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Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: The Sermon on the Mount
Message: When Look Becomes Lust

Transcribed Message
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Matthew 5:27-30

As you look at those numbers on the screen, those numbers can take you in a moment of time into a world that is as far removed from God's plan for human sexuality as you could ever imagine it would be possible to go. The first one is 4.6 billion hours, which represents the total number of hours viewed at the number one porn site in the world in the year 2016. A number that is just incomprehensible. The number 11 speaks of the average age when a child first sees some very inappropriate picture. 70% is the number of teens and young adults who when they think of porn don't define it in terms of its form as much as they do in terms of its function. This is simply to say that if they're viewing something and it's function, they don't believe it is to take them into pornography then it's okay. It's function has some other purpose – art, movie, whatever that might fall into. 57% of young people see porn at least once a month. 96% of young adults when asked gave an either neutral or accepting response with regard to this issue. In other words, no strong visceral response of understanding the depth of depravity and brokenness that it represents. 61% is the number that reflects the mobile devices and cell phones being used to access this material. 33% of women under the age of 25 admit that they visit a site at least once a month. 62% of teens who either send or receive explicit pictures of themselves to somebody else. It has just simply become a part of the dating scene in our culture. 36% of young adults who use these kinds of things to so call set the mood. 80% those who view who said they have no real sense of guilt once they've watched it. Behind those shocking statistics are people who are made in the image and likeness of God on every level. They are people whom God loves. Those are people for whom Jesus died and they are people that Jesus speaks to in Matthew 5, the passage we return to this morning again.

So let's do that. Let's turn to Matthew 5. We continue in the Sermon on the Mount this morning. We want to look at what Jesus says in this light. Purity of heart and mind

is absolutely essential. We can say without hesitation it is God's will for your life that you avoid sexual immorality. My friends, it is true that sexual sin has a way of disarming. It has a way of discouraging. It has a way of putting people down. It has a way of distracting us from a vibrant passionate walk with God like few things do. We want to see what God has to say about this vital area this morning. I think it is fully and totally appropriate that we hear from God on these kinds of things because I'm telling you, the world is bombarding us every day with its perspective and its message. So while this may be somewhat uncomfortable for some, the reality is if you're not hearing what God has to say about these things, then you're missing out on the opportunity to be equipped to do battle in the world that we live in everyday.

Let's view it from that perspective and ask God to open our hearts in that way. As we do that, let's step back and just remember the context in which we're finding these verses this morning. It is really this section of verses 20 through 48 of the 5th chapter. We've already seen the beatitudes and the similitudes in the first 16 verses. Now we come in the section, verses 20 to 48, to where Jesus is telling us all of this flows out of verse 20. All of this flows out of verse 20. Remember back in verse 20: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." So this is a shocking statement that Jesus makes. Shocking in the 1st century because what Jesus was doing was stepping into their world and saying if you're not any better than the Pharisees. Nobody thought they could ever be as good as a Pharisee. Jesus said you're not going to make it. What Jesus is going to do is He is going to take them from simply looking at the law of God through the perspective of the law and the letter, and He's going to expand their understanding to realize that behind that law, which is good, there is the spirit of that law that Jesus wants them to understand. He goes into six different comparisons. We've already looked at one two weeks ago. The difference between anger and murder. It's not enough, Jesus says, not to just not kill somebody. You also can't hate somebody because both of them are a part of God's law to us.

Secondly, in this context, it is really an illustration of how it is that we're to put off self-righteousness and we are put on God's righteousness. That's what every one of these snapshots is going to bring before us. The reality that we need to put off this idea

of self-righteousness and all we need is a little help from God. God, all I need is for you to give me a little boost every so often. We get wrapped up in this world of self-righteousness in which we actually think we have the capability and the capacity to do the things that God has called us to do. Jesus is going to put front and center that our attitude needs to be God save me! God change me. God transform me. God renew me. I can't do this. Maybe I haven't murdered somebody, but Jesus says that's not enough. You also must not hate. You must not have a resentful heart. All of these things really bring us to the fact that we need the righteousness of God in our life to replace our self-righteous spirit.

Let's do that by looking at the eye of lust and begin by looking at the nature of temptation. I want to read the verses this morning beginning 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 out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that 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."

Let's look at four things that I think will help us unwrap these verses. Let's do that by talking about first of all the nature of temptation. The nature of temptation. We need to understand right from the beginning that temptation itself is not sin. Temptation is not sin. You and I go through a day and we are tempted 100 times in the day. To do and to yield to and to think all kinds of things that are not honoring to God – that's the sin. Temptation is simply a part of life's experiences. It is not sin to be tempted. After all, if you turn back one chapter in the Gospel of Matthew to the 4th chapter, you see Jesus Himself going through a grueling and intense period of time in which Satan comes to our Lord and tempts Him to sin. The writer of Hebrews says He was tempted in all points like we are yet without sin. So it's never right to become guilty over the temptation itself. It is like Martin Luther said. You can't keep the birds from flying overhead, but you can keep them from coming and building a nest in your hair. There are just realities that are a part of our world. It's not sin to be tempted.

Secondly, temptation is always to sin. Temptation is always to sin. That's always the objective of temptation. When temptation comes to us, either by means of the world, the flesh, or the devil, the end desire of temptation is always that we would be entrapped in sin, that we would yield to the temptation, that we would give ourselves over to it. The temptation itself isn't sin, but the yielding to that, what I choose to do in the face of that temptation is what determines that. You know, one of the things that we do well to remember is that sin by its very nature is harmful. It's destructive. It is always death as the end result in some form or another. That's what sin does. The wages of sin, the Bible says, is death.

Thirdly, temptation appeals to human desires. Temptation appeals to human desires. Often the desires that temptations appeal to are good desires. They are God-given desires. Sex is a gift given to us by God. It was created by God. God is not up in heaven, as someone said, shocked and surprised that humans have figured this thing out. He is the one who created it. He is the one who gifted us with it. He is the one who sanctified it. All of those things are part of this understanding that Jesus gives us about this very important area. One of the things that the world does, one of the things that Satan does is he takes all the good gifts that God gives to us and he twists them and he distorts them. He wants us to see them in illegitimate ways. The same thing is true in this regard.

The Bible's message about sex in my mind is exceedingly simple. Before marriage, it is just simply "no". one word. Before marriage God says no. there are boundaries that God has established and while they may seem foolish to the world, they reflect the wisdom of God and the heart of God for us. Before marriage the answer simply is no. After marriage the answer is go. I don't know if I thought that up originally this week, but I was pretty proud of myself when I came up with that. No. Go. Now go has to have a little mark by it. Go is within the boundaries of marriage and within the boundary of your own husband or wife. But before marriage is no. After marriage is go.

The reality, my friend, is what Jesus is going to teach us here in Matthew 5:27 to 30 if we as the people of God have a healthy understanding of what God has given to us in the sexual relationship within a marriage. If we truly see it as a gift that God has given, if we truly see it as a way to bless and serve one another within marriage, that's

the latest protection that you can have from what Jesus is going to be teaching in these verses. I would imagine that if you ask a marriage counselor he finds very few (and there may be exceptions related to life's circumstance) but I would imagine that most marriage counselors that are involved in difficult marriage situations would almost tell you 100% if you were to ask that couple how is your physical relationship. They would say it's a disaster. It is simply reflective of what God intended in this beautiful gift that He has given.

Lastly, temptation begins in the mind. Temptation begins in the mind. That's why the Bible puts so much emphasis on our mind. Guard your heart. Proverbs 4. Guard your heart. Guard your mind. Why? Because out of it flows issues of life. Everything of your life flows out of your thought life. Proverbs 23 – as a person thinks in their heart so are they. 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul tells us to bring every thought into captivity to Christ. The mind is crucial to not just this area but every area of life. That's why the Word of God needs to be washing over our mind every day. That's why we're supposed to be people of the book. You can't get there apart from this. You can't think God's thoughts. You can't develop a passion for the things that God is passionate about if you don't know the heart of God. The only way we learn the heart of God is to be in this book in which all of these stories, all this teaching, all of this instruction, even the giving of the law, is all designed to show us the heart of God for His people. Here we see the great importance. If Satan can get us thinking about the temptation that is in front of us in such a way that we are more open to it than we were before, he's halfway home. It all starts in our thoughts.

Let's take that and let's look at the nature of lust. In verses 27 and 28, Jesus speaks specifically to this issue when He says: "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." Let's start with the teaching of the Pharisees. What were they saying about this? Jesus said you have heard that it was said. Remember, we noted already the Pharisees were a highly respected, highly thought of group of teachers. They were like the favorite Bible teachers of the 1st century. Everybody looked to them with great respect and regard. Jesus is simply saying those Pharisees who are your teachers have said thus and so to

you. He goes through that each of these six times. In this particular case, if you were to have said to the Pharisees what is a violation of the seventh command? When God said you shall not commit adultery, how do you bring that application into the life of God's people? How are you teaching that to these 1st century Jews? They would have answered and they would have said that the breaking of the 7th command (thou shall not commit adultery) is when you enter into a physical sexual relationship with someone other than your husband or wife. That was true. That is, of course, an accurate application and understanding of the 7th command. But what they failed to do was to move beyond the letter of the law to also include the spirit of the law. That's what Jesus is going to do. The Pharisees said basically this is all about outward appearance. It's not really mattering what you're thinking. It's all about whether you've done it or not. If you haven't done it, it's okay. There was actually a rabbi who is recorded in history as having said almost those exact words. God doesn't care what you think. He doesn't want you to act this out. What is that? That becomes the seedbed for self-righteousness. I'm better than you because you have fallen into the sin of adultery, because you have entered into the physical act. I've never done that therefore I'm better than you.

All you have to do is to see the application of this in one of the most powerful stories of the Bible. Go to the gospel of Luke and read the prodigal son. The prodigal son is an acting out of everything that Jesus is teaching in Matthew 5. It is a picture of self-righteousness and it is a picture of God's righteousness. It is a picture of the son who decides that he doesn't want to live under his father's authority anymore. In fact, that's really not adequate. He really wants to see his father dead because he wants his father's inheritance. He basically goes to his dad and said that I wish you were dead. Would you mind giving me all that I'm supposed to get from you even though you haven't died yet? He is in total rebellion against his father. His father graciously gives him his provision. What is it he does? He goes to another country and there he lives a licentious, immoral life only to awaken one day to the reality that he needs to go back home. When he goes back home, who does he encounter? He encounters not only a loving father but he encounters a self-righteous, pharisaical, older brother. That's who we often are in that story, by the way. That's who I am most of the time in that story. I'm

not the licentious, immoral-living younger son. I would never do that, but I would sure take on the robes of self-righteousness and condemn everybody who has. So that's the picture that Jesus is giving to us here.

In doing that, notice secondly the teaching of Jesus. We immediately move beyond the letter of the law when Jesus teaches to the spirit of the law. I want you to see two important words from the text. Look again at verse 28. We'll just read it again: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Two words that we need to be mindful of in this 28th verse. The first is the word "looks". Jesus says this is the way I see it. This is the way I'm teaching it. Looks. We have here a word that means more than an inadvertent glance. What Jesus is talking about here is not where you're in some kind of public setting and you walk by somebody who may be dressed inappropriately, or who maybe is just a very beautiful or handsome looking person. You see them and it is just in a glancing mode you look at them, you notice them and you've gone by them. That's not the word Jesus is using here. The word Jesus is using here is in the present tense so in effect He is saying to us that here is someone not just glancing, not just looking, not just inadvertently seeing somebody or something. But here is somebody who keeps on looking. That's the idea of the present. Continuous action. If it is continuous action, it means you continue to look. You continue to stare. You continue to gaze. You set your eyes on something and you're not turning them away. Or, you see them once and you look, but that's not enough so you look a second time. And that's not enough so you continue to look for a third time, and that's not enough so you look a fourth time. It is rightly said that the first look never gets you into trouble. The first look might very well be understood as temptation. There it is. It's the second, third, fourth look. It's the continuation of that stare that Jesus is speaking to here.

Let me just speak a word to the guys. If you think your wife does not realize, if you think your wife is unaware of the fact that you do that, you are really naïve. You really don't understand your wife. Because our wives, guys, have a sixth sense about that very thing. Men who do that regularly wound their wives deeply and it is a sin against your wife. Jesus is going to develop that but that just needs to be said. When you look the second and third and fourth time, that's what Jesus is talking about here.

Ask King David. It wasn't sin for King David to necessarily be on the roof. He probably should have been off at war. We understand that he was at the wrong place, but let's just take it as it is. He is on the roof of the palace. He looks and he sees a beautiful woman bathing. At that moment, all he needed to do was to look the other way and walk the other way and the temptation would have been over. But he didn't do that, did he? In fact, if you just read in between the lines of that story, it becomes very obvious, whether this was a one-time occurrence or whether it was something that was occurring over a period of days, to where he finally said I want this woman to come to the palace. That is not terribly relevant, but the reality is he was looking continuously at someone he should not have been.

Jesus goes on to say in the second word, the one who looks with lustful intent. The one who looks with lustful intent. The look can quickly transition to lust. Now we not only have broken the 7th commandment, but now we've broken the 10th Commandment. To look on a woman with lustful intent is a violation of the 7th commandment of thou shall not commit adultery. Then it extends to the 10th commandment which is thou shall not covet. Now you're coveting something that isn't yours. Jesus is speaking to that. What He says to us is simply this. Sexual sin always begins in the mind. Sexual sin always begins in the mind. It doesn't always end the mind, but it always begins there. Not all lust leads to physical adultery, but all physical adultery started with lust. That's what Jesus is giving us by way of His understanding. For Jesus, it is not that lust might lead to sexual sin. It is that lust is sexual sin. The Pharisees said the law only speaks to the letter and if you don't physically involve yourself. you haven't sinned. Jesus said no. That's to miss the point of the heart of God. God has established parameters and blessings in which He wants you not only to give yourself to each other physically, but He wants you to keep yourself from looking at somebody that isn't yours. If you violate that, then you have committed a sexual sin. That's why He says "but I say to you". It is not limited to the physical realm. It includes our mind as well.

Let me make three observations about what Jesus has taught to this point. It is very similar to the one we made last week and that is this. Jesus is not saying there is no difference between lust and adultery. Remember, when we looked at anger and murder two weeks ago. We said they're not one and the same. If you want to be angry

with me, okay. I can live with that. But if you're going to be so angry that you kill me, then I can't live with that. I'm dead. You killed me. So there's a vast difference between those two on one level. There are similarities and Jesus taught that and the same thing is true here. He is saying that lust in the mind and the physical act of adultery are both sin. Both are a form of sexual sin. Both are a form of adultery, but there's a big difference between the two. That's what He says in verse 28. Notice. It's very, very important that you see that: "He who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." In his heart. That's an important distinction. Both are sin. Both are wrong. But one has consequences that are far greater. The gravity of one is vastly different than the gravity of the other in terms of the consequences.

There was just recently an interview on CNN. Aaron Burnett was interviewing a national Christian leader and he said: "Jesus said if you lust in your heart, it's the same as committing adultery." I just respectfully disagree with that. I don't think that is at all what Jesus is saying. Jesus didn't say that. What Jesus said is that you have committed adultery with her in your heart. What you have is lustful intent. It is the seed thought. Physically involving yourself with someone other than your spouse is the product of that seed. So if one represents the seed, the other one is the plant. If one is the beginning, the other is the fruit. They are vastly different.

If you don't believe me, let me give you a current event that presses this point home very well. The whole sordid, terrible, horrific account that we've been hearing about too much of with Dr. Nasser and 150 young ladies involved in gymnastics. We know from news accounts and from his own testimony that he was deeply involved in pornography, including child pornography. That was lustful intent. That was sexual sin as Jesus describes it for us. But you tell me what is worse – that he did that? Or that he then proceeded to physically violate 150 young ladies? The consequences in their lives answer the question. Jesus is not saying if you've got lustful intent in your heart, just go ahead and carry it out because it's all one and the same. He is not saying that. He is saying they're both sin before God. They're both a form of sexual sin. They're both a form of adultery, but they are not one and the same.

Secondly, this teaching that Jesus has given to us I don't want you to misunderstand that this is only a message for men. This is a message that very clearly needs to be heard by men and women. Granted, the way God has made man, the way God has wired man, the way God has put men together, we understand that there are significant differences. I quickly acknowledge that this has application in many ways to men on a different level than it does for the women. But I believe Jesus's words speak to all of us. Statistics are bearing this out as more and more women find themselves going to these kinds of sites.

Then lastly, the cultural differences between the 1st century and the 21st century. They're just staggering. They're staggering, aren't they? The differences between our time and Jesus's time. When Jesus gave this instruction, what kind of technology did they have? They didn't have any technology. They had nothing. Here we are in the 21st century and I don't need to belabor that. What about the world of fashion and dress and how we present ourselves? In Jesus's day, it was obviously culturally more likely that you were fully and completely covered. Today it is how much can we uncover? So we're on opposite ends in terms of just how we present ourselves. The whole matter of the openness with which we discuss these things. The conversations that happen everywhere. When you're watching the Super Bowl tonight, parents, I hope you've got the remote in your hand for every commercial because some of them might be good and funny. Some of them frankly I don't think need to be viewed if it's historically going to reflect what we've seen in the past.

This is heartbreaking stuff. This is insanity. We live in a sexually insane world. I hope you understand that. We live in a sexually insane world that there is now an app and I went ahead and looked it up. this app is called "We Consent". and it is an app that if you're going to be connecting with someone on a particular occasion, both download this app and you work your way through this app. You give consent to each other in case something goes awry so it's not a he said/she said. What we've got right here on the app, we've both agreed to this. It is insane. So what are we to do? What are we to do? We know we can't run and we know we can't hide. We can't because Jesus tells us we can't. he's already told us that we're to be salt and light. People have tried running away from the very express purpose to get away from sexual temptation. What do they

always take with them? They take with their mind, their heart. Jesus calls us to purity. Jesus knew full well when He gave His teaching in the 1st century what you and I were going to be living in in the 21st century. I think His word is adequate for us.

Let's look at the nature of the solution in verses 29 and 30: "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." Four things. First of all, when you read those verses what's one of the first things that should come to your mind? Jesus is absolutely serious about what He's talking about. In our last study about anger and murder, Jesus talked about hell. Do you know that in the New Testament the work "gehenna" that is translated hell in our translation is used 12 times. Jesus is responsible for 11 of them. If you don't want to hear anything about the doctrine of hell, if you say that it's not a doctrine – it's right here. We don't take any joy in acknowledging it, but it is a part of the Scripture. Jesus is the one who tells us more about it than anybody else. He says to us that God's judgment is real, that hell is real, accountability is real, and we dare not treat lightly what God treats with great seriousness. The world laughs at us with regard to how we see the matter of sexual purity. They mock us regularly. I don't care. Do you know why Jesus says you've got to take this stuff with deadly seriousness? God has His purpose and His plan and if you take that attitude, Jesus says you'll end up in hell. I'm not talking about someone who has put their faith and trust in Christ and who has received the forgiveness of sin. I'm talking about the world laughing at this idea. Jesus said that if you take that view it goes only one place. It goes to death and destruction.

Secondly, it is figurative. We can all relax. The cure for lust is not amputation. If that's what Jesus is teaching, why would he just tell you to cut off the right hand and not the left hand? Poke out the right eye and also poke out the left eye. It is not amputation He is talking about here. He is talking figuratively. He is using what we call hyperbole. It is a figure of speech. It is a form of getting your attention by exaggeration, but the point of it is Jesus wants us to see that this is serious and He wants us to get real about how we confront it and how we deal with it.

This brings me to the third point. We need to do so in a radical way. It's radical, isn't it? It was just as jarring to the 1st century audience to hear Jesus say these things as it is to us. It is a call to treat sin in drastic measures. Don't pamper it. Crush it. Don't enjoy it. Ask God to give you a hatred for it. I think Jesus would say to us in application you do whatever it takes to overcome this temptation.

Then lastly, it's practical. Let me tell you what I mean by that. First of all, we begin where Jesus does. We begin where Jesus does. It's not out there. We can spend all of our time decrying that the world has gone insane with regard to sex. We would all agree that they have. But the problem is not out there. The problem is in here. By the way, those opening statistics that I shared they reflect that. They reflect that the problem of that whole matter of pornography is not out there in the world alone. It is in here too. It's among us. We're struggling in that regard. That's what the statistics tell us. It begins not by looking at someone else and blaming them, making an excuse. It comes back to looking at our own heart. It's not I can handle it. It's God I know I'm incredibly vulnerable. So you begin where Jesus does. You begin in your own heart, in your own mind.

Secondly, prepare for battle. Prepare for battle. Know your enemy. Know your enemy is relentless. Know he is cunning. Know he is a liar. Know he is a deceiver. Everything he promises you about this is not going to come to pass. He will never tell you the cost. Every time I read one of these stories about a public figure, oftentimes too often a pastor or a Christian leader or a politician or somebody in the public limelight, and you read of their fall into sexual sin. Then you read the next line and it says is married and has three children. The pain. That is never given to these people up front. It all comes at the other end. The pleasure never, never is greater than the pain. Know yourself. Know your enemy. Know yourself. Watch what you're watching. Take in account of the things that you're watching, that you're listening to. Understand the choices that you make and where the choices take you. These are oftentimes recurring patterns. Put on the armor of God. That's the whole point of Ephesians 6. One of the pieces we put on is the helmet of salvation. There's also the sword of the Spirit and breastplate of righteousness. All of those are so vital to preparing for the battle that we find ourselves in.

Then finally enlist help. Enlist help. That help begins by crying out to God. That help begins by calling out for the Holy Spirit to give us a quick awakening to the temptations that are around us, to bring conviction into our life. It extends to the church family. You were not designed to go it alone. Do you know the studies consistently show that people who are caught up in addictive behavior have a similar life story to tell, and very often it is one of isolation and loneliness. God never intended for you to be isolated. He never intended for you to be alone. That's why He gave us the body of Christ to be sharing life together.

I read a wonderful article this week called "A Safe Place for Sexual Sinners". You know where that was? Right here. A safe place for sexual sinners should be in the church. We should be the ones who engage in and help people walk through all of these various temptations. We should be there to come alongside and to provide the direction and encouragement that God's people and God's Word gives.

So what do we take away? Listen. The resources that we have in the gospel and the resources that we have in Christ are greater than any of the temptations we face. They're greater even than the gates of hell itself. What God calls us to is to repent, to receive forgiveness, and to be renewed. To repent, to receive forgiveness and to be renewed. That's why Paul says in Romans – I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God that you would present your bodies as a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God which is the most reasonable thing you can do in light of all that He has done for you. Don't be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you can show what that perfect will of God is for your life. And the perfect will of God is that we walk in sexual purity.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we are so, so thankful that you speak with such clarity. You speak with such honesty. You speak with such boldness. You come to where we are. Father, I pray this morning that your Holy Spirit will use Your Word to encourage, to move someone towards repentance and the seeking of forgiveness, the steps towards renewal. Father, we know for that to happen there has to first of all be a response to the gospel of Your grace. That gospel that we have sung about. It is that grace upon which we stand that causes us to see that what Jesus did for us was all that needed to be done in His death on the cross. Father, we pray that your Holy Spirit will

do both of those good works today moving someone towards faith in Christ, one step closer to understanding and accepting and believing the gospel. Lord, we pray that You will move us as Your people into a life style commitment of sexual purity in a world that is mad and has gone crazy so that we can truly be the salt and light You called us to be. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.