

But I say to you - Lust

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, if you could this evening, with the Lord's help, turn with me to the Gospel according to Matthew in chapter 5.

The Gospel according to Matthew in chapter 5. And if you read from verse 27, Matthew 5 at verse 27.

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 or pluck 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.

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.

[1 : 17] This evening we're resuming our study on the Sermon on the Mount. And it seems, I suppose for me, it has been a little bit of a start-stop over the past month.

But hopefully we'll continue our study in this challenging sermon which was preached by our Lord Jesus Christ. And as we've said time and time again, the whole thrust of this sermon is about Christ-centred living for Christ-centred lives.

Christ-centred living for Christ-centred lives. And the purpose of this entire sermon is to call us to live as those who are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and fulfil and have the desire to fulfil our chief end for which we were created which is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

And so in his sermon, Jesus has presented to us the marks of Christian character and conduct by way of the Beatitudes. He's given to us those illustrations of salt and light which sought to emphasise that we are to live distinct lives from those in the world.

But then as we went into the second half of this chapter, Jesus has focused his attention upon our relationship to the law. And in it, Jesus is saying to us that the law of God, the moral law, the Ten Commandments, they are still as relevant today as when they were first given to God's people.

[2 : 57] And Jesus seeks to emphasise the relevance for us. And he does that by contrasting what was said back in the moral law, back in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20.

And he contrasts it with his own exposition on that particular law. And I suppose you could say that Jesus is giving his commentary on different aspects of the moral law.

And by repeatedly using the contrasting phrases throughout the section, he says, You have heard that it was said, but I say to you.

You have heard that it was said, but I say to you. And Jesus is seeking to give this clear explanation of the law. But what we must be clear on is that the contrasts which Jesus repeatedly makes when he says, But I say to you.

It doesn't imply that he's doing away with the law, or that Jesus is in some way adding to the law. Instead, we ought to see that what Jesus says here is that he is giving us a fuller understanding, and a greater revelation as to why that law was given in the first place.

[4 : 13] And the reason for his teaching is because the scribes and the Pharisees, who were meant to be the teachers of the law, they were meant to explain the law. But they only taught and emphasised how to keep the law outwardly.

But for Jesus, the law doesn't just demand the outward reformation of our lives. For Jesus, the law demands the inward renewal of our lives.

And so in this section, in the second half of chapter 5, Jesus is aiming to cut right to the heart of our thinking and our actions as Christians.

Because last time we saw that Jesus gave an explanation of the sixth commandment, Thou shalt not kill. In which Jesus emphasised that murder doesn't just begin with action, it begins in the heart and with hatred and anger towards your brother.

But this evening we're considering Jesus' exposition of the seventh commandment, Thou shalt not commit adultery. And what Jesus is going to tell us in this passage is that if anger is the equivalent of murder, then lust is the equivalent of adultery.

[5 : 34] If anger is the equivalent of murder, then lust is the equivalent of adultery. And what's so clear in this sermon is that Jesus doesn't take sin lightly or trivialise it.

Therefore he expects those who follow him and those who are part of the kingdom not to take sin lightly either and trivialise it. And the serious nature with which Jesus approaches this subject of adultery is that he calls us to watch for two things.

He calls us to take our Christianity seriously. And he does so by saying, Watch out for your heart and watch out for hell.

Watch out for your heart and watch out for hell. And it's a serious warning. A serious warning. And so if we look at the first warning this evening, we are to watch out for our heart.

Watch out for your heart. He says in verse 27, 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.

[6 : 57] And so what we see here is that Jesus begins his exposition of the seventh commandment with this contrast. You've heard that it was said, but I say to you. And let's not hide the fact that Jesus is addressing an issue which we in the Western world would consider very personal.

Where Jesus is, you could say, encroaching on our personal space to the point that he may begin to make us feel quite uncomfortable. But that's what the Sermon on the Mount is challenging us about.

Because Jesus is challenging us against comfortable Christianity. Therefore, as those who have been bought by him and redeemed by his blood and sanctified through the Spirit, Jesus has every right to challenge us on the issue of lust.

And maybe the problem we've had as a church is that for far too long we want to avoid the taboo subjects and keep clear of them. Because by doing so we think that we'll be kept pure.

But as you know, the issue of lust and adultery isn't confined to the worldly man or woman. The church isn't exempt. And Jesus knows that.

[8 : 16] That's why he teaches us and says, watch your heart. Watch your heart. But it seems that when we read Jesus' statement, it's a bit one-sided, you could say.

Because he seems to only emphasize that men commit adultery and not women. And it seems that Jesus is, you could say, taking a dig at men when he says in verse 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.

But of course the seventh commandment wasn't confined to males because it was relevant for every member of society, male or female.

But the reason why Jesus makes this statement in this way is because in the ancient world it was held, not in the moral law, but all these other nations.

It was held that a married man could go off with another woman if he wanted, as long as that woman wasn't already married. However, women weren't allowed to do such things.

[9 : 25] They were to remain pure before marriage and they were to remain faithful after marriage. And so the problem and the root cause of adultery was always with men. Because men only viewed women as these sexual objects.

And that's what Jesus is addressing in his exposition towards males. But what Jesus is also very quick to point out to us is that the heart of the problem isn't just to be found with men.

He says the heart of the problem is to be found with the problem of the heart, which of course applies to both men and women. And what Jesus warns us about here is the eyes of our heart.

The eyes of our heart. And it's interesting that the Apostle Paul uses that same phrase in his letter to the Ephesians.

What he says in Ephesians chapter 1. Where Paul stresses to the Ephesians, he says in the opening chapter, that really long sentence about the greatness of their salvation, that they've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places, because they've been predestined and adopted and redeemed and forgiven, and they're united to Christ.

[10 : 45] They've received a great inheritance, and they're sealed with the Holy Spirit. But Paul emphasised to the Ephesians that even though they've been blessed with all these spiritual blessings, it doesn't mean that they are perfect and immune from sin.

Not at all. That's why Paul went on to say in verse 18 that he is praying for them as believers. And he says, I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and the riches of his glory.

In other words, Paul was praying that the Ephesian Christians would know what they are meant to be as those who are in Christ. He prayed that the eyes of their heart would be enlightened.

And that's what Jesus is calling us to realise here. That we would have the eyes of our heart enlightened, to see past the lusts of the flesh, and remember that our calling is to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

But when Jesus mentions our heart, or the eyes of the heart, he doesn't use the phrase, but that's what he's getting at. The eyes of the heart. He's highlighting to us that the heart is more than just the organ.

[12 : 13] Because the heart, and especially the eyes of our heart, it affects every fibre of our being. And I've mentioned this to you before, that for a Jew, and in the ancient world, the heart involved, it wasn't just the organ, it involved your mind, the emotions, the affections, the will, and the conscience.

The mind, the emotions, the affections, the will, and the conscience. It involved the entire life of a person. The heart was said to be the epicentre of a person.

But if there is a problem with our heart, it affects our mind, our emotions, our affections, our will, and our conscience. Of course, sin affects our entire life, and sin has disturbed our mind, our emotions, our affections, our will, and our conscience.

But Jesus is saying here, what he's saying here, is that one such sin is lust. And lust can affect our entire life. Where lust can affect our mind, our emotions, our affections, our will, and our conscience.

And that's why we need to watch our heart. Because the outcome of a heart, which is full of lust, could have devastating consequences. But what we need to be clear on in this, is that Jesus isn't condemning the natural interest in the opposite sex between two people who are unmarried.

[13 : 52] He does condemn it if we are married, or we are pursuing someone who is married. And sometimes it seems that we've blurred the lines between attraction and lust.

Because attraction is to acknowledge beauty, and to acknowledge it not only outwardly, with someone's appearance, but it's also to acknowledge it inwardly, with someone's personality, and their character.

And so if someone is single, it's not wrong to be attracted to someone else. That's only natural. But when it comes to lust, lust is only focused on the outward.

On what can be seen. And it's more than acknowledgement. It's desire. It's covetousness. It's obsession. It's burning to have what is not rightfully yours.

And in the day and age in which we live, it's becoming increasingly more difficult to take care of the eyes of our heart. Because everywhere we go and everywhere we look, we're being bombarded with images that not only seek to entice the eyes and draw in our heart to lust.

[15 : 08] And I suppose, to one extent, there's nothing new, for it was the same in the ancient times, in Rome and in Greece. But with such an increase in technology and social media, it seems that we're surrounded with it all the more.

And it seems that our society and our nation is obsessed with sex. It's obsessed with it. Where everything is sexualized and our nation glories in it.

We have magazines all over our shops with half-naked men and women. And we have soaps that are on in the early evening which are smothering us with sex and adultery and homosexuality.

And there are so many reality, reality TV programs that are anything but reality. And it's all made to look like harmless fun where adultery is the new norm and it's only a little thrill, a little bit of pleasure, nothing serious.

But Jesus is telling us that everything which we are confronted with is filling the eyes of our heart. And something which was created by God to be a beautiful thing between a man and a woman within the bounds of marriage and yet it is cheapened and degraded because it is fueled by lust.

[16 : 31] It's not based upon love. It's fueled by lust. And this problem isn't just confined to the world. Many Christians struggle with the issue of lust.

I was at the Keswick Convention a few years ago down in the Lake District and if you have never been I would encourage you to go.

It's a beautiful place. It's a great place to spend a week in the convention learning more about God's word and gathering with hundreds of Christians from all over the nation and further afield.

But when I was there a few years ago there were other lectures that were being held in the afternoon other than the main speaker. And one of the subjects which was being focused on for a week long of lectures five lectures was what they said was one of the greatest struggles Christians face in the 21st century.

And it wasn't the struggle of their faith or the struggle of their assurance or the struggle of their theology. It was pornography. It was pornography.

[17 : 42] And at first I was surprised and shocked by such a thought. But when we consider that we are bombarded with it at every turn it makes you realise that Christians are not immune from sin and they struggle with all types of things and lust is one of them.

And Jesus knew that. That's why he's addressing it here. But what is the result of glorifying and exalting a mindset of sex and lust?

The result is and we see it all around us lust promotes fun instead of faithfulness. Where the meaning of true love is debased women and men are degraded marriage is devalued relationships are destabilised children are damaged and homes are destroyed.

And it's no wonder that Jesus says to us watch the eyes of your heart. Watch the eyes of your heart because lust disturbs the heart.

It disturbs our mind our emotion our affections our will and our conscience. It disturbs all these things. It disturbs our mind because if we're putting into our mind and filling our mind with lustful thoughts or images of a sexual nature then it will disturb our mind and become an obsession maybe even an addiction which will inevitably disturb our emotions where the emotion of love loses its meaning.

[19 : 28] And commitment and faithfulness are no longer on the agenda to the point that we can be emotionally driven or just in it for the thrill. Where we can think and say that it's love but it's not because it's only lust being driven by emotion.

And lust doesn't last. Lust doesn't last. And that's the same with the arguments for those who practice homosexuality. They say that they love one another.

And this is relevant. You might find this heavy but this is absolutely relevant to the day and age that we live in. Homosexuals are saying that they love one another but their love is a disturbed emotion.

Their love is a disturbed emotion. It's a sin. But I want to be clear I'm not condemning homosexuals. They need Jesus just like everyone else. But I condemn the practice of homosexuality because Jesus says it's a disturbed emotion of lust.

And so lust disturbs our minds our emotions our affections. It disturbs our affections. Lust just like sin can convince us that something is right just because it feels right.

[20 : 47] Where everything is motivated by feelings but feelings can be failings. And some conclude that if it feels right then it must be right. And who is to tell me that I'm wrong?

Who is to stand in my way whatever my sexuality is? But the consequence of disturbed affections and feelings is that our will is disturbed.

Our will is disturbed. Our will is no longer to please God or to remain faithful to a spouse or to remain committed in the relationship. It's about pleasing self.

To have what we want. To fulfil our desires. To do as we please. And the end result of the eyes of our heart being disturbed by lust is that our mind our emotions our affections our will they're all bound up in the conscience.

All bound up in the conscience. And whatever is going on lust can disturb the conscience so much so that we have the frightening ability to dampen it down and ignore all the warnings.

[21 : 53] because the first thing to alarm us when we are confronted with lustful thoughts or images of a sexual nature is our conscience. Where our conscience alarms us to tell us that what we are doing is wrong or and we know it's wrong and we shouldn't be doing it or we shouldn't be seeing it.

And it's at that point when our conscience is prodding us that we have to make a choice. and the choice is do we flee or do we fall?

Do we flee or do we fall? And that's what Jesus goes on to challenge us in the next couple of verses because he's challenging us to make sure that we flee and do not fall into temptation.

And so Jesus says watch your heart. Watch the eyes of your heart. But secondly he says watch out for hell. Watch out for hell.

Because he says in verse 29 if your right eye causes you to sin pluck it out throw it away for it's better that you lose one of your members than your whole body be thrown into hell.

[23 : 08] 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.

And you know when I was thinking about this passage in the Sermon on the Mount and the topic of lust hard topic to talk about I was reminded of John's experience in the book of Revelation when he was given that little book and the angel ordered him to eat it because the angel said to John take it and eat it up and as soon as John had eaten the little book he said it was in my mouth sweet as honey but as soon as I had eaten it it was bitter in my belly.

And that's what I think this passage is like because it doesn't matter where we read from in God's word this word will always be sweet like honey in our mouth but as we digest it and as we consider what it is actually saying and confronting us with it's then that it becomes bitter in our belly and it's bitter because this little book is getting right to the core of our being and it's calling us to take heed to our life and conduct.

And that's what Jesus is doing here because he's telling us to check ourselves. He says keep yourselves in check. Keep yourselves in check.

Watch over your heart and the eyes of your heart. And with this Jesus makes a stern warning and calls us to take our Christianity seriously. He's not only saying watch out for your heart but he's also saying watch out for hell because which is better says Jesus what is more profitable for you to hold on to your lust or to be cast into hell.

[25 : 15] What's more profitable for you and Jesus warns us by saying it would be more profitable for you to pluck out your eye or to cut off your own hand and cast them away than to have your whole body defiled and cast into hell.

Now of course Jesus is speaking figuratively. He's not endorsing self-amputation. Mother Jesus is trying to drive home to us the severity of our sin and the effect which lust can have upon us.

And the hell which Jesus was speaking of that shows us the awful end that is brought upon a body which is defiled which is the reason why Jesus pleads with us to remove any defilement from us rather than to be cast into hell ourselves.

But the word which Jesus uses here for the word hell is the word Gehenna. The word Gehenna. And it was the name of the fire which continually burned outside the city of Jerusalem.

And it was the place to where all the rubbish of Jerusalem was taken. It was a dumping ground which was continually burning day and night. And apparently when you went out to this dumping ground it was an awful stench.

[26 : 41] And the Jews used to call it Gehenna because it was a place of continual burning. And so what Jesus is warning us is that the progression of lust when it takes hold of us can have dreadful consequences that will lead us away from the kingdom of God and closer and closer towards hell.

And that's why Jesus uses this vivid illustration of amputation because he's cautioning us and advising us that it is far better for us it would be more profitable for us to experience the pain of removing sin than allowing us to enter into eternal damnation.

And what's interesting is that the word cast or throw away when Jesus advises that we are to cast our sin from us rather than be cast into hell the word cast gives us the image of a weed we've all seen weeds in our garden they need to be plucked at the root and then cast into the fire and so what Jesus is urging us to do is uproot any sign of lust in our life and stop it progressing by killing it killing it because if it is causing us to sin and causing us to fall into temptation we are to remove it we are to put it to death put it to death for in the words of the apostle Paul we are to mortify it mortify it for as Paul says in Romans 8 if you live after the flesh you shall die but if through the spirit you do mortify the deeds of the body you shall live and so we're to mortify the deeds of the flesh we're to put them to death we're to ask the

Lord to take them away from us and if we can we're to physically remove these obstacles which may be present in our lives and what Jesus is saying is that when it comes to lust we are to keep ourselves in check and we are to do so before it progresses and festers and gets out of hand and out of control but whenever you do don't ignore it don't ignore it don't suppress your conscience take heed he's saying take heed don't ever think that with the temptation of lust you can give in and with the intention that it will be okay next time or the thought that you'll be stronger next time because Jesus emphasizes to us you won't you'll be weaker and more susceptible to fall into sin and so what Jesus is calling us to do is to examine our life to see if there's anything which causes us to sin and we're to take necessary action to get rid of it just get rid of it and you know when speaking about this

I'm reminded of that old children's hymn which I'm sure we're all familiar with where it opens by saying oh be careful it lies what you see be careful it lies what you see because your father up above is looking down in love be careful it lies what you see and that's what Jesus is saying to us he's giving us all these warnings with such severe imagery in order for us to see that it's said to us out of love it's said to us as children of God that we need to be careful with our eyes what we see we need to be careful with our children's eyes with what they see and we need because there's a host of different things on the channels on the TV there's a world of things on the internet but even in the case of men and women we need to take care with our eyes we need to think about what we are watching because the soaps and films and

[31 : 05] TV certain things on the television we might see these things as mind-numbing but they're mind-filling they're mind-filling and Jesus says if it causes you to sin cut it out and we even need to think about what we're listening to is it helpful music what is the content of the song what is the song about what are the lyrics about and Jesus is saying if it causes you to sin cut it out my friend we need to be thinking about what we are doing because I believe the Christian church is slipping into a problem of mindless worldliness mindless worldliness and when it comes to lust we even need to think about we need to think about how we dress because provocative dressing is unacceptable and I don't need to give details you know what I mean but if these things are done in order to attract men or to attract attention and even if it's done with no intention we ought to think about what we're doing we need to think about what we're doing and that applies to every area of our life it applies to everything we do therefore in this section on lust

Jesus calls us to watch our conduct watch our character and he asks us when it comes to lust what is more profitable for you to flee or to fall to flee or to fall and I have no doubt that when Jesus would have spoken about this issue he would have had probably had two people in mind when he spoke on the subject of lust because when it comes to the issue of lust we're given two great examples in scripture of men who struggled and what is so startling about them is that both of them were men of God both of them had positions of power both of them were types of Christ both of them were confronted with the situation of lust but one fled and the other fell one fled and the other fell and the two examples in scripture are of course Joseph and

David because we read in Genesis 39 about the occasion when Joseph was repeatedly confronted with Potiphar's wife and we read that Potiphar's wife continually spoke to Joseph every day day after day and what the chapter wants us to pick up on is that the only words Potiphar's wife ever said to Joseph are the words lie with me that's all she ever said to him lie with me but Joseph's response to to such a situation was the right one because he fled he got out of there as soon as possible where instead of falling Joseph fled he cut out the temptation to lust and he fled and as as we read his actions of fleeing the scene was what caused him to end up in prison but the other example which we're given in scripture is

David the king who had everything the king who had everything but he was still unsatisfied he he had all the power in the land of Israel he was called a man after God God's own heart but yet by that point he had lost sight of who God was and because of his position and status David had become filled with self and when he was confronted with lust he should have been on the battlefield leading his army but instead David was watching the wife of one of his most faithful soldiers and although we didn't read the passage I'm sure you know it well but when you read 2nd Samuel 11 you see the progression of events and you see that it all started with a look started with the eyes when David saw Bathsheba bathing on her roof and it was at that moment which David had a decision to make does he figuratively speaking does he pluck out his eye does he listen to his conscience and flee from the situation or does he fall into sin and unfortunately

David chose the latter he fell into sin because his initial look at Bathsheba led to inquiring about Bathsheba which ultimately led to taking Bathsheba and committing adultery with her but that wasn't the end of the story Bathsheba's pregnancy led to this massive cover-up situation which eventually led to the murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah and when you look at that one chapter in 2nd Samuel 11 the progression in David's sin is enormous but what's frightening is that it only started with a look it only started with a look and when we think about it it's no wonder that Jesus gives us such a severe warning here and he asks us what is more profitable to flee or to fall to flee or to fall but there's one thing we're never to do never think that we are immune to the problem of lust never think that it's only a young man's problem because David wasn't a young man he wasn't a young man when he fell into his sin but you know we ought to be thankful for

[37 : 28] David because David is a reminder to us that we are all human we all make mistakes and that even the best of men are only men at best and we ought to be thankful that the Bible gives to us the reality of our sin and that our sin is not to be taken lightly but the wonder of this sweet little book is that it presents to us the reality of our Saviour because even if we fail to flee even if we fall into sin even if we fall into temptation and lust the God of the Bible reminds us that all is not lost and that even if we make a mess of things the Lord can still use our mess for his glory because that's what he did with Solomon the result of David and Bathsheba was Solomon didn't mean that it was right for David what he did but it does mean that the

Lord is gracious far beyond our asking or our thinking it's not easy to raise these issues but they're in scripture I am to preach the word that is my mandate they're in scripture and we struggle with them and what I believe Jesus wants us to realize is that we need to rely upon him by his help and his grace we will flee and not fall we will flee and not fall so may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh Lord our gracious God we come to thee and we realize Lord that thou are one who has given to us a sweet little book that even the psalmist could say that it is sweeter than honey but Lord we bless and praise thee that even though there is sweetness with it there is also bitterness that reminds us of how far short we come how much we are dependent upon thee how much oh Lord we need to be taught and to be shaped by the

Lord and help us then we plead all to hear thy voice to be always following the voice of the good shepherd look upon us Lord we ask keep us for we cannot keep ourselves bless us we pray with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places Lord remember our homes and our families remember those Lord who could not be with us tonight and those Lord who are confined to their homes that thou wouldst remember them all be gracious to us look upon us as a congregation that thou wouldst add to our number that more may be seeking the Lord while he is to be found and calling upon him while he is near do us good then we plead and go before us for Jesus sake Amen we shall conclude by singing in Psalm 51 Psalm 51 in the

Sing Psalms version on page 67 Psalm 51 this of course is David's prayer after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba Psalm 51 from the beginning down to the verse marked 9 O my God have mercy on me in your steadfast love I pray in your infinite compassion my transgressions wipe away cleanse me from iniquity wash my sin away from me down to the verse marked 9 Psalm 51 to God's praise me from iniquity.

Wash my sin away from me. For I own my own possessions.

[42 : 37] I can see my sinful pride. You, you only I've offended and unhealed in your sight.

So your words are clarified and your verdict justified.

From my birth I have been sinful such the nature I receive.

Sinful from my first beginning in my mother's womb conceive.

Truth you poured in my heart. wisdom wisdom to be you impart.

[43 : 49] Glance with wisdom purify me. I'll be whiter than the snow.

Let the bones you crush be joyful. May I joy and gladness know.

From my failure hide your face. Lord, atone my wickedness.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.