necessary to buy it in magazine form; it now came to the privacy of your own home without cost or embarrassment. Today, addiction to porn is pandemic, affecting a large portion of our culture, including Christian men and women.

We have become sex-obsessed and there seems to be no boundaries that can stand before the wave of sexual perversion. Homosexuality is now accepted by a majority of Americans and we may be on the verge of redefining marriage. (I can hardly believe what I am saying!) And this is all because we have shut out God and laughed at what he has said.

## **Jesus Speaks to the Heart**

In our passage today, Jesus spoke to the heart of the problem. Like his teaching on anger, it isn't just the outward actions that are sinful. The root of the problem goes much deeper. The Pharisees and scribes, quoting the Law, limited the prohibition only to the actual act of having sex with someone other than your spouse. There was nothing wrong, in their understanding, with toying with the idea and fantasizing about it in your mind. They had reduced God's law to a convenient legalism. But Jesus, with assertive authority, cuts through the hypocrisy when he says, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Every modern psychologist will tell you that the most potent sex organ in your body is not where you might suspect; it is your brain. The brain, in all its complexity, is where sex is rooted. The rest of our body is just responding to what is happening behind your eyes and between your ears. Jesus knew that. He was way ahead of his time.

This is probably the place to warn Christian women not to tease men with the way you dress. It is not innocent and it is not naïve, and God will hold you accountable for defrauding and tempting your brothers to sin. Do not inflate your own ego and emotional needs by flaunting your feminine charms in front of a man who is not your husband. Do not dress so as to tempt a man to look at you with lustful eyes.

## **The Urgency of the Matter**

After making clear the nature of adulterous sin, Jesus makes startling and unsettling statements:

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. 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.

What are we to make of this? Is Jesus teaching self-mutilation? Some have thought that. Origen, one of the early church fathers of the third century, castrated himself in his understanding of this passage. Shortly thereafter, the church prohibited the practice. Actually,

Jesus used the same kind of language later in Matthew's gospel when he was talking about temptation in general:

Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

Matthew 18:7-9

In these passages, Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation, but rather the urgency and danger of the problem. The Book of Proverbs warns specifically against sexual sin and the enticing trap of a prostitute:

“Sons, listen to me...many a victim she has laid low,  
And all her slain are a mighty throng.  
Her house is the way to Sheol  
Going down to the chambers of death.”

Proverbs 7:24, 26-27

Proverbs makes the same urgent warning in several places. Perhaps even more compelling, however, is the tragic tale of King David and devastating effects his lingering look at Bathsheba had on his family. Most of you know the story that began in the opening verses of II Samuel 11. He saw the woman bathing on her rooftop. Now we would be naïve if we didn't think she could be seen by the king. She knew her rooftop was in sight of the palace but did not cover herself on that day. I do not believe Bathsheba was innocent in the affair. But David let his eyes linger too long. In his heart, he desired her. And he had her because he could. He was the king. But look at the long and devastating outcomes that were the result of that long, lingering, lustful look:

- Bathsheba conceived a child through her adulterous union with King David.

- David had her husband murdered to cover his deed.
- The child died at birth.
- Shortly thereafter, one of David's sons, Amnon, raped his half-sister, Tamar. (2 Samuel 13)
- David had no credibility to address the situation because of his sin.
- Tamar's brother, Absalom, later murdered Amnon in revenge.
- Absalom later drove his father, David, from his capital in a nearly successful effort to usurp the kingdom, probably in part because of bitterness over the king's inability to deal with his sister's rape.
- David was deeply distressed over Absalom's death in battle.
- Later, David's son, Solomon became king and had over 1,000 wives and concubines in his palace. He inherited his father's proclivities towards the lingering look of lust. His union with so many foreign women drew his heart away toward the worship of other gods which led to the eventual division and destruction of the Jewish nation.

All because David looked with lust upon a woman. The cost is too high. The danger is imminent. Do not look at a woman with lust. Look away. Run as fast as you can. Sexual temptation is not to be toyed with. Paul told Timothy plainly, "Flee youthful lust" (II Timothy 2:22). Jesus warned us with strong words. Don't lose your soul over sexual temptation.

### **The Moral Calamity of our Day**

There is so much that could be said about this topic. There are no topics that are more relevant than this one. Our society is in deep trouble all because we have laughed at God's Word. But Jesus speaks plainly. And his words directly relate to the pornography epidemic of our day.

Internet pornography has some impact on the majority of men in our culture, including every man in this room or who calls himself a Christian. Many Christian men are caught in the trap of pornography addiction. And every man will have to deal with the invasion of porn in cyberspace sooner or later. It is everywhere. Women, too, are not excluded because, increasingly, porn is becoming a problem for them as well.

We cannot afford to ignore this problem, church. The consequences of porn addiction are many and varied. All of them are damaging. There is the shredding of conscience. A Christian burdened with guilt has no power. And that's just how Satan likes it. And because of the shame of it all, the problem stays in the dark, in secret...just how Satan likes it. Porn leads to intimacy problems in marriage, and if the wife is aware, has devastating effects on her own self-worth. Porn addiction can lead to illicit affairs, the use of prostitutes, and other sexual debauchery. Every sex offender has a past with porn. Like any addiction, the same experiences don't satisfy, so the addict travels deeper and deeper into darkness. Our society is aware of the evils of human trafficking, but stubbornly refuses to deal with perhaps the most powerful root cause, pornography. Is it any surprise that human trafficking has exploded alongside the proliferation of internet porn?

Into this darkness, Jesus speaks clearly. "Don't linger in lust. It will kill you." The way out of sexual addiction is not simple and not easy. And like King David, "the man after God's own heart," there are many Christian men who struggle deeply with porn or sexual addiction. It is not enough to just say read your Bible or pray more. Sex addiction is like a snare. The harder you pull on it, the tighter it gets. You have to cut the wire.

Deep shame has driven the men and women who struggle with sex addiction into darkness. Most struggle helplessly alone. For all sex addicts, there are always deep internal wounds that drive them to seek comfort in their addiction. That has to be understood and addressed. There are habits that have to be recognized and broken. There is a recurring cycle of behavior that needs to be redirected. And secrecy has to be disempowered by loving and gracious accountability.

Jesus is more than a psychologist and the church is more than a 12-step group. Jesus offers grace and forgiveness that no therapist can offer. He crushed Satan at the cross and has the power to defeat the demons that delight in enslaving people to sexual addictions. The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit who indwells and empowers those who believe in the name of Jesus Christ.

In a way, we are all like Hansel and Gretel. We are all hungry and seek to ease the pain we feel deep in our bellies. The sugar-coated house is the sexual temptation that is all around us. Don't look long. Don't take a bite. There's a monster inside who will devour you. Turn away and run.

**Prayer (Invitation for those who struggle with sexual addiction to contact me...)**