

Sermon on the Mount

June 29, 2014

## **Title: Eye Teaming**

Text: Matthew 5:28-30

Summary: Every story has a beginning and an ending. The same is true of the sin of adultery. Jesus explains how it starts and where it can lead to. Our response: radical action before the sad story of adultery can take root in our lives.

## **Eye Problems**

### **Presidential candidates say the darnedest things...**

The year was 1976: the bicentennial of our country and an election year to boot. A little-known southern governor was running for president. His name was Jimmy Carter.

Jimmy Carter was a Christian who taught Sunday School at his local church. For some reason, the Sunday School teacher agreed to an interview in -- of all places -- Playboy Magazine. You might say things went downhill from there.

During the course of the interview Jimmy offered up the following comment:

*"I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times."*

Needless to say, the irony of such a confession in the nation's leading porn magazine was lost on no one.

Jimmy Carter was referring, of course, to what Jesus had to say about the true nature of adultery in the Sermon on the Mount:

### **Matthew 5:28 NIV**

**"But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."**

Carter took a lot of grief for his candid admission of personal failing. Interestingly, most of the criticism he received focused *not on what he confessed to have done in his mind*, but on having shared at too personal a level. Maybe he hit a nerve after all?

### **A matter of the heart and mind:**

Donald Hagner, in his commentary on this passage, points out that what Jesus said wasn't new or revolutionary. The last of the 10 Commandments prohibited "coveting," or lusting after one's neighbor's wife. He goes on to write:

*To lust after someone sexually is to nurture a burning desire for that person in one's heart. Such a lust has a consuming effect. Where lust exists, the discipleship of the Kingdom requires dramatic and determined action to rid oneself of the cause."*

Jesus refused to focus solely on the acting out of lust in adultery. Instead, He went directly to the source of the problem: the heart and mind, where lust takes hold and decisions are made that ultimately lead to the acting out of sexual sin.

## **What's so wrong with "just looking"?**

### **Every story starts somewhere!**

The readers of that 1976 issue of Playboy no doubt found Jimmy Carter's confession "much ado about nothing." After all, what's so bad about "looking"? Nobody gets hurt. Nobody actually *commits* adultery or physically cheats on his spouse. So why was it such a big deal to Jimmy Carter -- or Jesus of Nazareth, for that matter?

Jesus reminds us that every story has a beginning as well as an ending. The sin of adultery doesn't just "happen." It has a beginning in the heart and the mind. It may begin with a chance encounter or an extended conversation. Nowadays it may begin on FaceBook or in some other virtual setting. Whatever the case, the seed is planted in the garden of the mind. It is there that it takes root. It is there that it is nurtured -- a hidden and cherished secret. And it is from there that it is acted out. As James puts it:

### **James 1:14-15 The Message**

**The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer.**

Every story has a beginning. And the sad story of an adultery always starts in the heart.

### **Reflecting Whose Image?**

Secondly, when we look with lust at someone, we go directly against God's purpose for us as His representatives and reflection in this world. Remember how we talked last week about God creating us to be His representatives and His reflection in this world? We saw that when God created humans to be in His image, He did so by creating them as males and females. Only when *both* the male and the female aspects of God's reflection are present is God fully reflected and represented in the world.

So what happens when a man looks at a woman as a sex object instead of as a unique reflection of God? The result is that he *depersonalizes* her. He turns her into a *non-person*. To put it another way, he *dehumanizes* her, choosing instead to see her as an object of lust or pleasure. He may make her into an idol for his fantasy life. He may see her as something to be consumed and thrown away. In any case, he does not honor her as God's Creation and as a person meant by God to reflect God's goodness and glory into God's world.

### **Back to the Garden of Eden:**

Looking with lust is merely re-creating the sin that got the human race into so much trouble in the first place. The Book of Genesis tells us how humans rebelled against their Creator, choosing to desire His Creation instead of choosing to honor Him and reflect His image into His world. We read how a serpent tempted Eve to disobey God. So what was it that tipped the scales, as it were, and caused her to disobey? Just as James warned many years later, the sin of eating the forbidden fruit began with desire, or lust:

### **Genesis 3:6 NIV**

**When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.**

- She saw that the tree was good for food -- in other words, she longed for its fruit.
- She saw that the fruit was beautiful -- again, making her want it for herself.
- She desired the supposed wisdom that would come from taking it.

When a person looks with lust at another woman -- either in person or online, for that matter -- he makes her into something other than what God intended.

The writer John captures this wrongful desire in his warning to his churches:

### **1 John 2:15-16 NIV**

**Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.**

To reflect God into His world means to love Him above all else. It means that our eyes focus on Him and His purpose for us and those around us. And this is a choice that we make every day in every situation in life.

### **Eye Teaming**

**"Eye teaming":**

God gave us not one, but two, eyes -- designed to work together. Eye specialists refer to this as "eye teaming."

*"Eye teaming" refers to the ability to use both eyes together smoothly, equally, simultaneously and accurately in order to keep objects single. If our eyes are pointed in different places in space, we see double! Double vision is VERY disruptive, and makes reading, learning and athletics nearly impossible. (vision-learning.org)*

When men and women relate properly as God's image "in stereo" in the world, you might say that they "eye team," providing a clear, accurate image of God. This is what happens in a healthy marriage. It is also what happens whenever Christian men and women relate in a wholesome and pure way. We see God's family functioning as it was meant to function -- reflecting Him and representing Him in this world.

### **Where is the story going?**

How important is it that we get this right? Jesus says:

#### **Matthew 5:29-30 NIV**

**If your right eye causes you to stumble, 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. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, 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.**

Every story has a beginning. Every story has an ending. Get the beginning of the story wrong and you risk a nasty ending. That's why Jesus says that we must take drastic action -- whatever is necessary -- to keep from letting lust rule in our lives. Of course, He does not mean that we should literally maim ourselves. But He is saying that something has to *die* if we are to truly *live*.

For instance, if you are struggling with an online porn addiction, you may very well need to cut off internet access as part of getting free. You may need to trade in your smart phone for something "dumber." You will need to establish accountability for any use of your computer. You will need to man-up to your problem and seek help.

The "hell" that Jesus spoke of was symbolized by the city dump on the south side of Jerusalem -- the Valley of Hinnom, or Gehenna. It was the place where the old, rotten and broken things of this world ended up in their culture. It stood for the bad end of this world's story. Jesus says that if we let lust rule in our lives and depersonalize others our story goes there.

### **So let's review:**

So let's review what Jesus said and what that means for us:

- The sin of adultery begins not with an act but with thoughts and desires that we don't let go of.
- Looking with lust at someone means that we stop seeing them as made in God's Image with a God-given purpose; instead, we turn them into objects for our acquisition and consumption.
- Lusting means that we exchange the proper love of God for an unhealthy and life-controlling lust for someone He created.
- This story always ends in the garbage pit of this world.
- The only way out is to take radical action -- whatever is necessary -- to get back on track.

And here's the Good News: God created us to be His reflection in the world. That means we were never intended to be enslaved by lust. If we confess our sin to Him and ask Him to set us free, He will do so. And He will restore us to our original God-given purpose.

Anything less is living -- and dying -- in the dump.