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The Revolutionary Disciple: Authentic Relationships Matthew 5:27-32

We've been talking about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples of Jesus. A couple months back the pastors met on a planning retreat for the fall. I was the lucky one who drew the short straw to talk about adultery, lust and divorce - for my first talk at Chapel Hill, no less! I was feeling a bit of self-pity about that until Pastor Mark told me that Jeremy Vaccaro's first sermon was also on the topic of **sex** and his in-laws were sitting in the audience on the morning of that message. After that I did not feel quite so sorry for myself!

This morning I am talking about Authentic Relationships; specifically, authentic marriage relationships. The dictionary defines "authentic" to mean something that is "genuine, real, bona fide, true, legitimate." An authentic marriage shines like a light on a hill, giving encouragement, inspiration and direction to others who are also married.

At my last church we had a wonderful couple by the name of Erwin and Margaret Gamber. They were both over 90 years of age and they had been married 65 years. They were an amazing example of an authentic marriage! They radiated God's love for each. Whenever they entered the sanctuary they were an inspiration to the rest of us of how to love each other graciously and kindly. They were so patient with each other. Everyone would say, "I want to be like Erwin and Margaret" when I get old!" From what I understand, Chapel Hill's version of Erwin and Margaret are Ray and Patti Payne.

The world desperately needs to see authentic, loving marriage relationships. They draw people to Jesus. Former Fuller Seminary David Hubbard used to say that a God-honoring marriage is our greatest witness that we are disciples of Christ.

Don't we all long for authentic relationships like that? Jesus tells us how in Matthew 5:27-32

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' (Exod 20: 14). But I tell you anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 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 in to hell. 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."

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

Jesus tells us what we need to do to have an authentic marriage relationship. We must guard our marriage – specifically from lust.

What does Jesus mean when he uses the word "lust?" You must not look at another woman "with lust." It might surprise you, but it's not wrong when you see an attractive woman or man and think to yourself.... "Wow that person is good looking! God, You do really fine work!"

God does do exquisite work in his creation. He created us with "sex appeal" like the old ads used to say. If we didn't have it we would never get married! But finding a member of the opposite sex attractive is not what Jesus is getting at when he talks about lust.

What Jesus is driving at here can best be described by the word "staring" or to use a more graphic vernacular term, "ogling." It is not just a look at another person that Jesus condemns; it is a willful, sustained looking – what we would describe as staring. All staring has a purpose, and the staring that Jesus condemns here, specifically is staring with the intent to possess.

When this happens, the other person is no longer a unique human being in our minds; they become an object for desire. She or he becomes fuel for our passions, kindling for the fire of lust. Lust is the opposite of love. To lust over someone is self-taking. We seek to gratify the desires of our flesh. To love someone is self-giving. Love seeks the good of the other. Love gives away; lust takes for oneself.

I once attended a men's group dealing with sexual integrity. One man described what I thought captured the essence of most men's battle with lust. He said, "I long for the day when I stop objectifying women." He really nailed it. Lust is looking at a woman or a man simply as a sexual object to gratify one's own sexual fantasies and desire for pleasure. That's what Jesus is talking about when he uses the word lust.

And Jesus commands his followers to be absolutely ruthless with how they deal with lust. Jesus' followers are to treat lust like it were cancer - with immediate, swift, decisive action. No passivity. No delayed response. Instead, immediate surgery for removal or amputation – gouge out the infected eye, or sever the

gangrenous limb. Jesus said it's better to go into heaven with one eye or one limb than to go to hell with your whole body intact.

Jesus of course is speaking figuratively with this imagery. He doesn't want us dismembering ourselves. We'd all be walking around missing a lot of body parts! But Jesus does not want people to underestimate the destruction that lust can cause both in a marriage and in our singleness.

So how do we deal with this all too familiar demon of lust? Here are a few thoughts. I'm going to feed you some M and Ms this morning. 5 of them to be exact. If you like alliteration, we're serving it up today! The first "M" is to:

1. Make a commitment to daily live with sexual integrity by God's grace.

1 Cor 10:13 (LB) says

"The wrong desires that come into your life aren't anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you. No temptation is irresistible. God will show you how to escape."

I find this verse incredibly reassuring. First, it says everybody faces temptation. It's man's oldest problem since Adam and Eve. We've all had problems with temptation. I'm tempted. You're tempted. It's not a sin to be tempted. It's a sin to give in to temptation. And God will provide a way out of escape. You just have to be willing to take it! And it starts with a commitment.

Job did that. He made a commitment with his eyes. He said,

"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." 31:1 (NIV)

To successfully battle lust you have to make a commit to live a life of sexual integrity, not just settle for not committing the act of adultery.

Another decisive measure you can take to deal with lust is to:

2. Manage your mind.

You need to understand how temptation works.

James 1:14-15 *"Temptation is the pull of our own evil thoughts and wishes. These thoughts lead to evil actions."*

The battle with lust starts in the mind. We need to guard our minds. One way to do that is by practicing the "Principle of Replacement." Lust is just a thought, an image. As soon as a lustful thought comes into your mind, change the channel. Replace it with a positive thought, a clean thought. Telling yourself, "I won't lust, or I won't give in to sexual temptation", doesn't help. Telling ourselves we're not going to do something only fixates our mind on that thing making it more powerful. And we end up doing what we say we're not going to do.

So instead we replace that thought with another. That what Paul is getting at when he says in Romans *"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds."* Transforming our minds is a moment by moment process. We need to change the channel of our minds when an inappropriate thought comes in, especially when it comes to lustful images.

We have to learn to manage our minds. Each of us has the power to choose what we think about. Paul says:

"...take every thought and make it obedient to Christ." 2 Cor 10:5

A third "M" is to:

3. Monitor your media intake.

We live in a sex saturated society. We are bombarded by visual and verbal stimulation every day. Lust is big business. Madison Avenue discovered a long time ago that sex sells. It's so powerful that David said in Ps 101, *"I will set no vile thing before my eyes."* If you're serious about victory in this area you're going to have to give up about 80% of the movies and shows that are out there today.

You're going to laugh when I tell you, but I like watching Hallmark movies. (Even Jenny laughs at me on this one!) Yes, they are sappy and totally predictable. But they are romantic (for you irrepressible romantics in the group) and you don't have to worry about the images.

Scripture says that what you allow in the gate of your mind goes into your soul. Monitor your media intake carefully.

The fourth "M" and probably the most effective way to deal with lust is to:

4. Make confession to a brother or sister in Christ a regular habit.

"Confess your sins to one another pray for one another and you will be healed."
James 5:16

If you want to be forgiven for anything, confess it to God. If you want to be healed, confess it to another brother or sister and pray about it.

Herein lies the power to be set free. There is something about telling another person about a besetting sin that breaks the power of that sin over you. Confession to another person combined with prayer helps break the power of habits and compulsions that have power over us. That's why Celebrate Recovery is such a successful ministry. People practice confessing their hurts and habits to one another, and then they get freed from whatever it is that controls them.

I refer to this as eating humble pie! Humble pie may not taste good, but it's good for your spiritual life; it helps trim down the ego! And it reduces the enemy's power over you in areas we struggle in – like lust.

If you're serious about overcoming lust, make confession to another brother or sister in Christ a spiritual habit you practice regularly. And pray for each other! (Men of course confess to men, and women to women!) This is your most powerful remedy over lust.

The fifth and final "M" I'll mention this morning is to:

5. Maintain your marriage.

This is the greatest insurance for a happy home life. Rekindle that fire.

Prov 5:18-19 says *"Rejoice in your wife. Let her charms and tender embrace satisfy you. Let her love alone fill you with delight."*

The grass is not greener on the other side of the fence. The grass is greener where you water it. You have to regularly tend your marriage garden. Keep dating your spouse! Keep being spontaneous. Keep spending time together. There is no substitute for love in your marriage. And the way you spell love is T.I.M.E. The time requirement is high to possess an authentic marriage. But the investment is worth it. An authentic marriage is the gift that keeps on giving.

So let me ask a question of those of you who are married, since the passage primarily addresses those who are married...

Are you happier today in your marriage than when you first got married? (Jenny and I are happier now in our marriage 28 years into it than ever before, but we will both tell you, we've done a lot of work to make it great! And it's worth it!)

If your marriage is happier today than when you were first married, congratulations. Keep doing what you're doing. If your answer is "no" or "I'm not sure" then consider the following:

1. Sign up to take the *How We Love* marriage seminar in the winter. This series will give you understanding and tools that will heal your marriage and make it stronger.
2. A second consideration is to call the church and ask to meet with one of the trained marriage counselor couples that we have here at Chapel Hill, an amazing resource that most churches don't have. Here's the important thing: ask for help before your relationship is in crisis mode. Many people ask for help after significant damage has been done in a relationship. Relationships can be repaired

if both parties are willing to love, forgive and work on the relationship. Renewal Ministries at Chapel Hill are about healing and redemption, not judgment.

Our vision for Renewal Department is to see the renewal ministries “normalized” in the life of the church. There should be no stigma attached to people who are honestly admitting and working on issues that need healing.

Healing was a normal part of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus said *“It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.”* Jesus came to heal the sick. And honestly we’re all sick, at least a little bit. And we know that. If we were totally well we wouldn’t need a Savior!

Lastly, I want to speak to the congregation concerning the tsunami of pornography pervading our nation. According to Covenant Eyes, an online accountability organization, 50% of Christian men, and 20% of Christian women say they are addicted to internet pornography. Google says that word search for the words porn, XXX or sex will equal 84 million hits per hour by the end of 2014. (These statistics come from Christian Counseling Today, a very respected magazine in the Christian Counseling world.)

From a spiritual and psychological perspective pornography is ravaging the health of our souls. It is one of Satan’s most effective tools in destroying the moral fiber of the Church and our culture. Pornography is not the root problem. It is a symptom of deeper issues of emotional brokenness – a misguided search for intimacy, unresolved hurt, physical/sexual abuse, abandonment, guilt and unforgiveness.

Facebook is another means people use to satiate their pain and become involved in inappropriate on-line relationships.

One of the greatest promises in the Bible is Romans 8:1:

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

We know that God doesn’t want us to stay stuck in a cycle of sexual brokenness and sin. He wants to heal our brokenness. There are people and resources here and available at Chapel Hill to help.

Today, I have asked Celebrate Recovery leaders and Lay Counselors to come down front and be available to you after worship so you can talk to someone. The prayer team will also be here if you want to pray with someone about anything. If the Holy Spirit is speaking to you this morning on this subject, please do not leave this sanctuary before you’ve talked to someone. Your next step in becoming a fully surrendered follower of Jesus may be to get emotional healing in your life.

If you are continually saying or doing a thing you do not want to do, and you know God doesn’t want you to say or do, and yet you don’t seem to have the

power or control over that thing, then be courageous and take action today, by coming forward and talking or praying with one of the Lord's servants here this morning. This will not only bless your life, but also profoundly affect the lives of others who love you.

Let's take a moment and let the Holy Spirit speak to you about this.

*"May the Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you both now and forevermore.*

Recite Colossians 3:17

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

And all God's disciples said: AMEN.

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. What do you think was the most important point in the sermon? Why is it important?
 2. What other reflections do you have about the sermon by Pastor Bill?
 3. How do you think the sermon applies to us as a congregation?
 4. What is it that God wants you to do as a result of hearing this sermon?