

Sermon – 22/05/2005 pm

Adultery

Study Text: Deuteronomy 5:18

In talking about the sin of adultery, a preacher once said ‘you can’t stop the birds flying over your head but you can stop them nesting in your hair’. I remember having to carry an umbrella as I walked down the road to school to stop the magpies attacking me. I feared they would do more than nest in my hair if they got hold of me. We must be alert to the attacks of sin, the sin of adultery. We must hold up the word of God for protection. It is written *flee sexual immorality* (I Corinthians 6:18). We must shield ourselves and others by prayer. We must watch where we walk and what we watch.

At the time when kings go out to battle David was idle, roaming on the roof of his house. His eyes were drawn to a beautiful woman bathing in the courtyard of her house below. His glance became a gaze, and his gaze turned to lust. That desire or lust conceived and gave birth to sin (James 1). David demanded Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, be brought to his bedroom. She became pregnant and so David was trapped, he was entangled in sin that led to murder and the death of his own son.

Sanctity of Marriage

The seventh commandment prohibits the breach of the sanctity of marriage. The word translated as ‘adultery’ is used in the Old Testament of both men and women, though far more commonly of men. ‘That this word was understood literally is shown by its use for sexual intercourse of a man with another man’s wife in Deuteronomy 22:22 and Leviticus 18:20, 20:10’. In some contexts it is used figuratively of the relationship between God (husband) and his people (wife) as we will see later.

When God created human beings in his own image he breathed into them the breath of life. He gave the command you shall not murder. He created them male and female and brought them together in marriage – one man and one woman for life. *A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh* (Genesis 2:24). God gave the command you shall not commit adultery. God desired children from that marriage. He blessed them and told them to multiply and fill the earth with godly offspring (Genesis 1:28, Malachi 2:15). He gave the command for children to honour their father and their mother.

This blessed relationship, this most intimate relationship, this relationship that is fundamental to ongoing life on this earth and to the purposes of God for mankind, was destroyed by sin there in Eden. They realized they were naked and covered themselves. Adam turned to blame his wife Eve (Genesis 2:12). And it continues till today to be the prime target of Satan for he knows the significance of this relationship in the economy of God. Satan loves to hear the lie that marriage is an outmoded institution.

Adultery is the chief weapon in the armoury of Satan. Every society and culture on earth has been and is subjected to this attack upon marriage. We will learn nothing from observing other societies, least of all ancient societies. Nor will we learn anything from observing the animal kingdom, as some evolutionists like to do. It is from the word of God that we must learn. We must look to our Creator and follow his instructions. Marriage is a creation ordinance – it is for all mankind.

The blessing of God upon marriage goes beyond the truth that this is the fundamental relationship between human beings. Marriage is a reflection of the relationship between God and his people, and indeed of the divine relationship in the Godhead.

The Lord is a jealous husband. When his people go off and worship other gods he accuses them of adultery, spiritual adultery. The prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and especially Hosea, speak in this way. James accuses Christians of adultery when they love the world more than God. The human and heavenly marriage relationships are closely intertwined Ephesians 5 – *this is a profound mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

Sin against God

Marriage is sanctified by God. Since adultery destroys the integrity of a marriage it is a sin against God. *How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God* said Joseph as Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him (Genesis 39:9). Even the pagan king Abimelech was horrified at the thought of committing a *great sin* with Abraham's wife (Genesis 20:9).

David had the benefit of this clear command given through Moses. What he did in taking Uriah's wife as his own displeased the Lord (II Samuel 11:27). He confessed to the Lord *against you, you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight* (Psalm 51:4). David's adultery destroyed a marriage that was ordained by God.

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Divorce is the breaking of a marriage relationship and this often occurs because of adultery (Matthew 5:32). Divorce and adultery are closely linked, with adultery not only causing divorce but divorce also being the cause of adultery – *whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her, and if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.* (Mark 10:11).

In the New Testament adultery is seen as sin against the Holy Spirit. Your body, the body of a believer is *the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own* (I Corinthians 6:19). How then can you take your body and become one with a prostitute. *Certainly not!* exclaimed Paul. The sin of adultery then not only destroys the integrity of the marriage relationship but also the integrity of a believer's relationship with God – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Sin against Fellow Man

This commandment is in the second table of the Decalogue which Jesus effectively summed up in the command – *love your neighbour as yourself*. Adultery of course takes two people, two

willing people, except in the case of rape. Remember how the Jews failed to bring along the guilty man when they brought to Jesus the woman caught in adultery (John 8). *If a man is found lying with a married woman then both of them shall die* (Deuteronomy 22:22).

In adultery the sanctity of the marriage is violated and the rights of the husband are also violated. The fury of a jealous husband will not be appeased warns Proverbs 6:34. Many adulterers have suffered at the hands of a jealous husband – and rightly so. In fact the Lord is the avenger of aggrieved husbands. *No one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such* (I Thessalonians 4:6). Was David motivated by such a fear, pre-empting the vengeance of Uriah?

Laws in our society give scant regard for the man or woman sinned against in adultery. But the jealousy is there and vengeance is sought. All too often it is the innocent party, including children who suffer, sometimes tragically, because of this sin of adultery. But remember the Lord is the avenger. Any society which disregards this command and seeks to de-sanctify marriage will come under the curse of Almighty God.

Sin against Self

It is not only relationships that are destroyed by the sin of adultery, but the very soul of a person. *Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul; wounds and dishonour he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away* (Proverbs 6:32). *Abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul* (I Peter 2:11).

God made us male and female – sexual beings. He gave marriage as the context, the only context for sexual expression. *It is better to marry than burn with passion* (I Corinthians 7:2). If that passion is directed outside of marriage, then disaster soon follows. *Because of sexual immorality let each man have his own wife* (I Corinthians 7:2).

David had his own wife – indeed wives. He had no right to take another man's wife, even if he was the king. Not only did his own family suffer terribly but his very soul was scarred by his adultery. We see this in his song of repentance (Psalm 51). *Every sin a man does is outside the body*, said Paul, *but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body* (I Corinthians 6:18). Your sanctification will be severely hindered by adultery (I Thessalonians 4:3).

Jesus Teaches On Adultery

You have heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you (Matthew 5). As with murder, Jesus went to the source of the sin, the human heart. *Whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart*. The source of the sin in the heart – it is lust, the lust of the flesh. That lust is inflamed by the eyes, by gazing upon a woman lustfully.

This is just what we saw with David – right! And it is what Job vowed **not** to do – *I have made a covenant with my eyes, why should I gaze upon a young woman* (Job 31:1). We must vow not to look lustfully at a woman or a man in the flesh, or in image upon the page or on the screen.

To indicate the gravity of the sin of lust which leads to adultery Jesus says *if your right eye causes you to sin pluck it out and cast it from you* (Matthew 5). Lust must be nipped in the bud. The gaze must be diverted immediately, no matter what the cost. It is not always easy in our 'permissive' society. We are confronted at almost every turn. After years in India I was confronted by the image of scantily clad women in a large poster as I emerged from the airport in Frankfurt. Women should dress modestly, but let us not blame women as some do, for lust comes from the heart.

'Jesus therefore showed that his standard was one of total moral purity and marital faithfulness: the sexual relationship of marriage was God-given and was to be exclusive and permanent and not breached by thought or deed' (Ward Powers). Lust must be busted, for as Watson puts it 'the harlot's breast keeps from Abraham's bosom'. The marriage bed must be kept pure: *fornicators and adulterers God will judge* (Hebrews 13:4).

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