



James 4:4 Pt 1 The Heartbreak of Spiritual Adultery

Sept 27, 2015

Text: James 4:4

- With our hearts tuned into a better *Vision of Heaven*, our minds fixed on the *Beauty of the LORD*, and as a *Loving People* again overwhelmed by His love and grace, we are better prepared to look into and receive this text...I hope!! ☺
- I call spiritual adultery “heartbreaking” because in scripture, not only is at a harsh indictment of unfaithfulness on behalf of God’s people, it is expressed by God in the most heart-wrenching terms as we’ll see.
- We spoke a couple weeks ago about “**pictures**” or types in Scripture. One of the greatest is God as a husband, and his people as His betrothed or as His bride.
- Indeed, marriage itself is a type that points forward to the ultimate antitype, the marriage of Church and the Lamb:

Revelation 19:7-8 ESV Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; (8) it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"-- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

- Paul wrote it this way: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (32) *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*"(Ephesians 5:31-32 ESV)
- James seems to be basing his accusation of adultery on his flock’s intimacy with another god, in this case, “the **world**.” Jesus did the same:

Mark 8:34-38 ESV And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (35) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. (36) For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? (37) For what can a man give in return for his soul? (38) For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

- But before getting to that, let us explore, and maybe feel some of God’s heart on this most terrible of sins. It is also called **idolatry**. Sometimes it is called **harlotry** or whoredom. Yes, heartbreaking language that James likely wanted the Judean saints to experience.

You Adulterous People!

1. This phrase in Greek is literally, “You adulteresses!” (Gk: moichalis)
2. The word literally means “one who has unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another.”
3. To this point, James has not mentioned any sexual misconduct. Therefore, contextually, **spiritual** adultery is in view.
4. In the spiritual sense, it carries the idea that God’s people, to whom He is a husband, often choose to worship another god, either an actual idol god or in James’ case, the world system (much more on this coming).
5. Friends, this language, “You adulterous people” implies that God views His **worship** in **extremely intimate terms**. Indeed, some of the most vivid language in the whole Bible is used to describe God’s feelings on this.

6. It is striking (and sad) that James uses this word to describe Christians. Could it be that we are privileged and called to a level of devotion much higher than we think?
7. Again, next week, by God's grace, we'll begin to look at this issue of "the world." *Today, let us breathe in the heart of our great God and King, as He consistently laments over a people given to spiritual harlotry.*

Three Old Testament Heartbreaks

Here are three separate incidents of spiritual adultery that had a profound impact on God's people, and are mentioned over and over again in Scripture.

The Golden Calf

Exodus 32:1-9 ESV When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (2) So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." (3) So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. (4) And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (5) When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." (6) And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. (7) And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. (8) They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" (9) And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.

- Miraculously delivered from Egypt by God's mighty power and outstretched arm, God's people quickly made themselves a god to worship.
- Remember that God **feels**. How do you think He felt?

The Incident at Peor

Numbers 25:1-9 ESV While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. (2) These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. (3) So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. (4) And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." (5) And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor." (6) And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting. (7) When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand (8) and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped. (9) Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

- Scripture reminds us of this over and over again.
- Hosea writes, "*Hosea 9:10 ESV* Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved."

The Idolatry of Jeroboam

1 Kings 12:25-31 ESV Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. And he went out from there and built Peniel. (26) And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. (27) If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." (28) So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." (29) And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. (30) Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. (31) He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites.

- Not only did the kingdom separate, but ten whole tribes, led by Jeroboam, began to worship idol gods at a counterfeit temple.
- This "idolatrous impartation" is spoken of over and over again in Scripture: "*1 Kings 16:26 ESV* For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in the sins that he made Israel to sin, provoking the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols."

Here are two Prophetic, Heartbreaking Laments (Warning parents, the language is mature.)

In other times, God's people choose to "cheat" on the Lord by not only worshipping idols, but making alliances with nations, both of which are condemned by the prophets.

The LORD's heart through Jeremiah

Jeremiah 3:6-14 ESV The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? (7) And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. (8) She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. (9) Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. (10) Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the LORD." (11) And the LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. (12) Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, "'Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever. (13) Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the LORD your God and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed my voice, declares the LORD. (14) Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion."

The Utter Astonishment of the Language in Ezekiel

- Ezekiel 16:1-42

The Life of Hosea

Hosea 1:2 ESV When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD."

- His children were named after judgments: Jezreel, No Mercy, and Not My People! (Hos 1:4-9)
- Lest we are overwhelmed, in every case the Lord promised eventual mercy and hope...

Hosea 1:10-11 ESV Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." (11) And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

New Testament Exhortations

Flee idolatry!

1 Corinthians 10:11-14 ESV (11) Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (12) Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (13) No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (14) Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Note: In 2014, we taught extensively on spiritual adultery and idolatry from 1 Corinthians 10. Those notes and sermons are online.

1 John 5:18-21 ESV We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. (19) We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (20) And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (21) Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

The woman that rides the Beast in John's Apocalypse is called "the mother of prostitutes."

Revelation 17:3-6 ESV And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. (4) The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. (5) And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." (6) And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly.

- There are many interpretation of who this "woman" might be. But note she is in part, described through her adulteries. Very sad.
- Based on what you have read today, who do you think she is?

Final thoughts:

1. My goal for today was simple: **to read enough Scripture that this congregation might get a sense of God's heart as it relates to His own worship.**
2. It is noteworthy that the very first Commandment is "You shall have no other God's before me." (Ex 20:3) The second continues the theme, "You shall not make for yourselves a carved image." (Ex 20:4)
3. It is VERY likely, that James' flock would be very familiar with the narratives and pronouncements we read, as Israel's history was littered with spiritual adultery.

4. It is also noteworthy, that the New Testament keeps calling God's people to be a faithful **bride**, even unto the last book of the Bible: "*Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" (Rev 2:10)

All praises to Jesus the Christ, who has redeemed His people from their sin! Let us remember who our faithful husband is, and what He has done!

Revelation 22:13-16 ESV (13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (14) Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. (15) Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (16) "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

Amen.