

V13

- In the film the **Greatest Showman**, there’s a horrible moment.
 - For those who don’t know the film, it’s the story of PT Barnum
 - the unpredictable and entrepreneurial genius who runs a troupe of circus performers and misfits.
 - PT Barnum is married to childhood sweetheart Charity Barnum, and we’ve seen them promise to fulfil a “million dreams” in a world they’re “gonna make”.
 - But one day those dreams all fall apart. Charity opens her newspaper to see her husband kissing Jenny Lind- a famous and glamorous singer who he has been touring with miles from home.
- **What?**
 - It’s horrifying. It’s sickening. It’s devastating.
- It’s not more than a kiss, you’ll be glad to know. This is after all a PG.
 - And it turns out that PT Barnum had been resisting her advances, and nothing happened and everything is going to come right.
 - But the image on that photo is enough for Charity to believe that her husband is having an affair with another woman.
 - It’s horrifying. It’s sickening. It’s devastating.
- Last week we saw that Jeremiah has to bring a hard message to the people of Judah in the 7th Century BC. Destruction before construction.
 - And today we begin to learn why the message is so hard.
 - The people of God are having an affair.
 - And Jeremiah has to confront them.
 - And this time it’s not an illusion.
 - The very people who have been rescued by the living and loving God
 - are now giving their love to other gods. It’s spiritual adultery.
 - To use provocative language...
 - **The people of God have become a whore.**
 - It’s horrifying. It’s sickening. It’s devastating.
- We have a long reading today which we are doing to do in two parts.
 - And it doesn’t make comfortable reading.
 - Because not only does it paint a picture of Judah as an adulteress
 - But it acts as a mirror to ask us how we have treated our God and Saviour.

Let’s have JEREMIAH 2:1-20 read out.

This sermon is called “the depths of sin”, and I’ve called this first half ...

1) SIN AS ADULTERY.

- V1-3.
 - Right since the first books of the Bible,
 - God is likened to a husband
 - and his people are likened to his bride.
 - (we saw that in the church series)
 - And the honeymoon starts out so well.
 - The couple are so devoted, and so clearly in love.
 - As God drew his people tenderly out of Egypt and across the desert to
 - Any nation who touched them would receive their come-uppance v3.
- But tragically it all goes wrong.
- V4-5.
 - There’s a double tragedy. (Remember these they will come again):
 - **Rejection**
 - **Replacement**
 - Rather than valuing their kind and faithful husband they **rejected** him.
 - V6a- they did not ask “where is the Lord”
 - V8a- the priests did not ask “where is the Lord”
 - It’s a spiritually dangerous thing when you stop seeking the Lord and wanting to spend time with him.
 - They rejected him and they replaced him. What with? Who with? Baal v8.
 - Baal was the fertility god of the surrounding nations.
 - Baal worship was a devastating context of promises of fertility for the land mixed with sexual immorality.
 - So you could worship your god
 - Get assured of good crops
 - And satisfy your lust in the name of religion all at the same time.
 - Baal could give you so much.
 - Even though he was a fake, a worthless and empty lie, he was too tempting.
 - How must God feel? To be left for another?
- **BETRAYAL.** That’s what it is.
 - We need to pause and think about this.
 - It’s deeply painful, but it’s very instructive.
 - Whenever we sin, we are actually committing a kind of adultery against God.
- I wonder what your idol is?
 - I had a painful experience a couple of months ago.
 - I came face to face with one of my idols.
 - ME! And the image that I love to project that I am a competent nice guy.

- Emma said, and I love her for this, *“I wonder if you sometimes choose to do some things because of how you think they will make you look, and the price you pay for that is exhaustion”*.
- Now just for context, although I didn’t find the conversation easy, she said it in a loving way, and in chatting with her since it’s clear she wasn’t suggesting that she is idol free either. But it did get me thinking.
- Why do I work hard?
 - Partly because the job is demanding, and the needs are great.
 - Like anyone working with people, the minister’s work is never done.
 - But it’s shockingly easy to drift subtly from
 - Worshipping God through my work
 - To worshipping work instead of my God.
 - You see ministry can become a tool for making me look good, rather than as a tool to make God look good.
- Paul Tripp who has written a book that we are reading as a staff team says “desire for a **good** thing becomes a **bad** thing when that desire becomes a **ruling** thing”.
 - Family, money, pleasure, work, even Christian ministry are all good things, but when a good thing takes over, so that I’m controlled by my hobby or work, or other people’s opinions, then I have rejected the giver of life for his gifts instead.
- The rest of this section begins to move into the consequences, and it starts with courtroom language as God brings charges against his people.
 - V9.
 - It’s shocking. The neighbours are more faithful to their gods even though they are not gods at all. V10-11 Do you see Hindus swapping Visnu for Allah?
 - It’s appalling v12.
 - But **rejection and replacement** comes to a head in a famous verse in v13.
- No community can live without water, and in the arid Middle East there are two ways to get it. A fresh spring- living water.
- Or if you don’t have a spring or even a well, a storage solution called a **cistern**, where during the rainy season run off is channelled into an underground cellar hewn out of the rock and often lined with plaster to stop it leaking. Only problem is it was often less healthy because of the standing water which could breed disease and mosquitos.
- It’s crazy what God’s people are doing.
 - **Rejection**: they have forsaken me the spring of living water.
 - That’s ludicrous in itself. When you have a supply of satisfaction welling up for free from the ground why would you abandon it.
 - And then not just to **reject** but to **replace**: they have dug their own cisterns,
 - And these homespun DIY projects don’t do the job anyway- the water leaks through cracks.
- We are so self-sufficient. We are so stupid to run from God instead of to God.

- And does it do us any good?
- Not at all. Sin never does. Adultery never does (we actually saw that in Proverbs 5 in a sermon on adultery still on our website if you'd like to listen).
- You see Betrayal brings bitterness.
 - If God is the source of all goodness, it's madness to run away from him as the source of satisfaction, and think that we can find anything other than disappointment and bitterness by turning to an alternative.
 - We see this bitterness in the final verse of the section v19.
- I think instinctively we know this, but we rarely allow it to impact our thinking.
 - We prize the holiday more than we should, subtly beginning to look forward to IT rather than God to give us ultimate rest and refreshment, and we are gutted by the queues at the airport, the broken facilities in the hotel, and the cost of everything, taking it personally, and getting irate that those things have got in the way of our worship.
 - When we replace the Creator with created things (as Paul says in Romans 1) we are going to face painful consequences. Betrayal brings bitterness, as God hands us over to the consequences of our choices.
 - My workaholicism robs me of the enjoyment of the good things of life.
 - And health and family can pay the bill.
- The lesson here is see sin's sinfulness. V19 Consider.
 - Please consider with me now...
 - Why do you do the things you do?
 - Which of Satan's lies have you bought into?
 - Thinking that if you only had this or that, then life would be transformed.
 - It is God who satisfies. Rejection. Replacement.
- Do you remember the woman at the well.
 - She also was thirsty.
 - Thirsty for relationship.
 - Jesus said "go and call your husband".
 - "She said I have no husband".
 - "You are right he said, you have had 5 husbands and the man you now have is not your husband".
 - He exposes her thirst. See sin's sinfulness.
 - But he also (just for a spoiler of the good news)
 - he also offers himself as the source of living water.
 - Same phrase in Jeremiah 2. Found in the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Well I'm afraid it gets worse as we move into the second half of the reading.

If the first half paints sin as **adultery**, the second half paints it as **prostitution**.

Becca will now read the second half, and we need to brace ourself for some X rated language.

2) SIN AS PROSTITUTION

- Now as we approach this section, we need to be very sensitive.
- **First** women AND MEN are included in the unfaithful, even though the metaphor is feminine.
- And **second**, many women find themselves in the sex trade for reasons that are not always their fault. They have been trafficked, they have been abused, they have been coerced into selling their bodies.
- They are often more victim of evil than perpetrator of evil.
- However as Jeremiah picks up language similar to the book of Hosea,
 - Israel here is not like that.
 - She is the initiator, not the passive victim.
 - She is hungry for illicit sex.
- Let me pick out a couple of verses:
 - V20
 - V23-25 She is likened to a beast on heat.
 - 3v1b
 - 3 v2.
- And the reason for this analogy is again idolatry.
 - v23a baals.
 - v25
 - v27 worshipping stone and wood images as the lifegiver.
 - v28.
- Spiritual adultery has moved from a dabble, a “fling” (as people wrongly call adultery), a single act.
 - To a way of life, a trade, an addiction.
- So subheading V26. **DISGRACE**. Like a thief caught red handed.
- But again, does such degenerate, debased, disgraceful behaviour satisfy?
 - No.
 - However much Judah seeks pleasure, she never gets pleasure.
- **DISGRACE BRINGS DISAPPOINTMENT.**
 - They say that you can go mad at sea, because if you run out of water, you are tempted to drink the water in the sea around you. And it will never satisfy, never quench your thirst, only kill you.
 - You get the disappointment throughout the section.
 - But particularly towards the end.
 - V36. (the changing ways is changing paths from one lover to another)
 - And the spiritual adultery is connected to a political adultery.
 - Judah thinks that by making alliances with Assyria or Egypt they will be kept safe.
 - But they don't help. V37.
 - There's further disappointment in 3v3 in terms of rain.
 - Because Judah has failed to remain faithful to the covenant (that is the agreement at Sinai, that they will obey him) he sends the promised

covenant curses. And v3 that means drought- no rain .

- ~~There's a real irony here isn't there when you put it all together.~~
 - ~~V21. They abandon God the source of satisfaction.~~
 - ~~V21 they dig out their own cisterns as they seek satisfaction in idols~~
 - ~~v 18 they drink water from the Nile (they lean on Egypt and Assyria)~~
 - ~~3v3 they end up without any water because there's a drought.~~
 - ~~Disgrace brings disappointment.~~
- Here's what Julian Hardyman says in his excellent book "Idols- God's battle for our hearts", which would be a great study for anyone who wants to take this further:
 - *"Your idols seem so persuasive, so credible, so plausible. But all they have is good presentation skills. What they promise is simply spin. ... They offer pleasure but it's only temporary and limited. They entice you with thoughts of exquisite enjoyment, or a deep calm peace, or a relief from the pain that is eating you up inside, but it's all a delusion"*¹.
- As we reach our final application, I think there's a lesson here about sin's stubbornness.
 - There's a real addiction here.
 - Judah can't stop even if they want to.
 - Perhaps that's what's so worrying about sin.
 - V25.
 - 3v4 She claims allegiance. Oh I go to church, I get my kids baptised. I filled in the commitment form. But do they actually stop doing evil?
 - V5 No.
- Like an addict, Judah has lost the ability to want anything else.
 - She's lost the ability to reflect on the self destruction she is bent on.
 - She's lost the ability to change.
 - She's lost the ability to care.
- It's a horrible passage isn't it?
 - Horrible because if we are honest there is too much of it that is true of us.
 - And being Christians doesn't make us immune from considering this, but should make us more sensitive to it.
- Ray Ortlund has written a book about God's unfaithful wife throughout the Bible called "Whoredom". It's not necessarily a book you would read on the bus.
- But the book is rich and helpful. As he concludes he says that this is imagery which the church needs to think about today....

¹ Julian Hardyman "Idols- God's battle for our hearts" IVP p170.

- *“God wants our hearts, our loyalty, our love for himself alone. He wants to find in us the same sense of intimate belonging to him that is appropriate to sexual union on the human level. More than our showing the world how relevant the church can be, God wants us to show him how much we treasure him above all else”.²*
- The main verb today is consider. Think. Reflect. Take a long self audit.
- **Next time we will see the response that God invites: 3v14 RETURN.**
- And we will find out what we are to do
 - Today we are left reflecting on our sin and idolatry. See x2.
- But we don’t have to wait til then.
 - Today is a service of the Lord’s Supper.
 - As we share bread and wine we remember Jesus Christ our heavenly bridegroom and the lengths to which he went to win us back.
 - He came down from heaven to seek us.
 - To have us back.
 - There was only one way to deal with the sinfulness of sin.
 - He had to die instead of us.
 - And there was only one way to deal with the stubbornness of sin.
 - He would have to come and live inside us by his Holy Spirit, in an amazing New Covenant anticipated by Jeremiah in ch31: *“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people... I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*
- We need to know our only hope is outside of ourselves. In the cross of Christ. In the power of the Spirit. Our only hope is God.
- As my friends involved in the 12 step process of alcoholics anonymous tell me
 - “We have to admit self-reliance has failed us”.
 - We have to come to the end of ourselves, and look to a higher power.
 - And that power is Jesus Christ.
 - And he can save us from ourselves.
- Let’s finish by having a moment of quiet to reflect on these things,
 - To ask the Holy Spirit to show us areas we need to repent of.
 - And then we’ll sing together a song taken straight out of these words.
 - “Two sins have we committed”. By Sam Chaplin.

² Whoredom, Raymond C Ortlund Jr Paternoster p176