

March 22, 2009  
Houghton Lake UMC

## **The Dangers of Sexual Immorality**

Lenten Sermon #4

Mark 7:17-23

Isn't it interesting that as soon as Jesus begins to make a list of things that make us "unclean", that after "evil thoughts" he utters the words "sexual immorality"? Isn't it interesting that sex and the misuse of our sexual gifts are the first evil activities of the human heart?

The truth is that sex is a very powerful force in our lives. Sex is one of the foundational cornerstones of the lives we live. For instance, one of the first questions we ask when a baby is born is, "Is it a boy or a girl?" Our sexual identity determines how we will look and communicate with the world—through the color pink or the color blue....and we have discovered that there is a huge difference between the two. When the hormones kick in our journey toward sexual maturity may drastically change our perspective of ourselves and of the world around us.

We must also be very clear about one thing: sex, hormones and sexual energy are good things in our lives. Our sex is a God-given gift to us. It is good and it is the driving force of procreation that secures the existence and health of the next generation. Our sex shapes our identity, influences our name, shapes the roles we will often play in life, influences the goals we may have in our life, and perhaps ultimately what we will accomplish. Our sex is also one of those many things that we cannot control. It is God who chooses what sex we will be, just like God chooses our stature, our hair and eye color, and how many days we will live on this earth. (Although today scientists have told us that in the future we will be able to choose the sexual identity of children that are born.)

Our sex also determines how our brains physically function and how we learn. Because it is so much a part of who we are, our sex and sexual energy are also central to the choices we make and how we interact with others around us. If we look at the role of sex in its broader context, sex and sexual practices within our society shape and define our families, our community, our country, our culture, and our health. Sex and sexual activity define our morals, our ethics, our communication, our economics, and our relationship with God. So, I must say again that sex is a gift we receive from

God, and it is also a force in our lives that we must learn to control and master. Like everything else in our lives God will hold us accountable as good stewards of the gift of sex. Over and over in scripture God calls us to sexual purity.

In the list of “unclean” things that Jesus shares with us in our text this morning there are three much-related subjects put before us: the sins of sexual immorality (the Greek uses the word *porneiai*, the root word for pornography, which is translated here as “fornications”), adulteries, and lewdness. Obviously, we will be talking today about our sexual lives—a discussion which can quickly expand into the subjects of dating, marriage, family, homosexuality, the gay rights movement and gay marriage, and the cultural roles of fathers, mothers, single parenthood, contraceptives, recreation and procreation, artificial insemination, cloning, stem cell research... and on and on. You see where this topic can balloon into the stratosphere! Today we will need to limit our discussion to the words Jesus used in our text and to the message Jesus was giving us about what is “clean and unclean”.

So what is sexual immorality? What is the meaning of “*porneiai*”, translated here in Mark as “fornications”? In the Greek dictionary it is defined as sexual immorality and unfaithfulness. The word “*porna*” is the Greek word for prostitution. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament by Kittel outlines a family of words all connected to sinful sexual activity. Here we find the words harlot, fornicator, prostitution, fornication, and licentiousness. The reference is to both male and female, and all of the terms have their roots in the concept of being unfaithful. It has been used to describe both a single act and a general state or condition. Even in the Greek culture the stoics understood that by unclean acts a person defiles the deity within. The word as used in the New Testament not only has these connotations but also refers to the betrothed or married woman who proves unfaithful, and was also used figuratively as a term for apostasy or unfaithfulness to God—to turn aside from God and go after other gods. (The New Testament presupposes the existence of harlots in Palestine and the sinfulness of their trade. It also depicts these persons as being very responsive to the message of John the Baptist and Jesus. Jesus proclaims grace and forgiveness to

all who repent, because the true defilement is from within.) Therefore, the term “porneia” covers all sexual activity outside of the marriage covenant.

The next word in our text is adulteries (plural) or the Greek word moicheiai. This family of words not only means to commit adultery but to seduce. It has the connotation of sex and refers primarily to the lover outside of marriage. The Ten Commandments protect marriage and forbid its violation by adultery in the Old Testament. The New Testament puts the husband as well as the wife under the obligation of fidelity. Marriage is a life long partnership, and adultery is the label given to even the desire to be unfaithful. In other words, my friends, God’s will as revealed in the Bible regarding sex is that we are called to live faithfully with each other under the covenant of marriage, and to violate that covenant before or after the marriage vow is against God’s divine and perfect will. Otherwise it is sin, accompanied by the penalties and wages of sin.

Now let’s look at the word lewdness or the Greek word aselgeia, which means sensuality, indecency, and vice. According to Kittel it is translated as licentiousness, or in other words, “license” – or “to give permission”. The word lewd in the English dictionary means “showing, or intended to excite lust or sexual desire, especially in an offensive way.” When we look at the synonyms for lewdness we find these words: coarseness, filthiness, vulgarity, profanity, vileness, uncouthness, and unwholesomeness. The exact opposite of lewdness is purity.

Jesus has declared all of these things as “unclean”. They are not included in the kind of lifestyle Jesus wants for his disciples. They are not the activities God wants to see in people who take on His name. We are not to be loose with our body, our mind, or our mouth. Sexual activities were designed by God to be enjoyed by mature adults in the context of the covenant of marriage where it is the glue that holds married partners together and assists couples in becoming one flesh. All of the rest is sin, described by one word or another, and will produce the wages of sin, which is death. God designed it that way so that we would live together in covenant as life-long partners, learning what holiness and agape love are all about. The goal of marriage is to learn about holiness.

When our relationships disintegrate to the point that the covenant is shattered, the destruction and fallout of that disintegration is found in the brokenness of the next generations.

I want to emphasize again today that sex is a good and natural force in our lives, which God has given us to enjoy in its proper context. Sexual activity is a sin only when it is misused, abused, and engaged in outside of that marriage covenant. Casual sex in speech and in action is a sin according to scriptures. Even watching a movie or TV show that has strong sexual content is to engage in lewdness. Because of our technology today pornography and lewdness are everywhere and it has been accepted as “ok” by most of our society. Hollywood pushes the envelope of decency further and further into oblivion. And, according to the internet, 20% of teenagers today are not only engaging in texting but in “sexting”--- that is “sending nude pictures via text message through their cell phones. They take inappropriate pictures of themselves or their friends and send them to other friends, and it is a crime that is ruining very young lives.

Sadly, many people these days do not fall in love. They fall in lust. They “get the cart before the horse”, and in their sexual passion either find themselves pregnant or they decide to get married before they are ready to make a life-long commitment. If all goes well they fall in love over time as the heat of the daily grind and the burdens of life itself melt and mold them together into interdependence and partnership, into mutual respect and true agape love --- that is if they make it, and most are not these days. Often after the lust has subsided (and it will), the heat of the daily grind and the burdens of life cause them to file for divorce and often times shattered lives are the result.

It is just this kind of scenario that the rest of the world reacts against—especially the Muslim world. The Muslim world looks at American culture as completely saturated by sexual immorality, adultery, and lewdness. And we didn’t get that way over night. Hollywood has been eroding our sexual moral platform for generations- one movie, one comedy routine, one sit-com and one step at a time. There is a Christian music video by the group “Casting Crowns” that I want us to experience this morning. It contains this very message.

*(View video, “Slow Fade”...)*

My friends, sin doesn't just reach out and grab us one day and make us its slave. Sin is a gradual process that erodes us with compromise, little by little, until one day we wake up and find ourselves a long way from where we ought to be. Like the proverbial frog in the pan of water, through evil thoughts and exposure to temptation after temptation our minds and hearts will compromise our lives into sin until we do not even see it as sin anymore. Our blindness will condone the sin that we do, and in time we can even teach others to do the same.

So how do we turn this around? How do we keep from having righteousness eroded from our lives? The answer is, we can't -- not by ourselves. This is why Jesus came! He is our Savior. He is the one who can hear our confession and forgive us of our sin. We need to realize that we have sinned, confess our sin, ask Jesus for forgiveness, and live a new life! We cannot change our history, but through Jesus we can change our future. 1. By bringing Christ back into our lives, repenting of our sin and conforming our lifestyles to please God at all times. 2. By getting back into the Bible and by living higher moral standards for others to follow. 3. By teaching the truth and by exposing the results of this sin. 4. by thinking through the ramifications of our actions before we engage in something that might be sinful. 5. By being a personal example of holiness, righteousness and purity in thought, speech and action. 6. By putting on the full armor of God as shared in Ephesians, Chapter 6 and by asking God to show us when we enter those "danger zones" of compromise. 7. By being more intentional about what we watch on TV or movies and the online sites we visit, the books we read, the words we use, and the fashions we choose. Modesty has gone out the window. 8. We can change things by demonstrating our faith, using the shield of faith -- God's mechanism to overcome temptation -- and by sharing the gospel openly with gentleness, kindness and true joy. We can change the spirit of those who live around us by refusing to do evil and by holding our friends accountable for their danger zones, as well. By this we can make the world a better place for everyone and impact the world for Christ. Many people who are trapped in sin are looking for the joy which we Christians can demonstrate if we get our eyes above the problems, above the pain, and keep our eyes on Jesus and move forward in obedience and faith.

Know the dangers of sexual immorality. Realize that it is the misuse of sexual freedom, adultery, and lewdness that is sin and that can break our lives into pieces. Choose to walk a higher path -- a holy path, a righteous road -- that pleases God. Choose a lifestyle that is filled with the Bible, with prayer, with worship and with joy, and stay in love with God! We can do this. We can change our world and have an impact, but we must have the audacity to live pure, holy and prayer-filled lives.

Let us pray.....

Dear Lord, you are holy. You are pure. You are perfect and you call us to be perfect, as well. Father in heaven, you sent your Son Jesus the Christ to die on the cross for our sins. And through the power of the Holy Spirit you can clean our hearts today; you can clean our minds and our speech and you can change our lives forever. You can clean our hearts so clean that the sins of our past are completely gone, like they never happened. Clean our minds of the things of this world and focus our lives on the cross and the eternal life to come. Help us to know how temporary the things of this world really are and to remain focused on you, our Savior and King. Be our king, Lord Jesus, and save us from the pit of sexual sins.

In your name we pray, Amen.