

se7en: Lust

Reconnect – March 22, 2009

Text: I Thessalonians 4:1-5; Romans 8:1-2

Key Thought: Lust disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote: a connection with God that brings health, life and joy.

Finally dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You are doing this already, and we encourage you to do so more and more. For you remember what we taught you in the name of the Lord Jesus. God wants you to be holy, so you should keep clear of all sexual sin. Then each of you will control your body and live in holiness and honour – not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways. (I Thessalonians 4:1-5, NLT)

Pre-Intro: Chocolate Axe Man (video)

Intro: “What can I say about lust?”

- I’ll let you know next week how well that works – I’m buying three cans of the stuff right after church is done this morning
- Lust... what can I say about lust? What do I NEED to say?
- After all, it’s just about everywhere – advertisers have known for a very long time that you can sell just about anything with sex, from SUV’s to body spray
- (I was getting the car washed yesterday, and as I’m driving into the car wash on Strandherd, what pops into my head? Yep – talk about wrecking the moment!)
- Universal sexual desire – lust demands to be the centre of attention, all the time – it’s never content to have a supporting role
- Sensuality and sexual desire are worshiped in our society – we have to be in shape, we have to be beautiful, we have to desire and be objects of desire, and we have celebrities to lead the way in it, to be our fantasies of who we’d like to be or have
- Yet ironically, sex is trivialized at the same time – it’s no big deal – just an act, just filling a need
- And in a culture that is equal parts “if it feels good do it” and “have a little fun for once”, it falls to the followers of Jesus to keep their eyes on the page that reads what we heard earlier:

Read Text: I Thessalonians 4:1-5

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Why are we so uptight?

- And before we even get into it, I have to ask: “Why are we so uptight, anyway?”
- There’s no room for negotiating in this section that Paul the church planter writes to the church in Thessalonica, in modern-day Greece
- It’s part of what is considered by many to be one of the first, if not THE first, letter written by Paul to a church that he had founded, and this is a pretty key section – and there’s no room for lust here
- So was Paul a little bit uptight? Frustrated? Anti-women? Repressed? People have said all these things and more about him
- And yet, maybe he knew something about lust that we tend to forget, or at least want to forget

Lust: defined

- But let’s back up a little bit first: what is lust, anyway? What can I say about lust?
- There are all kinds of definitions, but I think it comes down to this: lust is a need to conquer or destroy something attractive – to either have it or barring that, to make sure that no-one else can have it
- Listen to what Tomlin has to say about it:

The desire of lust is for conquest and possession. It is also about personal, physical satisfaction. It thinks of the other person as a means for getting that satisfaction, of releasing the tension of sexual desire. And as such it makes the other person less than a person. They become just the need through which a physical need can be satisfied or relieved; a bit like a hamburger or even a toilet... this is what lies at the heart of lust: pure selfishness. (Tomlin 123)

- Conquer or destroy – control or trample – it’s going to be one of those options
- We generally figure that lust is a guy thing – “what’s wrong with building up an appetite along the way as long as I eat at home?”
- And yet, today it’s equal opportunity – the sexual revolution meets the feminist movement and bingo! Women are expected to have the same kinds of desires, and to act on them in the same ways as men – conquer or destroy, control or trample what they are attracted to
- It seems that more and more, we are all in the same boat

The Church’s response:

- Unless of course, you’re a “church person”, in which case there’s no problem – no problem at all **[denial]** – there is nothing to see here, move along, nothing to see here
- Why don’t we have a problem with lust? Because, in response to a culture that worships sex and sensuality, we have elevated lust to be the worst sin of all, and “just said no” – literally – as a reaction to what we see all around us
- There’s no place for lust, no room for desire – no, bad, un-uh, nope, nada, bye-bye
- At least, that’s been the message that has been received – and people, faced with a choice between what they have and a life devoid of passion, make their choice accordingly
- But what does it really mean to **“live in a way that pleases God?”**, as the first part says? What’s He looking for, anyway?

God on lust, part 1: “I invented sex and I like it”

- God’s first answer might be unexpected – He says, “read the beginning of the book”
- God invented sex, way back on about page 2 of the Bible, when He created people
- And think about how He made it – as nature tells us, He had some options – He could have made us asexual, where we wouldn’t have needed anyone else to reproduce
- But no, he made it something between two people in marriage – and then added pleasure into the mix
- We get so uptight that you would think that sex came along after sin came into the world – after Eve took a bite of the apple and Adam said “hey, give me some of that, will you?”
- But it didn’t – sex and desire are there when the world is perfect, and there is some multiplication going on, and God, seeing everything, calls it “very good”
- Our yes has been way too quiet – within marriage, God says “go for it – desire your spouse, love them deeply and joyfully and fully in every way” – it’s a treasure
- Tomlin, again:

...evil is not very creative. It just takes something good and twists it, distorting it into something destructive and painful... the physical pleasure of sex is a good, healthy and positive thing. Sexual feelings are God’s gift to us and it would be unnatural and odd not to experience them at all. Christian hostility to lust is not hostility to sex.” (Tomlin 122)

- There’s a pastor in rural Alabama who made the news a couple of weeks ago – his church has grown to where it’s much bigger than the small town it’s in, and he’s been preaching a series on “Great Sex, God’s Way”, complete with huge billboards – and stirring up all kinds of controversy in the Bible Belt
- What he’s preaching is straight out of the Bible, and he’s STILL taking heat for it – which unfortunately, has been par for the course for the past couple hundred years

God on lust, part 2: “Lust is like cancer and I hate it”

- God’s second answer might be expected, but maybe not why you’d think – “take a look around you”
- We can nudge and wink at lust – but the price tag is steep – rape, murder, violence against women, unwanted pregnancies and abortions, adultery, shattered marriages, devastated children, broken people, anorexia/bulimia, low self-worth and self-loathing, shame, guilt and hopelessness
- When the Bible says, “**God wants you to be holy, so you should keep clear of all sexual sin**”, it’s not to be some kind of prude or killjoy – it’s because He’s the one that’s always trying to pick up the pieces of the people that He loves so much, all of His children, created to be like Him and to be with Him
- Lust is like cancer, because it starts out as something natural and healthy – sexual desire – and then quickly morphs into something deadly that spreads so fast and destroys everything in its path
 - When a doctor tells you that you have cancer, you don’t fool around with that – you get rid of it
 - Can you imagine a doctor saying to you, “Well, you have cancer, but it’s not too bad... we’ll just keep an eye on it and everything will be still alright”?
 - No – it’s about doing everything possible to become “cancer-free”, not “cancer-limited”, and then making changes in lifestyle to stay that way, so it doesn’t come back
- The price tag of lust is way too high to get near – it truly is the devil’s playground

So what's the answer?

- Over the ages, Christians have asked themselves that question, and a lot of times, they've answered "Get rid of all of it" – push down all sexual desire, don't talk about it, sweep it under the rug, and eventually, the lust problem will fix itself
- The problem is, that doesn't work - Christianity, unlike Buddhism, maintains that even though our desires get us into trouble, that we were made to be passionate people, because we were made in the image of a wonderful, passionate, loving God, and He is always at work recreating us back to that ideal
- I love what C.S. Lewis had to say on this, in his book Mere Christianity:

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased. (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity)

- Instead, God says **"learn to control your own body and live in holiness and honour – not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways"** - so how do we do that?

1) Examine the roots of your lust

- Shame; low self-worth; control issues; what hole are you trying to fill, and who are you trying to control? (No-one would ever want to love me: therefore, I need to conquer or destroy)
- "Lust is the craving for salt of a man who is dying of thirst" – Frederick Buechner

2) Ask for God's help

- Even if you've done it a thousand times before, do it once more – but this time, ask him to deal with what's becoming clear in 1)

3) Awaken your desire for God

- The myth of lust is that you need to fight it to beat it – but it's a mud fight, and you just wind up getting more dirty – the more you focus on it and try to fight it, the stronger the hold it takes
- The better way is to go around it to God, and let your desire grow and be for God – as that desire for God grows, one day it will be larger than your lust

4) Let God love you back (forgiveness)

- When God forgives us, He does it out of love – there aren't any strings attached – He refuses to keep holding our wrongs against us, just as we forgive OUR kids – don't let your shame get in the way of His love

5) Plan in restraint

- One of the wisest ladies I know was famous for the saying "Nothing good happens after midnight" – and except for sermon preparation, it's true
- Planning in restraint means forecasting when you're going to be weak or tempted or vulnerable, and limiting yourself in advance – making better choices when you're stronger, not weaker – help yourself out – like not answering the door when the mailman comes with a package – **as the Bible says, "you're a slave to whatever controls you"**

6) Get accountable

- Open your life up to someone else and be honest with them – bring this out of the darkness and into the light, and watch it start to shrivel

7) Embrace community and learn what friendship is

- Friendship is the opposite of lust, because it's about serving and encouraging, instead of conquering or destroying – discover friendship and community among other Jesus-followers

Key Thought:

**Lust disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote:
a connection with God that brings health, life and joy.**

“So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death.”
(Romans 8:1-2, NLT)

Conclusion: Shadowfeet (Brooke Fraser)

- *[play the video]*
- Explain the video after – sometimes I do, sometimes I don't – but look at the people – every sort of person represented, because it doesn't matter who you are, or what you've done, or which of the seven sins you tend to fall into, again and again – God is there for you, and Jesus wants to grab hold of your hand in what you're in, right now, even if it feels right now like the “world is falling out from under your feet”
- We're all in this together – this is the song we sing, a song of faith and hope through joy and despair
- Not only that, but it's about images – images that are distorted so often by everything and everyone around us, that we distort in our efforts to lust – pictures – but here these images are redeemed – they are of real people, warts and all, nothing doctored, nothing unreal – it's humanity
- “every fear and accusation, under my feet” – what a great description of a life that God will one day, whether today, tomorrow or down the road, set free from the controlling power of lust

Communion is coming:

- Maybe this morning wasn't about “your sin” – maybe you've already squirmed through one of these, and maybe you're dreading one that's still to come – we've all got more than one, if we're honest
- But we are on this journey together – and we are building towards celebrating together the work of God in our lives, in another two Sunday mornings, as we celebrate communion together the Sunday before Easter
- A chance to together, as a community, acknowledge the journey that we are on with Jesus
- It's not something to be worried about, or to feel guilty or unsure of – it's going to be something beautiful, that I'm believing will open our eyes to the reality of Him in our lives and His great love for us

Response: Prayer