

Unfaithful Love - Hosea 4:1-19

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[0 : 00] 902. So page 902 of the Church Bible, Hosea chapter 4, just starting in verse 1.

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land. There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery. They break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away.

The beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying. But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest. You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you.

So I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests. Because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children. The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me. They exchange their glory for something disgraceful. They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness. And it will be, like people, like priests, I will punish both of them for their ways, and repay them for their deeds. They will eat but not have enough. They will engage in prostitution but not increase. Because they have deserted the Lord to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding of my people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray. They are unfaithful to their God.

They sacrifice in the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law ought to adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery. Because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes. A people without understanding will come to ruin.

Though you commit adultery, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty. Do not go to Gilgal. Do not go up to Beth-Avon. And do not swear as surely as the Lord lives. The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the Lord pasture them like lambs in a meadow? Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone. Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution. Their rulers dearly love shameful ways. A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame.

[3 : 11] Thank you, Kirsty. Hosea chapter 4. So keep your Bibles open there, please. Alex is just handing around pens and a little sheet which has notes if you want to take and follow along with the talk.

Again, just to remind you and encourage you that if you miss any of the talks, you can find them all on the church website. And the little booklet that's on the table as well, The Passion and Pursuit of God, which gives you a review, an overview of what the book is all about, which is always refreshing too.

Thank you. So let's turn to God as we pray and ask for his help.

Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for its truth. Thank you for the way in which it speaks to us today.

And we pray that as we listen, as we engage, that Father, you would be turning our hearts away from other lovers and other things.

[4 : 50] Turning our hearts and our attention to you, our true love, our faithful and loyal husband.

Help us to do that well. We need your help. So pour out your spirit on us, we pray. Amen. All rise. How does the defendant plead? Guilty or not guilty? Well, I can still remember my day in court. It was a humbling experience.

The evidence was laid out before the judge, a witness's account and the moment captured on CCTV. Driving across a railway line when the barrier was coming down was not only stupid, it was costly.

The judgment was just and fair. I had no excuse. Well, chapter 4 brings all of us into the courtroom. [6:05] Not just any court, God's marriage court. And on trial is God's wife, Israel. Remember, God's marriage to his people was illustrated through the marriage of Hosea to Gomer.

Just as Gomer had left Hosea for other lovers, so Israel had walked out on their marriage to God. But God was not about to give up on his loved one.

Have a look at chapter 3 and verse 1. The Lord said to me, so the Lord is speaking to Hosea, Hosea, go show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites. And so Hosea would go and love his wife again and he brings her back into the family home.

It's a wonderful picture of God's love and grace towards people like us. So if chapters 1 to 3 give us the big picture of God's marriage to his people, then chapters 4 to 14 give us the detail of how the marriage failed, how it broke down, and how God is going to restore it again.

[7:27] Hosea and Gomer may not be mentioned again, but God's marriage to his people is still central to the story. And here we are in chapter 4 and it all starts in God's marriage court.

God, the faithful, loyal husband, has turned judge, jury, and prosecutor. Israel, God's unfaithful wife, is the silent defendant.

Chapter 4, verse 1. You can imagine the scene. Israel, the wife, in the dock. God, the judge, comes in. Chapter 4, verse 1.

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land. Now, as we enter this marriage court and listen to the proceedings, we're not just spectators up in the gallery.

We are also in the dock. We are also the defendant. Because we too have failed to love God as we should, we too have led an adulterous life.

[8:47] So first, the charge against us, no love. Look at the second part of verse 1. Here's the charge.

There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. Yes, Israel was married to God, but it was a marriage on paper, not in practice.

They enjoyed receiving all of God's wonderful gifts and his blessings and provision. They took it all, but they did not want to fulfill their marriage obligations.

There was no faithfulness, no love, and no acknowledgement of God. And it seems that our love for God is no different.

You see, God is not some distant impersonal force away out there. He is our loving creator and he made us for a relationship with him.

[9:48] That's why we exist. He created us so that we could be married to him. But we've rejected his advances. We've turned down his marriage proposal.

Oh, we're quite happy to receive all his blessings and all the good things that we get. But we don't want to commit to him. And the evidence is seen all around us first in a breakdown in society.

Look at verse 2. Because there's no love for God, well, verse 2, there's only cursing, lying, and murder, and stealing, and adultery.

They break all bounds and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Now, you listen to the news and I think that's a pretty accurate description of the human race.

Because we do not love God, society is completely broken. There are no boundaries. We live and do as we please, we do what we like, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

[10:53] There's wars, there's crime, there's violence. But not only is society broken, look at the evidence all around us in the physical world.

Verse 3. Because of this, because there's no love for God, not only is society broken, but the world is broken. Verse 3. Because of this, the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away.

The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish in the sea, they're all dying. And isn't that what we see in our world today?

Not only is there the wars, but there's flooding, there's famine, there's earthquakes, there's disease, there's pollution. It just goes on and on. Everything is wasting away.

Creation is groaning, it's breaking. Because we have not loved God as husband, the evidence is clear to see.

[11 : 56] Society is broken. The world is broken. The human race is broken. But you say, well, I'm not like that.

I'm not that person that you've just read in verse 2. I care for people. I don't murder, I don't steal or lie. Well, that's exactly how the religious priest thought.

Look at verse 4. But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, so stop pointing fingers at each other, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest.

In other words, here are the priests, they claim to be innocent and above and superior and better than everybody else, but he's saying, you're just as bad.

In fact, having more priests didn't make things any better. Having more church services and more church buildings didn't make things better, it only made things worse.

[12 : 58] Look at verse 7. The more that the priests increased, the more they sinned against me. They exchanged their glory for something disgraceful.

They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness. You see, every time the people sinned, they would have to go to the priest to go and make a sacrifice.

And the way in which the priest was paid was, well, you would give him a little bit of the sacrificed animal. Maybe a nice bit of steak or a leg of lamb, whatever it might be.

So the more sin that there was, the more sacrifices that were required, and therefore, the more sacrifices that were made, well then, the more pay the priests got.

And for the priests, it was simple maths. Let's keep the sin going and we earn more money. We earn more food for ourselves.

[14 : 01] Verse 8. That's what it's telling us. They feed on the sins of the people. They relish in the wickedness. It was simply too profitable for the priests to actually deal with the sin.

their attitude was, if we try and deal with the sin, we're out of a job. We're not going to do that. The smug religious were just as bad.

And I think it can be a bit like us, like that with us. We can come along to our church services and do the religious things, help people out now and again.

But why would we want to increase our giving to the unreached peoples of the world when it would mean we would have less to spend on ourselves? No, I'd want to give to that because then I wouldn't be able to do this.

Why commit to serving the most vulnerable in our community when it would mean, well, it stops me from doing the things I want to do? Why bother using your gifts in the life of the church when it means I'm not going to get talking to people or see my friends as much?

[15 : 15] You see, sometimes it's too profitable for us to deal with the sin. We just prefer to kind of live our nice, comfortable, cosy life.

The reality is we're all guilty. That's how it's summed up in verse 9. And it will be like people, like priests.

It doesn't matter who we are, whether we're religious or irreligious, whether we're a church leader or a church member, whether we go to church or we don't go to church, all of us, the human race, the evidence is there to see society is broken, the world is broken.

We have not loved God as we should. So first, the charge against us, no love. Second, the sin within us, an adulterous heart.

Look at verse 12. They consult, so again speaking about the nation of Israel, they consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood.

[16 : 30] It's like you or me getting a box of matches, opening it up, chucking it up in the air and then seeing where the matches lie and determining what direction you're going to go in life by the direction the matches are pointing.

That's what they were doing, chucking bits of wood around to see what they should do. And worst of all, rest of verse 12, a spirit of prostitution leads them astray, they are unfaithful to their God.

As a nation, as a people, they had wandered after other lovers, they had rejected their marriage to God and committed adultery, they loved other things and other people more.

It was really quite gross. Look at verse 13. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under the oak, poplar, terebinth, where the shade is planted.

It was kind of a nice thing to do, shaded by the trees. You see, when the people wanted something, they would go up to the mountaintops and they wouldn't, instead of turning to God, they would turn to their made-up gods.

[17 : 50] And as part of their sacrifice of offering things, the men and the women who all came there, they would all have sex with each other in the hope that somehow it would sting the gods in the heavens to have sex, which would result in earthly blessings and fertility, that somehow it would cause rains to fall and the sun to shine and good harvest to grow and that the animals would reproduce.

It was really gross. That's what's being described here at the end of verse 13. Therefore, your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery. not only the women, but the men. Look at the middle of verse 14. The men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes.

So this picture of physical adultery not only showed how messed up the nation had become, it was a picture of their spiritual adultery with God.

Their joining with other people was a picture of how they had become married to other gods. Verse 17. Ephraim, which is another name for Israel.

[19 : 12] Ephraim is joined to idols. Literally, they've broken up the relationship with God saying, we don't want you anymore. They've effectively signed their divorce papers with God saying, we don't want you, and they've now formed a new marriage, a new relationship with their new gods.

They've fallen in love with other things and other people. Now we might look at all of this and it seems somewhat distant and look in horror and disgust and think, really?

Is that the way they behaved? But we need to grasp it because it's a picture of our own hearts. Look what it says in verse 12, the end of verse 12.

It talks about a spirit of prostitution leading people astray. They are unfaithful to God. Now we might not be a prostitute at some religious shrine, but we can all play the spiritual whore.

We all chase after other lovers. others. We exchange God for other things. We make sport and career and money and sex the most important things and give our life to that.

[20 : 37] Or we replace God with other people, a spouse or a lover. They're the most important. We leave God and have affairs hoping to find joy and happiness in things and people.

evil. And that's the sin within our hearts. It's what the Bible describes as adulterous behaviour. The physical adultery that Israel committed is a picture of our own spiritual adultery within our hearts.

You might think, well, that's just one way I can go and it's going to be good to me, it's going to give me everything that I want. But it's a lie. It leaves us empty.

Look at the beginning of verse 10. It's talking about their adulterous behaviour and leaving God for other things.

Look what it says, verse 10, they will eat but not have enough. They will engage in prostitution but not increase because they have deserted the Lord to give themselves to prostitution.

[21 : 53] You see, we believe and the world tells us that if I can just get that perfect job, I will be content.

If I can just find that perfect lover for my life, then everything is going to be sorted. If I can just earn enough money and buy that perfect house in the right location, then I will be absolutely happy, completely satisfied and content.

If I can just have, I'll be okay. But chasing after other lovers will never satisfy you.

As it says in verse 10, we will never have enough. We will never increase. chasing other lovers will never satisfy you, never fulfill you.

Spiritual adultery, replacing God with other lovers, will leave you empty and broken. So second, the sin within us, adulterous hearts.

[23 : 09] Third, the warning before us, judgment coming. We can imagine Israel, God's wife, sitting there in the dock, listening as all the evidence is laid out before her.

No love, an adulterous heart, and watching up in the gallery up there is Judah. Remember, Israel was the northern part of the nation, Judah was the southern part of the nation and she's come into court too, but she's sitting up in the gallery.

And now God turns to speak to them. Verse 15, though you commit adultery, O Israel, so God is speaking to his wife, you have an adulterous heart, you have no love, and now God turns and he looks to Judah up in the gallery, the rest of verse 15, let not Judah become guilty.

Judah, do not follow the same path as your sister Israel. Do not forsake me as your first love. Be careful that you do not have eyes for other lovers and exchange me for other gods. Look at the rest of 15. Do not go to Gilgal. Do not go up to Beth Aven. The real name, of course, was Beth El.

[24 : 41] Beth simply means house, El means God, so the house of God, the place that it was meant to be. But Israel had turned Beth El into Beth Aven.

Aven means wickedness, so they had turned the place where they came to meet God into a house of wickedness. And God is saying to Judah, see what Israel has done.

Don't go there. Don't go to the house of wickedness. Don't follow in her ways. Verse 17, Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone.

Remember, I'm your husband. It is I who love you. I rescued you from Egypt. I provided you with everything that you have. I love you.

Do not seek after other lovers. Because if you do, verse 19, a whirlwind will sweep them away and their sacrifices will bring them shame.

[25 : 49] God would bring judgment upon his wife Israel. Assyria, the great nation, would come in like a whirlwind, a great big tornado that would sweep through the nation, destroying the people in the land, everything in its path.

And God is pleading with Judah who is listening and looking in on it all. Judah, don't go that way. Don't let your eyes wander towards other lovers.

Love me because of all I have done for you. But Judah, if you don't love me, judgment will also come to you.

But you see, this isn't just a warning about Judah. This is actually God's warning to me and to you. You see, if we know our history, not only did Israel commit adultery and wander away from God, but Judah went and did the same thing. They didn't listen to God's word.

[26 : 59] They didn't heed the warning. And just as Assyria came in and swept Israel away, in time, Babylon would come as a great nation and they would sweep Judah away.

God's judgment fell on the people. And all of this is a picture of God's final judgment that is to come. And so it becomes a warning for people like you and me.

it's saying do not chase after other lovers. Don't turn from me, your husband, because judgment will come. You want to live a life without God's love?

You want to live life your own way and do your own thing? You want to live life without any boundaries? You want to search out your own lovers and turn to other things and other people? If that's the way you want to live, then a life without my love you shall have. But let's remember what that looks like.

[28 : 02] Do you remember back in verse 2 and verse 3? Because we do not love God, what is there in its place? A broken society? Lying, cursing, murder, stealing, breaking of all rounds, bloodshed following bloodshed?

What happens if we do not love him? The land breaks, the world breaks. And God is saying to us, if you do not love me, if you want to have a life without my love, then a life you shall have.

But mark this, it will be for an eternity. It will be hell for an eternity. The absence of God's love is the absence of everything that is good, and beautiful.

No friends, no laughter, no joy, no hope, brokenness. God says, you don't want my love, then my love you shall not have.

It will be judgment, an eternity of separation from me. men, for to be to be zed. Now, chapter 4 is not easy to listen to.

[29 : 20] I struggled reading through this and thought, how can I speak about this on Sunday? Where's the good news? Where's the hope in all of this?

well as we hear these words of chapter 4 let me ask this question what do you see? do you see a judge with terror in his eyes?

or do you see a husband with tears in his eyes? is it a judge with terror? or a husband with tears?

you see yes God is judge but he is the faithful loyal husband speaking to his wife whom he loves look at verse 16 the Israelites are stubborn like a stubborn heifer ask any of our farmers amongst us they'll tell you what a heifer is like when they don't want to move you can do all the pushing and shoving but they will not budge an inch well God had come back to his wife time and time again wooing her pleading longing aching please return come back to me but she would not budge she

rejected God's loving advances look at the rest of verse 16 how then can the Lord pasture them like lambs in a meadow have you got that picture?

because here we see the heart of God here is the husband with tears in his eyes this is God's desire for us that we would stay close to him like lambs to a shepherd so that they are free to enjoy the meadow lambs in a meadow are free to enjoy the rich pastures that have been provided for them everything is there for them contained within that meadow stay close to the shepherd and you will enjoy life in all its fullness wander away from the shepherd and you will face eternal danger this is a husband with tears in his eyes saying I long to shepherd you to pastor you to care for you stay close to me if we don't quite grasp it see the heart of God in the Lord Jesus because just as God looked out upon the nation so when God came to earth through his son Jesus he looked out on the crowds and here is what he saw when Jesus saw the crowds people like you and me he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd filled with heartache for a lost people moved by their sinful broken lives fearing for the danger that they were in

[32 : 51] Jesus had compassion he was broken inside and his compassion was not just words it led to a demonstration of the greatest act of love the good shepherd would lay down his life die on the cross taking the judgment that we deserve so that we could enjoy life with him you see when he calls us to himself he's calling us like lambs to a shepherd to say stay within the meadow enjoy life with me enjoy life in its fullness wander away from the meadow wander away from the shepherd and you will face eternal danger be careful that we do not turn to other lovers but stay close to our one true lover the husband with tears in his eyes pleading longing that we stay close to him let's pray to a family to God who be careful to die before die after lol what come on to die for them much share to pour everything the huh punish how are not after år jun