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Sermon Notes

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Covenant Faithfulness and the Evil Human Heart: Adultery, Divorce, and Oaths Matthew 5:27-37

I. The Uprooted Harvest

- ◆ Traveling through Indiana farmland... rows and rows of cornstalks
- ◆ Each cornstalk was a single seed, planted with hopes of a fruitful harvest
- ◆ Very much like our lives... a life lived in hope of a future harvest
- ◆ Every word said for Christ, every gentle moment of love with our spouse, every lesson taught to our children, every cup of cold water given in the name of Christ is like a seed planted for a future harvest
- ◆ NOW picture a farmer in Indiana whose entire livelihood depends on his crops... gets a call from a friend whose farm is right next door to his... that some species of underground rodent has systematically pushed up each of the stalks of corn from the ground... they are all lying flat and the crop is ruined
- ◆ WHAT WILL THAT FARMER DO TO SAVE HIS HARVEST??? Whatever it takes

Job 31:1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. . . . Does not God see my ways and count my every step? [Adultery] is a fire that burns to destruction; it would have uprooted my harvest. "

II. Christ's Application of the Law: Matthew 5:21-48

- A. Christ's authority: **"You have heard... but I say to you"**
- B. Pharisees' false teaching: **Righteousness through effort**
- C. Heart righteousness: **Perfection required on Judgment Day**
- D. Primary purpose of the Law: **The making of spiritual beggars**

III. The Deeper Issue: The Utter Sinfulness of the Human Heart

- A. We fancy ourselves as generally pretty good

B. The Sermon on the Mount: How much we need Christ & His grace

C. Common theme: Covenant faithfulness... MARRIAGE

IV. Adultery

²⁷ ***“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.***

A. The Devastating Deed

- 1) Simple definition: sexual relations with someone other than your spouse
- 2) The sixth commandment of the ten commandments
- 3) The Spirit of our age
 - a. open flaunting of adultery on TV shows
 - b. how many times are relations mentioned on TV, & how many of those are relations between married partners?
 - c. loss of shame is a loss of one more layer of protection
- 4) A proper fear: Godly people should be deeply afraid of falling into this sin

Proverbs 6:27ff ²⁷ Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? ²⁸ Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? ²⁹ So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.

Job:

Job 31:1 “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. . . . Does not God see my ways and count my every step? [Adultery] is a fire that burns to destruction; it would have uprooted my harvest. ”

Paul:

1 Corinthians 6:18 “Flee sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”

1 Corinthians 9:27 “I beat my body and make it my slave so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

- 5) Satan’s opposite lies: all sex is good or all sex is bad
 - a. Satan pushes to extremes here... early heresies implied that the body was evil and all sexual relations were as well
 - b. Catholic church has forbidden clergy to marry
 - c. Scripture clearly teaches the holiness and rightness of proper relations within God’s boundaries
 - d. NOWADAYS... more likely pushed the opposite way... “If we really love each other, it’s okay!! God wants me to be happy, doesn’t He?”
- 6) Adultery destroys lives... homes are destroyed by it, churches ruined by it...

Illus.: Look at what happened to David’s life after his adultery with Bathsheba... 2 Samuel 11 marks the “Great Divide” of David’s life: before that, the consistent blessing of God... afterward, the consistent chastisement of his sin: the death of the baby, the incest of his son Amnon & daughter, Tamar; the killing of Amnon by Tamar’s brother, Absalom; Absalom’s exile; Absalom’s rebellion; David’s exile; David cursed by Shimei; Absalom’s death; David’s weakness before Joab; Sheba’s rebellion against David; David’s sinful census & the plague that came as a result... it goes on and on.

B. The Desire Behind the Deed

1. Perhaps you haven’t committed adultery... but Jesus goes deeper to probe the heart

²⁷ ***“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.***

2. The lustful look is sufficient to send one to hell
3. Greek word implies continual gazing... looking deeply and pondering; not an accidental or involuntary glance, but something done purposefully

Illus. This is purposefully watching certain TV shows or videos because of their ability to stimulate lust; this is purposefully looking at someone who is dressed in revealing clothes; this is going to a beach purposefully to look at those in a state of undress

4. Accidental viewing not the issue... it's the matter of the will and the heart

C. The Danger of the Desire

1. The Effect of the Desire: What does this thought lead to?

"Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."

2. What is the destiny? Eternity in hell... lust can condemn a soul

It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

3. Reminder of hell:

- a. Jesus used the word "Gehenna" to describe eternal judgment
- b. Gehenna refers to the valley of Hinnom, a ravine south of Jerusalem

Gehenna: Valley of Hinnom used for child sacrifice to God Molech;

- c. Christ's teaching on hell... a place of eternal torment, totally separated from God

1) separation from God: "outer darkness" (Matthew 22:13) where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth... darkness implies total absence of God

2) torment: Luke 16:23 "rich man, in hell, being in torment, lifted up his eyes..."; here in Sermon on the Mount, consistently likens hell to fire

3) eternal: 26:41 "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"

D. The Deliverance from the Danger

- 1) Only Christ can save you from lust!!
- 2) Begin by recognizing your guilt & becoming a spiritual beggar
- 3) Realize the grave danger of a life of lust... you may not be a Christian!... Judgment day is near, and Paul says it is because of lust that the day of wrath is coming
- 4) Then... **ATTACK THE SIN WITH EVERYTHING YOU HAVE**

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if

your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

a. sin will not die with a half-hearted struggle

Illus. John Owen's fight with the viper... "The vigor and power and comfort of our spiritual life depends upon [putting sin to death]."

b. Jesus cut out everything that causes sin

c. NOT literal... if we lose one eye, we still have another... it's a matter of absolute dead earnestness that lust MUST be destroyed

In 1920, a 14 year old farm boy was plowing a field in Utah... as he moved up and down across the acres, plowing in one straight line after another, he began to think about his hobby—electronics; and in the mind of this genius boy sprang an idea that has affected America deeply. The boy's name was Philo Farnsworth, and within 7 years, he had invented the basics of modern television... the first image ever transmitted by television was a dollar sign!

Years later, he was the guest on a show called "What's My Line" in which people had to guess what he was famous for... they asked a question about his invention, asking if it might be painful when used... Farnsworth hated most of what was on television and wouldn't even permit one in his house... he answered "Yes, sometimes it is most painful." Television has become one of the forces which has spread evil faster and more efficiently than any before

d. begin to make some choices... if you find that you lust every time you watch TV, what would Jesus tell you to do? STOP watching TV

CUT OUT everything from your life that causes you to sin

V. Divorce

³¹ ***"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'***
³² ***But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.***

A. A Modern Plague: The Broken Home

B. The Mosaic Law & The Pharisaic Interpretation

1. Matthew 19: debate between factions of rabbis... some say a man could divorce his wife for any and every reason, others said it could only be for sexual immorality
2. Moses' Law: Deuteronomy 24:1-4 simple protection for the woman... NOT a blanket permission to get a divorce!!
3. God's true attitude:

Malachi 2:16 "I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel.

4. Christ clearly speaks this same heart

Matthew 19:4-6 "Haven't you read that at the beginning he made them male and female and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together let man not separate.'"

5. Divorce was NEVER a command by Moses, but rather a concession

Matthew 19:8 "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."

C. Christ's General Principles: The Permanence of Marriage and the Devastation of Adultery

1. One man, one woman, one flesh united for life... that is Christ's standard
2. Divorce for adultery permitted because of the devastation of trust and the severing of the one flesh union
3. Putting together other concerns from Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 fills out the picture... Christ was here only giving general guidelines, not case by case studies... for example, only the adultery of the wife is in view here
4. Today's popular "no fault" divorce and the ever-popular "irreconcilable differences" not at all in view

D. Life in the Kingdom: Lasting Marriages which reflect the commitment of Christ and His Church

Illus. Paul & Ephesians 5: Marriage a picture of the lasting covenant between Christ and the Church

Illus.: Abraham Lincoln's painful marriage: Mary Todd, a vain materialistic woman with a violent temper... she flirted constantly with visitors to the White House and wore shameful fashions that were shocking in her day... several times she attacked

Lincoln, one with firewood, and once with potatoes... Lincoln bore it all patiently, and John Piper believes that these trials helped him develop the incredible patience, tolerance and forbearance that so characterized his policies

Modern people assume that our own personal freedom from pain is a God-given right... a the quick divorce is the answer; Jesus calls us to a higher standard

VI. Oath-Taking and Oath-Breaking

Malachi 2:13 ¹³ *Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.* ¹⁴ *You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.* ¹⁵ *Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.* ¹⁶ *"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel,*

A. Another modern plague: The Broken Promise

B. Issue here: oaths taken and broken

³³ *"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.'* ³⁴ *But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*

1. what is an oath?

2. why does one take one?

C. Pharisaical oath system: This oath counts and that one doesn't

D. Heart issue: truthfulness and commitment

E. The Incredible Power of Words

1. God simply spoke the universe into existence... "Let there be light," and there was light

2. each and every statement God has ever made is true... absolutely secure

3. When God sent His Son into the world, the best analogy He could think of was the Christ was the WORD... an absolutely true and reliable communication from His heart to ours
4. When Jesus opened His mouth to speak, each of His words were uttered for eternity... absolutely true and reliable

Jesus likens his own words to solid rocks on which one can build an entire life and it will not fall... our words are so often like shifting sands

- ◆ We make promises to our spouses and break them... "I will love you and be gentle with you even when the going gets tough"... but then the feeling of love diminishes and we break our promises
- ◆ We make promises to our children: "Yes, Billy... I'll play with you on Saturday," but then Saturday comes and you have other things you want to do
- ◆ We make promises to God, and fail to keep them

F. Warning: Judgment comes on the strength of your words

1. Pharisees compartmentalized God... but He has absolute authority
2. Judgment Day is a study of your words

Matthew 12:34 "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. . . . But I tell you that men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned."

G. God is calling on His people to tell the truth and to stick with their promises... EVEN IF IT HURTS

***Psalm 15:1, 4 LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?
² He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart; ⁴ ...who keeps his oath even when it hurts.***

Illus. Minneapolis almost had to pay \$31 million to a French firm that had intended to build a large mall downtown... the city backed out of a contract to the French firm, and then hired expensive lawyers to save them from the commitment... **the comfort of breaking an oath!!!**

V. Summary and Application

A. Common to all three sin patterns: immediate gratification

- 1) lust craves physical pleasure NOW forgetting the terrible cost later
- 2) divorce wants out of this relationship, forgetting the terrible cost later
- 3) breaking of vows provides an immediate easing of a burden, but forgets the terrible cost later

B. Christ's Kingdom gives power over sin

1. eternal perspective frees us from temporal gain
2. we're not looking for our rewards, our comfort, our pleasure in earthly temporal things
3. Christ's expectation:
 - ◆ men and women free from lust, pure in their eyes and hearts
 - ◆ men and women committed to each other in selfless marriage which mirrors His relationship with His church
 - ◆ men and women who speak truth, not lies... who keep their promises, who let their yes be yes and their no no without wavering if the cost gets too high

C. How can this be done?

1. Spiritual begging
2. Simple and radical obedience:
 - ◆ cut out everything in your life that causes lust
 - ◆ work constantly on your marriage until it reflects Christ and His church
 - ◆ honor your word, even if it hurts