

Necessary Sins - week 2: Lust

(Sermon series adapted from life.church series on same topic)

Introduction

Mathew, chapter 5, verse 27 and 28, Jesus says, "You've heard it said that you shall not commit adultery." Most of us would say, "Yeah, that's probably a bad thing to do." He raises the standard and says, "But I tell you anyone who" does what? Let's all say this aloud. "Anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already" done what? "Has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

According to Jesus, Looking lustfully is equal to committing adultery in your heart.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have to agree that surrendering to the natural sinful desires of lust is wrong. And not only is it wrong; according to James, it's very dangerous. James, the brother of Jesus, said this in chapter 1, verses 14 and 15. He says, "Temptation comes from our own desires which **entice us** and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And sin, when it is allowed to grow" -- in other words, when it's not confessed and when you don't turn from it, when you just continue on in your sin and it's allowed to grow... It gives birth to death.

Death of what? Death of purity, death of intimacy, death of trust in a relationship, and ultimately, spiritual death.

In fact, the word "entice" -- is actually a fishing term.

Imagine there's some bait on a hook and this bait is our spiritual enemy's bait – and we think, "Oh, that looks good. I think that will fill the emptiness. That will keep me from being bored." And we go after it and then we are hooked, and we are enticed, and we are dragged away. Think of this in terms of how lust works.

In fact, the Greek word that's translated as entice means to entrap, to allure, to hook. Now, how is it that we get hooked?

It very often starts with a small moment that captures us, when we are exposed to some type of sexual impurity. Where what God has created as beautiful and good is distorted and used for sinful purposes.

Maybe you're a kid walking through the shopping mall in the city and you see a Bra's and things shop, and the huge posters lining the windows of women in their lingerie. It may not seem like much, but those images have the power to imprint in the mind...

Or maybe you're online and there's an ad and you click on it and you click on something else and before long, you see something that you weren't supposed to see.

Unfortunately, tragically, some of you were a child, someone betrayed your innocence, and someone abused you, maybe an authority figure or someone that you trusted. And at a very young age, you just lost something that was very special to you. You're exposed to something impure.

When you're exposed to something impure, you become injured.

Your mind is changed, the injury is like a pollutant, it harms us and spreads. Something in our thought process is not the same. Our mind starts playing out: I like this, but I feel guilty, there is a mixed sense of enjoyment and shame.

It's like Paul in Romans 7 where he says, "The things I want to do, I don't do. And the things I don't want to do, I do and I'm trying not to, but I am so I don't know what to do."

So because you're enjoying it, and yet you feel guilty, many people become skilled at justifying it. "Well, I probably shouldn't but I'm single, so it doesn't matter as much now. This

just kind of helps me get through things." And we end up confused.

You're married and you think, "If my spouse met my needs, I wouldn't have to." And so, since he or she doesn't know, and so you tell yourself, "This must be okay. It's necessary for me to cope with things."

Then sometimes you get convicted by the Holy Spirit and you make a promise. "God, I'm never going to do this again. God, if you help me, I'll never do it again. I promise, I'm never going to do this again." And then four days later, you're doing it again.

And sometimes, you have these long periods where everything is good, And then you open up the door and where you find yourself spiralling and in even more trouble...

So what do we do?

Do we keep on justifying it, so it becomes a necessary sin... hey even our non-Christian friends will tell you, it's all good to have a look and not touch; mates will say, she's alright, I wonder how limber she is, girlfriends invite you to go to the movie based on the book to see how it can be done...

But Jesus tells us this is not healthy, this is not wholesome, this is not feeding Holy Spirit with good food

Jesus knows what is good for us and for our relationships, and for our spiritual health. But Jesus isn't only words, He invites us into his wholeness and his love and to get our injuries treated...

When I once cut my hand, I remember the doctor telling me, you need to make sure you protect the wound, don't let it get wet, don't move your fingers this way, make sure you come back to see me to get the bandage replaced... If you don't protect it, it could get worse.

Some of you have been wounded. You saw something that you shouldn't have seen. You got excited and then you justified it. And the next thing you know, you've been confused. You don't want to, but you do. You can't stop, hard as you might try.

The problem is you've been injured. Guess what? God heals wounds.

But you have to protect the wound in order for God to heal it. How do you do this? Psalm 119, verse 9.

Thousands of years ago, the psalmist asked the same question we could ask today.

"How can a young man (or woman) keep their way pure?" Isn't it interesting that this is not just a modern day question but one that has been asked from centuries upon centuries.

"How can a young man/woman keep his/their way pure?

"By guarding it according to your word."

By protecting the wound, by guarding your mind, your purity, by keeping distance between you and that which would tempt you.

Jesus, in the New Testament, taught it this way. He said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, you should gouge it out." Wow! He said, "If your right arm causes you to sin, you should cut it off."

He said, "It would be better for you to go through life without all of your body, than to give away your soul in eternity." Now, was he being literal in his analogy? I'm kind of hoping not. Okay? Because if he was, there's going to be a lot of one-armed cyclopes walking into church next week. Jesus is telling us, "You've got to do everything that you can to stay away from that which would harm you."

In fact, the Apostle Paul, when he talked about sin, he would say fight it or resist it. When he talked about sexual immorality, he didn't say fight it; he didn't say resist it. He said, "Flee from it."

When it came to sexual immorality. He said, "Run for your life. Keep a distance between you and anything that would hurt you." In other words, protect yourself. Protect the wound and give it some time to heal.

Lust is powerful, and we are lying to ourselves if we think we can manage our wounds with our own strength. Some of us may be strong for 364 days of the year, but we are wise enough to know that one day is enough...

Maybe you need to get rid of certain types of books and magazines, from your home.

Setting up systems to protect you when you are online. Have a trusted friend who can support you and checking in with you, praying with you.

Maybe you need to change the time you go to the gym. Walking away from workmates who talk inappropriately. Maybe you need to learn to bounce your eyes away.

Do what you need to do to protect yourself.

Now, some of you may say, "But I'm so down on myself because I'm still struggling with temptation. I've been a Christian for so long and I'm still struggling. God couldn't use me because of this." Or "I could never have a good marriage because of this." I'd say to you, the fact that you're still struggling is an indication that you have not been defeated yet. There's still fight in you.

The problem is when you surrender to it and say, "I just give up." I need this to cope".

If you're still struggling, what's happening is you're a sinful person bent towards sin who has not surrendered to the temptation of sin, and you're still fighting with the power of God. Keep fighting and depend on his power, and let him keep fighting to set you free.

Another way we protect our wounds is by having trusted compassionate people to support us.

Now if a friend or loved one comes to you to confess, they open up to you, don't look at them like "You're a loser." Or tell them to buzz off...

Realise you're talking to someone who's been injured, who's hoping to be healed. The amount of courage it took for them to speak to you, is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Maybe, on the other hand, you're going to open up to someone and say, "I'm really struggling with this." Don't beat yourself up with the self-talk, "I'm a loser, no good, jerk that God doesn't even love."

You're someone who's been injured and who's seeking healing from God. This is God drawing you to himself.

You protect the wound, and you also pursue God.

You don't just try to have a good defence. You have an attack – you pursue God. Now God has pursued us and caught us already, but I'm talking about having your mind switched on to his way, he chased after his holiness, his forgiveness, his word,

If all you do is say, "Don't have lustful thoughts, don't have lustful thoughts, don't have lustful thought." That's going to drag you back into it – it's like me saying, don't think of a pink elephant – you just thought of it.

If instead, you say, "I want to pursue God. I want to know him. I want to serve him," that gives you a good offense as well as a good defence. In fact, this is what Paul said.

Ephesians 4:18 and 19.

"They are darkened in their understanding and they are separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."

Some people's hearts are hardened and they are separated from the life that God intended for them.

"Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity."

When we sin like this, we are separated from the life that God intended. Why do we give into lust? Why do we look? Why do we fantasize? Why do we pull up memories from the past? Why do we fool around before we're married? A lot of people would say, "Well, I was just bored. I felt empty.

This kind of filled a void. It was a distraction."

What happened is you were settling for a counterfeit. You were pulled away from the truth.

You are separated from the life that God intended. What life did he intend?

He intended a life of intimacy with another person.

He wants you to have no fear of getting caught, no looking over your shoulder, no regret at all, free from shame.

He wants there to be absolute trust in a relationship, absolute security in intimacy.

For those he has placed the call to singleness and/or celibacy, He calls you to have a life of purity and of depending on him. Christian singleness can be agonizing, and the pressure to be hitched depressing.

And yet, marriage or singleness are both expressions of sexuality as God's people and is more than what happens in the bedroom.

And for those who yearn to be married, we pray for them, and we help them to protect their wounds and to pursue God as they help us.

God wants something far better, but our spiritual enemy puts some bait on a hook and wants us to swim towards something that's going to take us from the life of God.

The times when we are most vulnerable are the time when we have stopped pursuing God. When we have stopped listening to him, being led by the Holy Spirit, living the mission, and speaking with him...

No matter what you are struggling with our loving Father has his arms wide open. He has given us Jesus who has died for our sins, to free us from sexual impurity, lust and to heal the

wounds that we carry. He is the Lord, and he will protect us and guard our minds, and help us to pursue a life free from lust.

"Father, I pray today that your Holy Spirit would do a healing work in our hearts as we seek you.

Father, we pray that you would give us the divine wisdom to distance ourselves from that which would tempt us." "God, help us to protect the wound, that you could heal and renew our mind according to your truth. But God, not only do we want a good defence, we want a good offense. God, we want to awake every day with our eyes focused on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith."

"God, we want to run toward you, living out your calling, your purpose, serving in our church, serving in our communities. God, being available to the prompting of your Holy Spirit, so much on mission for you that we don't have the time to be tempted and distracted by the lower things of this world that do not please you and only hurt us." "God, help us to protect and to pursue you with everything in us.