

Sermon Transcript from April 17th, 2016
Understanding Love, Sex and Marriage
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So, we've been in a series starting a few weeks ago called "The God I Don't Understand." And we've looked at two subjects already. And the point of this series is to look at the difficult subjects that we're coming across in the Bible as we've been reading through it, especially the Torah and the history books. And, two weeks ago, we looked at understanding the Old Testament law. Last week, Josh Butler was with us, and we looked at understanding violence. I recommend both those podcasts. Today, we'll be discussing "Understanding Love, Sex and Marriage in the Old Testament." So, before we get started, let me pray, because we need a lot – I need a lot of prayer.

Let's pray.

Lord, I ask, God, that You would be so present in this time right now. That we would sense heaven and earth overlapping and that we'd get Your heart and Your character, God. I confess that there's so many times I think I'm way smarter than You and I read the Bible and I'm like, "I wouldn't have done it that way. That was really weird."

I think that You're not caring sometimes, God, and I think that You're not just sometimes. And I confess that, as I read through the Bible, those are thoughts in my head. And I pray You'd bring clarity today. Show us Your character, oh God. Show us Your love for the world and what You're doing to redeem the world. I pray that You would use my words, as insufficient as they might be, and that You would teach us all and that we would grow in the nature and the love and the character of the God that we follow. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

There was an essay recently in Eon Magazine by sociologist Frank Furedi, and he wrote this essay called "Books Are Dangerous." He says that, probably for the first time in history, young readers, themselves, from universities all around the world are demanding protection from the disturbing content of their course texts. They're saying to their course advisors that you have to put warning labels on some of these texts that we're reading because the students themselves are being disturbed by them. From Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" to F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," these books have "triggers," they claim. These students claim that these books have triggers that cause them to lose touch with reality and, consequently, to become vulnerable to a series of mental illnesses.

And the author argues, the sociologist argues, that this is not new. People have been saying that reading is dangerous for thousands of years. He even quotes Socrates that said that most people couldn't handle written text on their own. So, advocates are asking for trigger warnings to go on course texts in universities all over the world. But, obviously, this bleeds over into censorship. So, this debate rages on. This is how the author concludes his essay:

"There is one point on which the crusade for the imposition of trigger warnings is absolutely right: it is not for nothing that reading was always feared through history. It is, indeed, a risky activity. Reading possesses the power to capture the imagination, create emotional upheaval and force people towards an existential crisis."

Welcome to the Old Testament. That is what it's like. I think the Old Testament is – I've thought this before: reading the Old Testament is dangerous. The Old Testament has a way of causing the follower of God to have an existential crisis. Now, if you're one of those people who doesn't have a crisis of faith when you read the Old Testament, that's really cool. You probably still have a lot of questions when you're reading through it. But, if you are one of the many people that wish there was a trigger warning on the front of your Bible as you entered into the waters of the Old Testament, you're not alone.

For example, the story that I had you turn to has always got me. Every since I was a young follower of Jesus, I started to try to read through the Bible and I'd always get to this verse right here, this chapter, and go, "Okay. I'm out."

I'd want to slap the Bible out of everyone's hands. I'm like, "Don't read that. This is crazy."

Right here in Genesis – and I mentioned it in our first teaching series that we did at the very beginning of the year. This story: it's the story of Judah and Tamar. This Judah is

the family line that Jesus would come through. Jesus would later be called "the conquering lion from the tribe of Judah." This is that Judah. So, let me read it to you. I'm going to start in verse 6.

Genesis 38:6: "Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death."

"Then Judah said to Onan, 'Sleep with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother.' But Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death also."

So many questions. We're not even half way through this thing. Gosh. This is crazy.

Genesis 38:11: "Judah then said to his daughter-in-Law Tamar, 'Live as a widow in your father's household until my son Shelah grows up.' For he thought, 'He may die too, just like his brothers.' So Tamar went to live in her father's household.

"After a long time, Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend..." – that guy – "...went with him."

Whatever.

Genesis 38:13: "When Tamar was told, 'Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep,' she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.

"When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, 'Come now, let me sleep with you.'

"And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked.

"I'll send you a young goat from my flock," he said.

"Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" she asked.

"He said, 'What pledge should I give you?'

"Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again.

"Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. He asked the men who lived there, 'Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?'

"There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here," they said.

"So he went back to Judah and said, 'I didn't find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, 'There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here.'"

"Then Judah said, 'Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her.'

"About three months later Judah was told, 'Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant.'

"Judah said [immediately], 'Bring her out and have her burned to death!'

"As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. 'I am pregnant

by the man who owns these,' she said. And she added, 'See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are.'

"Judah recognized them and said, 'She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah.' And he did not sleep with her again."

And then she goes on to have a baby. That is the story. And, there are so many questions. This is, honestly, a part of the Bible... I'm out. I can't do this anymore. I can't. There's all kinds of questions. First of all, God is killing all of Tamar's husbands. I don't know if that's a question, but like, wow. That's happening right here. And can you imagine the youngest brother and what the youngest brother must have felt like? He was waiting to come of age to marry and sleep with his older sister-in-law. I imagine one day he went up to his dad and said, "Dad, I'm going to marry who?"

And his dad's like, "Tamar."

And he's like, "Dad, I will literally die if I marry this woman. Like, I can't."

And then Tamar, in this whole story, she kind of sounds like a piece of property getting passed off down the family line. And why does it seem like no big deal that Judah is going to see a prostitute, and a shrine prostitute. Not only is he guilty of fornication, he's guilty of idolatry. I mean, it seems like God's killing everyone in this story. Why doesn't this guy die? And why, in the end, does Judah's repentance look less like repentance and more like he was caught in one of those hidden camera shows? Right? Like, "Oh, okay. You know. You got me. When you dressed up like a shrine prostitute and I paid to sleep with you and I impregnated you, you're not going to burn to death. You got me. We're done here."

Like, that's how the story kind of resolves. This is in the Bible. This is in the Word of God. David Lamb, who wrote a book called "God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist and Racist?" By the way, he argues, "No, He's not."

But, buy the book anyway. It's good. He argues it really well. He says this:

"One of the easiest ways to misrepresent Scripture is to just ignore the problematic texts."

"The easiest way to misrepresent Scripture," David Lamb writes, "is to just ignore the problematic texts."

So, one of the things that we tend to choose to ignore, maybe, when we read through the Old Testament is how sexually messed up everybody is in the Old Testament. As it pertains to love and sex and marriage, the Old Testament is very very broken. It's like we get the ideal of God's vision for sexuality, for flourishing, for marriage, for life, in Genesis 1 and 2, but, from Genesis 3 on, no one hits it. I mean, almost no one hits it in the Old Testament. And you're reading through this and it might be very disrupting for you, because you're reading all of this and part of you might be thinking, "Does God condone this? Is God for this? What is happening here?"

For example, there are many accounts of polygamy in the Old Testament. Jacob, who would be later called "Israel," who has twelve tribes of Israel, that whole family, had four wives. Four. Two wives, two concubines. But, essentially, four wives. Solomon, who was called the wisest person who ever lived – in the Old Testament. Jesus was wiser – had a thousand wives. A thousand wives. There's polygamy in the Old Testament.

There's rape in the Old Testament. The worst example of rape is in Judges 19 where a Levite is visiting a town and he has a concubine and his concubine is gang-raped and then left for dead. And then he wakes up the next morning and sees, essentially, his wife on the ground having been gang-raped and left for dead, throws her on his donkey and then she dies. And then he cuts her up in twelve pieces and ships her to the twelve regions of Israel. That's almost how Judges ends.

One scholar says, "She is the most sinned against woman in the entire Bible."

It's in there. You have prostitution in the Bible. Tamar, right here that we just read, plays a prostitute, is a prostitute. Rahab, that we meet in the book of Joshua, is a prostitute. We have incest in the Bible. Lot's daughters get their dad drunk and basically rape him. They rape him so they can get pregnant. Adultery is found in the Bible. The most famous case

of adultery is David with Bathsheba, which is probably closer to power-rape, him being the king of Israel. Now, some of these people the Church would normally call heroes in the Old Testament. What you and I would look to and look back at. Not all of them, but some of them. These are like heroes in the Old Testament.

Now, the questions that we should be asking is, "How do we get through them? How are we supposed to read these?"

There's a helpful way. I don't know, this might be helpful to you. There's three buckets that I would probably lay out for you to try to place these stories in as you're reading them. Bucket one would be the descriptive versus prescriptive bucket. Like, we have to put some stories in the descriptive versus prescriptive bucket.

The other bucket would be prescriptive to them. So, it was to them, but we can read back, like 1 Corinthians 10 says, and it's for us. It's for us to learn from, but it was actually written to them. It wasn't written to us; it was written to them.

And bucket three that we place some of these stories in is God's character throughout this entire thing. What was God doing? What is God's character throughout this thing?

So, let's try to put some of these stories in these buckets. When you read the Old Testament and come across stories like David and Bathsheba – if you're not familiar with that story, David commits adultery with Bathsheba. Sees her on a roof, calls for her. He's the king and he can kind of do what he wants. He's considered guilty throughout the whole story. Bathsheba's not. And he sleeps with her, gets her pregnant, tries to trick her husband in coming home to sleep with her so it looks like his baby, but he doesn't because he's noble. And then David has him killed and then marries Bathsheba.

When you read stories like that, stories like Judah and Tamar – the one we just read. Like Jacob marrying Leah and then marrying Rachel and then two other women that were their servants that they gave to Jacob so they would have more kids. All of this that we read – and you should probably write this down or something. This is important – all of this is descriptive. It's describing what happened. It's in the Bible, it's in the Old Testament Scriptures because it happened. It's not in the Bible because it's what should have happened, it's in the Bible because it's what did happen. There's a huge difference between those two. It's not what should have happened, it's what did happen.

The Old Testament narrative is descriptive of deeply flawed humans, not prescriptive of how to act. The Old Testament stories, most of them, are descriptive narratives of deeply flawed humans where God is entering into their world and trying to pull them out and move them forward to be a light to the world, not prescriptive of how to act. The novelist Frederick Buechner, I quote him quite a bit. He's one of my favorite writers. He said this about the Bible, the Old Testament specifically:

"The Bible is a swarming compost of a book; an Irish stew of poetry and propaganda, law and legalism, myth and murky history and hysteria. Over the centuries, it has become hopelessly associated with tub thumping evangelism and jury piety, with superannuated superstition and blue-nosed moralizing, with ecclesiastical authoritarianism and crippling literalism. And yet, just because it is a book about both the sublime and the unspeakable, it is a book also about life and the way it really is. It is a book about people who, at one and the same time, can be both believing and unbelieving, innocent and guilty, crusaders and crooks, full of hope and full of despair. In other words, it is a book about us."

When we find and when we read the stories of Judah and Tamar in the Bible, it's because these things happened. They happened to two very scared people, two very broken people. These things happened. Judah didn't want to lose another son. He thought Tamar was like a bad omen. Everything Tamar touches dies. He had one son left, "I'm not giving him to Tamar."

Tamar wanted to honor her first husband and to have the security of a husband and a son. That was her right. That was actually her right. And she was used by her second husband for sexual pleasure. He didn't want to give her a child. He didn't want to honor her with motherhood. So, I mean, you know what he did. You read the story. So, he did that and so God killed him, because he's wicked.

So, she took matters into her own hands. What part of this story here is prescriptive of how to act? None of it. None of it is. You don't read that to do something. You don't'

read that and go, "Okay. What do I do, God? Let me go do something."

You read that to learn something. You read this and what do you learn? This is what you learn: we learn that God uses messed up people and messed up situation to accomplish His purposes. We learn that God uses messed up people to accomplish His purposes. This might be scandalous, but your story is scandalous too. God uses you and you are messed up. And you're going, "But, I'm not that messed up."

What if your worst sin was recorded in the best selling book of all time? I guarantee none of you would be like, "Oh, just do what I did. That's how I got through it, guys."

No. You would be like, "No no. Don't do that. Well, first of all, don't write that. But, second of all, if you write it, just don't do it."

What I would want you to see, what I want you to see is God just figured out a way to make something happen out of my mess. Every single one of you would say that. And this is what the story does. And do you know who the first woman to be named in the New Testament was? Not Sarah, not Rebekah, not Mary the mother of Jesus, not even Eve. It was Tamar. This same Tamar. And not just any old place, either. Look. Listen. I know you guys skip over this because it's genealogy, but it's very important.

Matthew 1:1: **"This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:**

"Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar."

There's actually no real reason to put Tamar in there. He doesn't mention anyone else's mother. He puts it right in there. This woman, who played the prostitute to get pregnant by her father-in-law, is the first woman to be named in the New Testament. And Judah made the list, too. That should shock us just as much. The guy who hired a prostitute that ended up being his daughter-in-law and then tried to burn her to death. He's in there too. Is this prescriptive? No. It is descriptive of the brokenness of humanity and the scandalous grace of God. That's what this describes.

Matthew is preaching the Gospel in his genealogy. He's like, "You want me to show you the Gospel? I'm about to get to the Gospel. It's Jesus. But, let me preach the Gospel to you before I even get to the Gospel. God uses people like this. That's the Gospel. God uses people like this."

And it's descriptive of you and me. You must find yourself in this story. All of you are broken people. All of you are broken sexually. All of us – and Jesus has a lot of sexually broken people in his family. Broken sexually, messed up people that Jesus is redeeming. And it's descriptive. This is all descriptive of how God works through brokenness to accomplish His purposes in the world, that God would use broken people like you and me.

The Apostle Paul would put it this way. In Romans 5 he's talking about the Old Testament and what the Old Testament Law is for and then – Paul does this a lot when he's writing – he works himself into a frenzy and it's awesome to see. He does that, kind of, in Romans 5. He says, "Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more."

Where sin increases, grace increases. Where our sin increases, God's grace increases. And then he would go on to say that this happens through Jesus Christ our Lord. And what this means is that God is graciously inviting people with sexual issues to be a part of His mission, to accomplish His purposes in the world. God invites sexually broken people and people with current sexual issues to be a part of what He's doing in the world. And this is a huge theme of the whole Bible and, if you gloss over this, you're not reading it right. God is not limited by human sin. He uses broken, disturbed people to accomplish His purposes.

When you wash over the Old Testament and go, "They're all heroes," they're not all heroes. They're all broken. He can work through polygamists, and He does, prostitutes, and He does, adulterers, and He does, and He can work through rape victims. Oh, by the way, Bathsheba is also named in Jesus' genealogy too. Four women are named. Two prostitutes and one rape victim. And God doesn't say, "This is good." God says this: "I am good and I will work through broken humanity. I am good and I will take these people, who are really messed up and really broken, and I will work through them."

This is God's covenantal promise that He made with Abraham. "Even though you might break this covenant, I will be faithful to this covenant. I'll be faithful to you."

There's a lot of hope for us when we look at sexuality in the Old Testament. So, when we read it we're like, "Ugh. Why is this there?"

We need to see our own brokenness as well. Now, you may be thinking, "Gosh, that's really great, Pastor. Thank you for that. But, that still doesn't deal with the way women are treated in the Old Testament and some of the prescriptions around sex and marriage that seem to favor the male and treated women like property."

You may be thinking that. If not, you're thinking that now. What about those things? I mean, that was pretty soon in the sermon. You probably should've ended right there. But, you didn't now. So, you're too late. You can't back out now. So, what about this stuff? I read that and I see a mistreating of women. This has lead many to agree with a book put out by the Atheist Foundation of Australia who said this in one of their books:

"Any honest thinking person reading through the Bible cannot ignore the blatant misogyny and barbarity toward women."

Any honest thinking person reading through the Bible cannot ignore the blatant misogyny and barbarity toward women. And when you read through the Old Testament, it could be upsetting to see these spiritual heroes like Abraham and Jacob and David and see how they treat women. They engage in polygamy and some of them buy and sell their wives and it's horrible and awful to read. Does the Bible condone this? Does God condone this?

Robert Alter, a Jewish scholar who taught at Berkeley in ancient Jewish literature, he has a book called "The Art of Biblical Narrative." An amazing book. He writes in his book that, presented in the book of Genesis, one of the most prominent institutions of the culture at the time, that was universal in this culture, was polygamy. "Every culture practiced polygamy during this time," he writes.

Polygamy is when a husband could have multiple wives. And what Alter points out in his book is that, when you read the Old Testament and you read it narratively – and his argument is to read it narratively like you would read literature – you see that, in every generation, polygamy wreaks havoc. If you trace the stories of polygamy, he says, "Having multiple wives is a disaster at every turn."

Any person who reads the Bible as narrative can figure that out. So, there's one sense that when you read the Bible as good literature, you begin to realize that what the Bible is doing is actually subverting, not supporting, these ancient institutions. It's turning them on their heads and saying, narratively, that this is not the ideal. Polygamy is not the ideal. The ideal is found in Genesis 1 and 2, and I'm going to show that narratively through a huge arch of a lot of broken families and a lot of broken relationships. So, there is a sense, there is one sense in that this text is doing that. The Old Testament is doing that. It's subverting. But, there are places in the Old Testament where it seems that God at least allows polygamy. He at least allows it.

Actually, there's laws in Deuteronomy and laws in Leviticus that are built around polygamy. Well, how do you deal with that? Instead of thinking that God allowed polygamy, it's probably better to think in terms that God was working through polygamy. Let me explain that, because some of you guys that are not tracking with me are probably mad that I said that. But, follow this. God is working through polygamy. God worked through broken people. We've already established that. God also works through broken cultures and broken systems. Polygamy is not the ideal. It's not Genesis 1 and 2. But, in that culture at that time, polygamy offered security and concern for wives and children. Polygamy, at that time where a lot of men died in war and there was way more women than men, polygamy offered security and concern for wives and children, who were the most vulnerable people in that culture.

This is actually still a reality today in cultures all around our world. So much so that an article in Slate, written by a feminist, Jillian Keenan, argues – a feminist – that the U.S. should legalize polygamy, since she thinks it would provide more protection for women, children and families. From a feminist point of view, surveying the culture, she said, "If you adopted polygamy, it would actually protect women and protect children and protect families way better than divorce."

Now, I don't agree with that fact that polygamy should be a thing. But, the fact remains that this cultural practice and the laws around it in the Old Testament were anything but sexist at the time. You might read them today and go, "Oh my gosh. That's so sexist."

They were anything but sexist at the time. They were extremely protective of women. Which brings up a very interesting point, because what if all the things that we read, in the Old Testament especially, where we have a lot of problems with, that we trip up about, that some people, you might know them or you might be this person, you leave God because of something you read in the Old Testament. What if that can really be chalked up as cultural arrogance? What if it's just you being arrogant of thinking that you are so so smart? What if it's you being arrogant thinking you're so much more advanced than the people of the Bible? "Why would God ever do that?"

And you never try to enter into that cultural stream and that cultural river to understand what God is doing. I listened to a podcast a couple weeks ago about race. And the podcast was called "The Liturgists," and I don't agree with most of the stuff they say on this podcast, but this one was just so good. The guest was "Propaganda," who is an African American hip-hop artist. He said something that I actually never really even thought about. He was talking in this panel and he was talking to one of the hosts who was white. He looks at – well, he didn't look. I don't know if he's looking at him. It's a podcast.

But, he says to him, "Your problem..." – and he was speaking to this white guy, who was one of the hosts of this show – "...with genocide in the Old Testament might really be a white people problem."

That's kind of what he said, essentially. I mean, we dealt with violence last week. So, I'm trying to build on this in this Old Testament series. He says, "At least, it's a power problem."

I'm just going to quote him. I'm just going to read kind of what he said and I'll let you know when the quote's done. So, this is what he says. It kind of goes in and out because it's a conversation. He says this:

"I don't know if I can jive with a God that would mandate the wiping out of an entire people group, and the idea that you can't jive with that is probably because you more identify with the people being wiped out. It's because you've been in power, you've always been in power."

Especially speaking to him, as a white man.

"You understand the world from the position of people, culture, that has always been in power. But, when black people looked at the Scriptures, what we saw is the narrative of people who have been, from day one, oppressed. And, throughout the entire story they were always looking for a redeemer. And this redeemer came and what the redeemer did not only freed them physically, but He freed their minds and their spirits and their souls. So, when I open up the Old Testament and see a God that says, 'Wait, wait, wait. They did what to you? Wipe them all out,' what I see is a conquering king who cares about my suffering and is not going to allow the subjugation to last for so long. But, also, a God who says, 'I love the oppressor, too.'

"So, we see a God that says, 'Are you kidding me?' A God that will wipe out an entire people group? That's exactly who I'm going to rock with. Do you know why? Because I have been oppressed and I need a God that's going to, with vigor and fervor, liberate me from this oppression, and with the foresight and the grace to say, 'But, if those who I am about to smite desire freedom, you can come hallow with me.'"

That was so good. I mean, you listen to it. It's way better when he says it. But, there's something there that – especially wrestling through this whole Old Testament thing, right? As we've been wrestling through it, how much of our problem is really more of our problem and not God's problem? Maybe we're too smart and too powerful to see what God is really doing. Like, God is trying to deliver people and He's trying to actually crush oppressors and wicked people. That God is actually trying to protect families and societies, but we think we're too smart for that. "God must be going something else. God must be evil. He must be oppressive."

That's what we think. There are some smart people that came to Jesus once to trap Him with a question about marriage and love. This is what they said. It's in Matthew 19.

It says, "Some Pharisees came to him to test him."

So, they ask Him a question, but they were actually testing Jesus.

"They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'

"Haven't you read,' he replied,"

Which is really funny, because they're Bible scholars and Jesus is like, "Haven't you read your Bible?" And then He says, "Haven't you read page one of your Bible?"

Such a burn from Jesus.

"Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

So, the answer to the question, "Can we divorce our wives?" Jesus is like, "No. No. That's not how it was in the beginning. That's not God's intention. No."

But then they answer back and they basically say, "Have you read?" And they quote Moses to Him. They quote Deuteronomy to Him.

"Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

They actually are quoting a law to Jesus.

"Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'

"The disciples said to him," – the disciples are tracking with Jesus. Like, "Yeah, yeah. Get 'em!"

And then, when Jesus said this, they turned and they're like, "Whoa, wait."

"If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

Have you ever noticed that part? The disciples are like, "Whoa, Jesus. I get it. Burn them, but don't get crazy on us."

That's what they're saying. They're like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait. Jesus. Time out."

These are His disciples. Okay, it's interesting here. A couple of things. What Jesus does here with the Law of Moses. He says that Moses, in the Law, was permitting them to divorce. But, it was never supposed to be this way. The hope lies beyond the Law. Jesus says, "Moses permitted this, but this law was to protect and then move you forward. That's what it's supposed to do. It's supposed to move you forward to covenant. It's supposed to move you forward to what it was like in the beginning. This is what the Law was supposed to be doing. This is what the Law was trying to do. And Moses permitted this, but this was the intent of the Law. This is how the Law is fulfilled among you."

It seems that Jesus is one of those characters that's kind of like when the main characters in C.S. Lewis' "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" are about to meet the Christ character, Aslan. And they ask, "Is he safe?" And they say, "He's a lion. He's not safe. But, he's good."

Jesus is kind of like that. Jesus is so good that He meets us where we are. Jesus meets so many sexually broken people. Like, they were very very very attracted to Jesus. They were attracted by His grace, His presence, His love. They were attracted to Christ and they would come to Jesus and Jesus would go to them. And He would attract all these sexually broken people and then Jesus leveled the playing field. He met them where they were. So, whether it was people that were abused and used by other men, prostitutes, even people like tax

collectors who were considered crooks in their day, Jesus meets them where they were.

But, then what Jesus does, He's good, but He's not safe. He's not safe. He'll meet us where we are as sexual sinners, but then He'll lead us to the impossible. He'll meet us where we're at. We're broken. We're broken sexual people with all kinds of conflicting desires. Yes. That's true. And we all have this really – some of us, a lot of us – bad sexual past. Some of us in here might have a really bad sexually present. Like, right now. And Jesus meets us where we are. He's good that way. But, He's not safe. Because He meets us where we are and then He pulls us forward toward the impossible to where His disciples are even saying, "Whoa, whoa, wait. That's impossible. It's better not to be married then. Who could do that? Who could stay with someone for the rest of their life through thick and thin no matter what happens?"

Jesus is like, "That's the hope. I mean, that's hard. Maybe it's almost impossible, but that's what I do. I'll meet you where you're at and you might think that's impossible that God would meet you where you are, but I will lead you towards the impossible. I will lead you toward the ideal. I will bring healing, I will bring fullness, I will actually come in and bring restoration."

I'm sure that there are many here this morning who are sexually broken, maybe even traumatized, in this room. Time Magazine, two weeks ago, had a whole cover issue on pornography and how it's destroying – and this is all written from a secular point of view, not religious at all, not spiritual at all. People, men, who advocated for pornography for a long time or were on pornography for a long time are now, in their early 20s, strong opponents of it. And the reason why they are is they say that it's destroying their ability of being present to the person that they want to have sex with and it's destroying them to the point where they cannot even be aroused anymore by another human.

One porn user says this at the end of this article. This is what he wants to tell his kid one day. I mean, this is crazy. This is what he wants to tell his kid:

"I want to be straight up with you. All super stimulating things like internet porn, junk food and drugs can be fun and pleasurable temporarily. However, they also have the potential to desensitize you to normal, natural things that ultimately rob you of the one thing you thought they would give you: the ability to experience pleasure."

This is from Time Magazine. I think this can be said. I mean, I know they want to stop at pornography. But, I would say that this can be said of all sexual pleasure outside of God's ideal. It can be pleasurable and it could be good temporarily at best, but most of us have really really bad stories, maybe some more bad than good stories. And that's all of us, because all of us live outside the ideal of what God has. Most of us. I'd say maybe all of us live outside the ideal of what God has sexually.

The beauty is that God enters into our less-than-ideal situations and meets us where we're at and then He pulls us forward and He redeems. And then He uses broken people to accomplish His purposes in this world, and we need Jesus to do this. We need Jesus to enter into our world to save us, to forgive us and pull us toward His idea and His vision of wholeness.

Let's pray.

God, I know that there are a lot of us that experience temptation, struggle and past brokenness and present brokenness that robs us of joy of presence, of enjoying another person. And I know this scandalous – especially the very beginning thing that we talked about, God, that's scandalous that You would enter in and use polygamists and prostitutes and adulterers. You do that, and that's many of our stories in here. People that are sexually deviant, just so messed up sexually that we have a hard time even confessing it, admitting it, there's so much shame wrapped up into it.

So, I pray right now, in the Spirit of Christ, Jesus, that You would slowly remove shame from this room. We know that this place is safe to confess that we are broken and that, in You, we can find healing and restoration, God. In You, we can be met. You can meet us, Lord. Right now You can meet us and we can invite You into those deep pockets of pain, those deep pockets of brokenness and loneliness and despair and hopelessness and maybe even anger. We can invite You into those places. Be a real, present healer during this time as we respond to You, God. Be with us. And I pray, God, that You would bring about change here; that we would leave changed. Like, completely changed and full of hope.

Fill us with hope today. Thank You that You, Jesus, are a gentle and kind savior and that You are pulling us onward, Lord, and You're sanctifying us and You're making us more like You. Thank You that you're doing that. In Jesus' name, amen.