

Sunday, August 30, 2009

**Matthew 5.27-30
Sacred Boundaries
SWCOB 8.30.09**

“In 1999, for the first time in 47 years,
Local fishermen discovered that tuna,
Were running thirty miles off Cape Cod, MA.

And they were biting!

You didn't have to be a professional to catch them;
All you needed was a sharp hook,
And some bait.

And the rewards for doing so were substantial.

Rumor had it that Japanese buyers were willing to pay
\$50,000 for a larger blue-fin tuna.

As a result, many ignored Coast Guard warnings
And headed out to sea in small, unequipped boats.

What these new fisherman didn't realize
Was that the problem is not catching a tuna—
It's getting them into the boat!

On September 23, the *Christi Anna*, a 19-foot boat,
Capsized while doing battle with a tuna.

That same day,
The 27-foot boat *Basic Instinct* suffered the same fate,

While *Official Business*, a 28-footer,
Was swamped after it hooked onto a 600-pound tuna.

The tuna simply pulled it under water.

These fishermen underestimated the power of the fish.
Temptation, likewise, can blindsides you.

A small indiscretion appears to be worth the risk.

But, as with a hooked tuna,
Only after we hook into temptation,
Do we discover its true strength.”

This is an excerpt from the book,
“The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham”
Written by, Harold Myra and Marshall Shelley.

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Today we look at the next set of contrasting statements,
From Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount.

Last week we heard him say,

You have heard that it was said,
To those of ancient times,
'you shall not murder.'

But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister,
You will be liable to judgment.'

This week, we hear Jesus saying,
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 lust has already committed adultery in his heart.

If your right eye causes you to sin,
Gouge it out,

If your right hand causes you to sin,
Cut it off and throw it away.

It is better for you to lose your eye or hand,
Than for you to go into hell.
Harsh words from a gentle soul.

Now to me this is hyperbole.

Hyperbole, according to the dictionary,
Is a figure of speech,
In which exaggeration is used for emphasis.

But having said this,
The point is made and made rather clearly,
That followers of Jesus have no business,
Playing around with temptation.

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There was a young seminary student,
Who had been asked to preach,
This text for seminary chapel.

He stood before his fellow students and declared,
"I stand before you today,
As a one-eyed, one armed preacher!"

Was he any different than the other students gathered?
Probably not.

Perhaps the only difference was,
That he was willing to admit his feelings of lust.

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Patrick Morley, in his book,
"Man in the Mirror," writes,

"Are you living a secret thought life,
Significantly different from the 'you'
That is known by others?"

Would you be embarrassed if your friends,
Knew what went on in your mind?

If your thoughts were audible,
Would your wife want a divorce?"

Morley continues,

"Each of us leads a secret thought life,
An invisible life known only to us—
It is not known to others.

This secret life is usually very different
From the visible you,
The 'you' that is known to others.

Yet it is the real 'you,'
The 'you' that is known by our God."

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Last week's text on anger and this week's text on lust,
Forces us to focus,
Not on the outward obedience of God's law,
But rather on the inward, heartfelt obedience.

Jesus knows that the true origin of outward disobedience,
Originates from an inward disobedience.

Jesus knows that sin lurks in the hearts of everyone.

Adultery does not begin in the neighbor's bedroom,
But in the craving of one's heart.

Lust, like anger can have a consuming effect.

People will do things, as if possessed,
As if they weren't in their right mind,
As if driven, despite all the "red flags."

In the Sermon on the Mount,
Jesus redefines boundaries
That were, at one time, literally set in stone.

In the Old Testament, God established physical boundaries,
One was not to cross, in this case,
"Do not commit adultery."

In the New Testament, Jesus establishes mental boundaries,
One is not to cross, Jesus says,
"When it comes to adultery,
Don't even think about it!"

In legal terms, sexual misconduct,

Is defined as crossing physical boundaries.

But according to Jesus, sexual sin,
Begins in the heart and the mind.

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The former president Bill Clinton,
When he denied having sex with Monica Lewinsky,
Defended himself by asking the question,
“What is your definition of sex?”

Clinton sought to exempt himself by any wrongdoing,
Simply by arguing he didn't cross the sacred boundary.

But Jesus would have told Clinton,
That even in his obsessions with Lewinsky,
He had crossed those sacred boundaries.

Sacred boundaries are to be set,
In one's mind and heart,
Not only in one's actions.

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So now, with Jesus saying this,
 Just where is the sacred boundary
 Between temptation and actual sin?
Jesus was tempted but was without sin,
So temptation is not sin.

Morley, from the book, “Man in the Mirror,”
Asks the question,

“Is there some definable threshold,
Over which we cross from mere temptation,
To actual sin?”

He states that when normal observations,
Become abnormal preoccupations,
Then we have crossed the sacred boundary.

Dr. R. C. Sproul states it this way;

“Lust is not noticing that a woman is sexually attractive.”

“Lust is born when we turn a simple awareness,
Into a preoccupied fantasy.”

Someone else once said,
“Temptation is sexual attraction to the opposite sex,
Sin is walking around the block for another look.”

Adultery has been around forever.

And I believe Jesus would define adultery today,
As any sexual encounter outside the marital covenant,
Between a man and a woman.

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The church today is not facing anything new!
The church has faced these issues since its beginning!

The sexual promiscuity that we see in our society,
Is not a new dilemma.

The Apostle Paul had to deal with it,
In his ministry to the Romans,
And with the Corinthians.

During that time,
The Greek and the Roman societies,
Accepted all kinds of sexual activity;

Bathhouse orgies, bi-sexual acts,
Homosexual acts,

And a form of pedophilia,
Between older men and young boys.

Sexual immorality ran amuck in their societies.

Paul speaks of some of this in his opening chapter of Romans.

1.24,
Therefore God gave them over,
In the sinful desires of their hearts,
To sexual impurity,
For the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

In the same way the men also abandoned,
Natural relations with women,
And were inflamed with lust for one another.

In my observations taken from this text,
And according to the passage today;
All forms of sexual misconduct begin with lust.
As it did back then,
Sexual promiscuity is eroding the sacred boundaries,
In our society today,

Today, our society and even our churches,
Cannot agree just where those sacred boundaries lie.

It has become an acceptable practice to have sexual relations,
Before marriage,

51% of Americans find it acceptable.

49% of Americans find it acceptable for two men,
To be in a relationship.

And learn from me,
For I am gentle and humble in heart.

Jesus calls us to come as we are,
And place our sins at his feet,
And allow his Spirit to transform us.

And you will find rest for your souls.

Jesus is the answer to the question;
Is there any hope?

The hope is found in our relationship to Jesus.

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As Tom Brooks writes, I paraphrase;

“Jesus and his Saving Grace
Will make someone as willing to leave his lusts,
As a slave his master,
Or a prisoner his dungeon,
A thief his spoils,
Or a beggar his rags.”

If you struggle with a secret thought life.
If you struggle to maintain sacred boundaries,
You'll find power in the name of Jesus.

Come to Jesus and you'll find rest for your weary soul.