Good morning, everyone. Welcome again. My name is Mike. I’m one of the pastors here on staff. I’ve been here a little over three years. I work with our community groups and our global ministry. It’s a privilege to be with you to share God’s Word.

I’m going to start with a question. Is freedom a good thing for you or not? This weekend - and on Tuesday - we celebrate the independence of our country and the many freedoms that we have – the freedom to govern ourselves as we choose. We have the freedom to gather on a morning like this in worship. So freedom in that way is a good thing. But there is a different freedom permeating our culture. It’s not a freedom of our country but a freedom of an individual that isn’t quite as good, for it says and allows each one of us supposedly to govern ourselves, that we have the right to say what is right and wrong, what is true and false, which way is good and healthy for me and which way is not. So if you want to live one way and I want to live a different way, well that is okay.

It’s easy for that sort of thinking to infiltrate the church and the way that we follow after Jesus. We can view it multiple ways and say if you want to follow Jesus your way and I want to follow him my way, that’s okay. But in the Sermon on the Mount here, Jesus doesn’t lay out a multiple of options or a multiple of ways and say, “Pick the best one for you.” His goal is to lay out one primary true way, the way of the kingdom. And our goal this morning and in our series as a church is to know this way and to walk in it. So if you have your Bible, turn with me to Matthew 5:27-30.

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 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. 30 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.

This is God’s word.

 Needless to say, you’ve come to a doozy of a Sunday here at Christ Community Chapel. We have adultery, lust and hell repeatedly in four short verses. So I hope you’re awake, and I hope you’re sitting up straight, your shoes are on and tied tightly. We’ve got some work to do. Three things we’re going to look at. We’re going to look at the definition, the warning and the opportunity.

First, the definition. The focal point of this passage and of our time this morning is on one single command, “You shall not commit adultery.” It’s one of the famous ten commandments that God gave to Moses all the way back thousands of years ago to Israel when they were coming out of Egypt. It seems pretty straightforward, “You shall not commit adultery.” Yet for some reason, Jesus is addressing this command again. So perhaps it’s not quite as straightforward or as clear as you might think.

There was a recent study done a few months back that asked this single question: How often - if ever - would you say the following activities would be considered cheating on a spouse or partner? In other words, what counts as adultery?

  - Sending flirtatious messages to someone besides your partner: 58%.
  - Actively maintaining an online dating profile: 68%.
  - Watching pornography without your partner: 31%.

It’s not as straightforward as we might think, which is indicative, I think, of the culture that we live in. People more than ever are defining what is right and wrong for them. Instead
of looking to what Jesus says - to what the Scripture speaks on, they trust themselves or their experiences or we look to our own studies. In this way adultery means one thing to you and something completely different to somebody else. If you think about your spouse and you guys have different ideas of adultery, what happens then? So if you aren’t sure what your spouse’s view of adultery is, let me encourage you to find that out. There could be some friendly conversation on the way home.

It’s a dangerous minefield when we define sin for ourselves. One of the main points Jesus is communicating on the Sermon on the Mount is that he has the right to define what is sin and is not. He has the right to define the right way or not. He has the right to govern us and we do not, which means he has the right to define adultery for us.

So the question is, What is adultery according to Jesus? He says it clearly and plainly in verse twenty-eight. It says, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” “Everyone who looks at a woman - or looks at a man - with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her or him in his heart.” It’s startling, isn’t it? It’s not how we think it would read necessarily. This would make more sense to me if it said, “If a man is looking lustfully at a woman, he is in danger of committing adultery,” or “If a woman is looking at a man lustfully, she better be careful; it’s a slippery slope towards actually committing adultery.” But that’s not what Jesus says. He says clearly and plainly, “Whoever looks at another person lustfully has already” – keyword already – “committed adultery.” So the important question for us this morning is, What is lustful intent? What is Jesus saying here?

Let’s start by what it isn’t and then we can figure out what it is. Jesus isn’t referring to normal, healthy attraction. This is what I mean: If you were to go to the doctor, they would probably test you for your reflexes. So they would take a tool and they would hit you right below the kneecap. If your knee is working okay, it would bounce up a little bit. That’s how God created your body and your knee to react. It’s the same way with our physical attraction. God has created us and he’s wired us in such a way that we are physical, sexual beings with normal, healthy sexual desire. So when we notice someone who is attractive or beautiful and we look, that is a God-given, God-created natural reflex, and that isn’t lust.

The question is, What is lust? It’s everything that happens after the natural reflex. When we see someone who is attractive – whether in person or on a screen – where does our mind go? What happens in our heart? What happens in our imagination? - for there we have the playground of lust.

There is a famous story in 2 Samuel 11 of David and Bathsheba. You may have heard it or heard a sermon about it. I’m going to read a few verses for us that help us understand the difference between looking and lusting.

2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. 3 And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?”

Now what do you notice in that story? Well, in verse two David has his knee-jerk reaction to seeing Bathsheba. She was a beautiful woman whom he noticed. In verse three he gets into trouble. In verse three he moved from looking to lusting - for something began to happen and work inside of him when he saw Bathsheba. He began to desire, he began to imagine, and then he pursued her.

If you know how the story ends, you know they end up having a physical affair with each other. But I can tell you before anything actually happened David had already committed
adultery with Bathsheba in his heart, and that is lust. It is when we mentally linger and
over-desire a physical interaction with somebody who is not our spouse. It’s when we
mentally linger and over-desire a physical interaction with someone who is not our
spouse.

So it’s one thing if you’re at the gym to notice someone. It’s another thing to linger over
that person. It’s one thing to watch a video or see a picture on social media. It’s another
thing to desire the person in that video or picture. The opportunities are everywhere. I
don’t have to tell you that. It will find you even if you don’t want to find it. Whether you’re
shopping in the mall, whether you’re shopping at Acme, whether you’re on your phone,
whether you’re at your house watching TV, you could access it right now if you wanted to.
We probably live in the most sexually-saturated culture of all time. So there’s not a
question of if we will encounter this but how will we respond. And there’s a God-given,
God-created attraction that is not lust, but everything after that natural reflex is.

So when we look at this command, who among us can stand guiltless? Who can look at
the command “You shall not commit adultery” and say we fulfilled that completely? - for
who amongst us has not desired or lingered or imagined something with someone who is
not our spouse? Jesus says everyone who looks at another person lustfully has already
committed adultery in their heart.

That’s the first thing, the definition for us to know. Jesus is doing something in his
definition. He’s acting like a doctor to help us to see what’s really going on inside of us.
Like a surgeon, he’s trying to cut us open so we can see ourselves for who we really are.
What we see is that we are more flawed than we would like to admit, and we are more
adulterous than we realize - not just a few of us, not just some of us, not just those who
perhaps have had a physical affair, but all of us who have looked with lustful intent. You
may not like that. You may not agree with that. You may prefer your own definition, but
it’s so crucial for us to understand and to see ourselves in the way that Jesus is exposing
us to be, because there are real, significant consequences to our sin, and there are real
dangers to our sexual sin, which leads me to my second point, the warning.

I’m going to reread the last two verses of our passage here.

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.

These last two verses are nearly identical. Jesus repeats himself essentially. If you think
back to the last time you repeated yourself – or perhaps someone had to repeat
themselves to you, you know that repetition communicates value; it communicates
purpose; it communicates the seriousness of what they’re saying. So Jesus in this
passage is trying to give us a warning by repeating himself – don’t miss what I’m going to
say next. Don’t miss what I’m going to say next. The warning is this: Sin is like a cancer
that has the power to kill. Our adulterous ways are like a disease that can wreak havoc on
our souls.

You probably caught the word that was mentioned twice in these verses. We don’t talk
about the “H” word in church a ton, but Jesus refers to hell frequently throughout the book
of Matthew. This chapter, in ten, in thirteen, twenty, twenty-three, twenty-five - as you
page through Matthew, you will see the reality named and described and affirmed.
According to Jesus, hell is an eternal place of punishment. It is everlasting reality apart
from the God who made us.
The best picture I can give to you is one of solitary confinement, for there we are stripped of any access to what we really need the most. What we really need is a God who can restore us and heal us and bring us back from the sickness that we have.

The Bible is very clear of the connection between our sexual sin and our solitary confinement. First Corinthians six says it most clearly for us.

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Solitary confinement is for the adulterers, for the sexual immoral, for those who look lustfully after another person.

The connection between sin and hell can be illustrated in this way. One of the things that you probably already noticed about me is how well I tan. The red shirt helps. The sun and I, we don't get along that well, which means I'm very susceptible to getting burned and then also for skin cancer. Actually last year I was at my primary care physician just checking on my knee reflexes, and he found a suspicious mole on my back. So he referred me to a dermatologist, and it turned out it was a case of melanoma, which is a form of skin cancer. Let me ask you a question. What happens if melanoma goes untreated? What happens if it goes undiagnosed? What if my primary care physician missed the mole, or what if my dermatologist misdiagnosed it? Well I think we all know that the power of cancer can kill.

Jesus is trying to help us see the same connection with our sin. If our lust goes untreated, if our adultery goes undiagnosed, and if our sin goes untreated, then sin has the power to kill and to place us in solitary confinement. So our sexual sin has real, eternal consequences laid out by Jesus. While we're here, let me offer a pastoral standpoint - for not only are there eternal consequences but also earthly ones.

It's probably the elephant in the room when we talk about lust and adultery. Statistics revealed that last year alone at one website people watch 4.6 billion hours of pornography, which is about 524,000 years’ worth. By age eleven, ninety-three percent of boys and sixty-two percent of girls have been exposed to it already. I offer those stats to make a singular point, that pornography is an incredible epidemic throughout our world but also across all ages, all genders and all churches, and it's absolutely destroying and wreaking havoc on ourselves and the people we love the most.

Pornography absolutely destroys our souls, and this is why. It never delivers on its promise, does it? No one ever walks away feeling positive and uplifted after watching pornography. Instead, feelings of guilt and of shame and of disgust begin to fill your heart and your soul. You can't believe you did it again and again and again. Like a cocoon, shame tightens itself around our hearts one click at a time. What’s so dangerous about shame, what's so destructive about it – is that's an isolating, hiding feeling. It makes you feel unworthy, and it makes you want to hide and run. So you do. You grow absent from your spouse. You move away from God because you don’t think you’re worthy of their love or of his, and you move closer and closer into solitary confinement, and it’s absolutely destroying your soul. It’s destroying the ones that you love the most.

There is perhaps nothing as painful in having to confess your sexual sin to your spouse or the person you love. There is nothing that causes more harm than to look them in the eye and to say after thirty years, “There is something I've never told you,” or to grab your wife’s hands and have to say, “For the past three years night in and night out I’ve been living a lie and I am completely addicted to pornography.” It will absolutely destroy them - for what
you are communicating is, “In my desires, in my thoughts, in my imaginations, in my
dreams I don’t think of you but somebody else. Even though you are here in the flesh, I
turn to somebody on the screen. I am not completely and purely yours but somebody
else’s.” That will bring them to their knees, and it will destroy your marriage.

Jesus offers us this warning that there are real eternal and earthly consequences for our
sexual sins, which leads me to my third and final point, the opportunity. I’m going to
reread the last two verses again, the first half of each verse. “If your right eye causes you
to sin, tear it out and throw it away. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and
throw it away.” In both verses we see the same idea, cut it off and throw it away, tear it out
and get rid of it. In very simple, clear terms Jesus tells us and commands us sin must go.
As one person I read put it, we are to deal drastically with sin. We must not pamper it, flirt
with it, enjoy nibbling a little bit around the edges. We are to hate it, crush it and dig it out.
That’s the command he gives to us.

We are commanded to treat sin the way my dermatologist treated my melanoma. I had
surgery last year, and he dug up the mole and the whole area around it. He didn’t pamper
it. He didn’t flirt with it. He didn’t just take a piece of it. But he dug it up completely so I
could live.

Jesus is commanding you -and he is commanding me - to dig up and to cut out the
adulterous thoughts and desires and actions of our hearts and in our lives - for if we don’t
kill them, they most certainly will kill us and those we love.

As I was thinking about this command for a whole week - which is a long time to think
about this command - as gruesome as it may be, there is a real opportunity that Jesus is
presenting for us here. If we are able to follow this command, if we are able to deal with
the sin in our life, it opens up a completely new life for us, a completely new opportunity
and a completely new marriage.

I was watching a Netflix documentary a few months ago. It was called, Fat, Sick and
Nearly Dead. It starred a guy named Joe Cross, who was fat, sick and nearly dead. He
was completely overweight, and it’s a story of his transformation of being completely sick
to being completely healthy. His transformation was based on one thing – he cut out and
threw away all sugar, all processed food, everything unhealthy for his body. And he went
from being fat, sick and nearly dead to thin, healthy and fully alive.

It’s the same opportunity Jesus is presenting to us – not with sugar but with our sin. If we
are able to deal drastically with it, we have an opportunity for a completely new
experience, a completely new life and to walk down a completely new way. That is good
news for us this morning - for Jesus is coming to you and he’s coming to me. If you’re in a
cocoon of shame, if you’re in an addiction you just can’t break, if you’ve been fighting this
battle for far too many years, Jesus comes to you and says, “It doesn’t have to be this way.
Sin does not have to kill. Lust does not have to reign over you. And adultery does not
have to ruin your marriage. There is another way. It’s my way, the way of the kingdom.”

Do you know what makes that way possible? It’s because Jesus himself has dealt
drastically with our sin. He came into this world for one purpose alone, to triumph over our
sin. He paid for it all and on the third day he rose again and he triumphed over each and
every one of our sins. Jesus is the medicine for our disease. He is the chemo for our
cancer, and he is the surgery for our melanoma - for through him we can cut out and throw
away the sin that entangles our lives, and we can walk in a new way of the kingdom.
Because of what Jesus has done, we can walk in the new way of forgiveness and not
shame - for he has paid for and he has triumphed over every single one of our lustful
thoughts, adulterous motives and every one of our fantasies. He has borne our guilt and our shame so we can come out of hiding. We can return to him and he will embrace us - for he has cast our sins and he has thrown them out as far as the east is from the west, and there is a new way that we can walk. Because of what Jesus has done, there is a new way of obedience and faithfulness rather than adultery.

If you’ve been struggling for far too many years and your thoughts and your imaginations are dangerous places to live, there is hope in Jesus – for not only did Jesus die for your sins, but on the third day he rose again and now he lives within you. In Romans 8, it talks about how that’s the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit who lives and dwells within all of us, like a nutritionist in a way or a personal trainer who helps us to throw out the sugar, to cast out our adulterous thoughts and motives and lustful looks and replace them with faithful and obedient ones. This means that we are not alone as we walk this way but that he is with us with his strength and his power and his grace.

The question is, How does that happen? How does the Spirit actually work in our hearts to change who we are? Let me give you three ways the Spirit works. The Spirit will work through protections around us. The Spirit will work through people with us. And the Spirit will work by the prayers by us.

First, the Spirit will work by protections we put around us. Like fences to our yard, we need to put protections around our hearts to guard ourselves and to protect ourselves from the sexual temptation that we encounter almost every day. I have a friend I admire in this regard. He lives in a house without internet. He lives actually without a smartphone. And he’s actually not even Amish, if you can believe that. For he knows the temptations that surround him and he’s put up fences.

The same way for us, my question is, Where do we typically stumble? Where are the places that lead you to stray? Could it be your smartphone? Could it be your cable subscription? Could it be the place that you work out? It could be a whole number of things, and if you aren’t sure where to start, I would ask your spouse. That could be the one question that transforms your marriage. If you go to her – if you go to him – and ask the simple question, “What kind of boundaries would you want me to put into place?”, and then see God work. He works through protections around us and the people with us.

One of the requirements of a staff member here is to have an accountability partner. So we get asked every other month if we are meeting with them on a regular basis. It’s somebody who knows us, that we can be vulnerable with and that can walk with us on this journey. And we all need that person. You can call them an accountability partner. You can call them a good friend. You can call them whatever you want to call them. But it’s somebody the same sex as you that knows you, that you can be vulnerable with and can walk this journey with words of grace and truth.

Thirdly, the prayers by us. If we’re going to change - if we’re actually going to replace our lustful thoughts with obedient ones, we have to learn to pray differently. If we had more time I would take you to Psalm 51, which is David’s prayer response to his adultery with Bathsheba. There you will notice the way that he prays - for he confesses and he repents over not just what he’s done but what was in his heart. He confessed his actions and his desires. So for us we need to pray and confess our imaginations, our fantasies, everything that we do and everything that we wish to do. As we do that, watch God work.

Those three things - they are not exhaustive and they are not a guarantee, but if we put protections around us, if we have people we invite into our life and we change the way that we pray, I honestly believe the Spirit of God will work inside your heart and he will
remove the sinful longings and replace them with obedient ones. He will remove and replace and throw away the adulterous ones and replace them with faithful ones. He will enable you to truly obey the command, “You shall not commit adultery”, which leads me to the final way, the way of love.

What’s been underlying this whole passage is the beauty and the joy of marriage – for there is a lie about adultery and lust that you can experience more with someone who is not yourself – whether in person or on a screen. That couldn’t be further from the truth - for in the way of love and in the way of obedience and faithfulness, you can grab your spouse’s hands and you can look them in the eyes and you can honestly say, “My thoughts, my desires, my imaginations, my passions are for you and nobody else. My heart is completely and purely yours. It has been, it is now, and it will forever be.” Can you imagine what it would be like to hear those words from you?

Our culture is presenting a variety of ways for us to live and saying pick and choose the one that is right for you. But Jesus comes in the Sermon on the Mount and he says, “There is not a multiple of ways. There is one true, healthy way for you to live. It’s the way of my kingdom -for it’s the only way that truly diagnoses the problem that we are more flawed than we’d like to admit and we are more adulterous than we want to realize.” It’s the only way that offers a real solution - that is Jesus Christ - for it is through him that we don’t have to be sick, but we can be healthy. We can move from being fat, sick and nearly dead to being thin, healthy and fully alive in Christ. It’s a way of forgiveness and not shame. It’s a way of obedience and faithfulness, not adultery. And it’s a way of pure, joyous, satisfying love. It is his way, the way of the kingdom. May it be our way. Let’s pray.

Father, thank you for this morning. Sometimes your word encourages us and comforts us. Other times it just opens us up and lays us bare. God, I pray for my heart and the hearts in this room and as a church, Lord, that you would help us through your Spirit to cut out and throw away the sins of our life and replace them with truly obedience and faithfulness for those we love. I pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.