

## **James 4:4 - Spiritual Adultery**

**Sign Title: Spiritual Adultery**

**August 21, 2011**

Good morning Faith Church! If you are a summer visitor, we are glad to have you. We are studying the book of James, and this morning we continue working our way through the book. Today, we come to James 4:4 where we find a true love story. I know you will love the message, because everyone is captivated by a good love story.

When I do premarital counseling, one of the best parts is hearing the story about how the couple met. God has an amazing way of bringing together people from completely different parts of the country, and even from different cultures. Many times he draws them together through their common love for Christ. It is really amazing to watch.

Even better than the fresh love stories of young couples are the faithful love stories of couples who have grown old together. Those stories are harder to find. In our divorce culture, we applaud faithful love. Who do we have here that is married more than 40 years? Could you stand? We want to applaud your faithful love story right now!

I think it is fair to say that we all want that kind of love story --- a love story that doesn't just begin with the heat of passion but a love story that handles the bumps of the years. We want a love story that finishes well.

The good news is that even if the love story of our earthly marriage has fallen apart, we still get to live that faithful love story that finishes well. As Christians, we are part of a deep, eternal, and faithful love story. This is not a

cheap romance. It is not a weekend fling. There is nothing superficial about this love story. This is the greatest love story of all. It is not a picture or a parable. Every wedding, every love song and every marriage ceremony is only a shadow of this love story. This is the love story of Christ and his church.

According to Ephesians 5:31-32, all the passion, emotion and relational energy that exists between a man and a woman that leads them to commit themselves before God in the covenant of marriage is just an appetizer of the passion, emotion and relational energy that exists between Christ and each of us, since we are part of his bride, the church. Before we get into the text, I want to explore what the Bible teaches about the marital relationship and love that exists between Christ and the church.

## **The Husband**

**For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name... Isaiah 54:5 (ESV)**

God is the husband in this love story. God is the one seeking his bride. In the Old Testament, he does this by entering into a covenant relationship with his bride on Mt. Sinai. The Mosaic covenant was, in essence, a marriage covenant between God and his people. It was a covenant of love and fidelity. I want you to notice that the first stipulation of that marriage covenant was fidelity.

**“You shall have no other gods before me. Exodus 20:3 (ESV)**

Why does God start there? The essence of a marriage covenant is fidelity. That is why in a marriage there is the giving and receiving of rings and the pastors says, “These rings are a sign that you are now in an exclusive relationship with one another.” Exclusivity was part of the original blueprint for

marriage. Look how Jesus describes marriage as it was created by God in Genesis 2:24.

and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Mark 10:8–9 (ESV)

In a Christian wedding, we are asking God to do for a couple what God did for the original couple in Genesis 2:24. We are asking for God to join them together, not the state, not the pastor, but God to do the joining. It is an exclusive joining. So marital love has exclusivity at its core. Who is the bride?

### **The Bride**

In the Old Testament, God’s people were Abraham and all of his descendants plus anyone else who believed in the God of Israel. This was mostly Jews, but there were also Gentile proselytes, like Rahab; who left their pagan religions to follow Yahweh. God called this group, his bride. These people were the objects of his love and affection, and God promised himself to his bride exclusively forever.

And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord. Hosea 2:19–20 (ESV)

When we get to the New Testament, the nature of this exclusive marital love between God and his people is unfolded. With the incarnation of Christ, we discover the person behind the husbandry language in the Old Testament was the second person of the Trinity. We discover the incredible depth of love Jesus has for his bride as Jesus gives his life, on the cross, to die in his bride’s place, for her sins. This is the most extravagant act of love ever displayed in all of

God's creation. Ladies, you are impressed when your husband brings home roses. That is nothing. Be impressed by your greater husband, Jesus, loving you so much that he died in your place for your sins. Nothing even comes close to that extravagant act of love in all of creation.

In the Old Testament, the bride was all those who believed in the promise of God. In the New Testament, the bride is all who enter by faith in Christ into the blessings of the New Covenant Christ inaugurated by the shedding of his blood for our sins. The bride in the New Testament is called the church.

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:1–2 (ESV)

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,... "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:25, 31–32 (ESV)

These are powerful words that give us a whole new understanding of marriage and our love relationship with Christ. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul describes our present relationship with Christ as an engagement time. Today, we are engaged to Jesus. I know some of you men with lots of hair on your chest think that sounds very weird, but don't misunderstand. This is a very masculine concept.

I have done some weddings over the years. What I have noticed is that the bride is very interested in preparing for her wedding day. She wants to be the best she can be. Some ladies join a gym; others start jogging. Some go on crash diets, which I don't recommend. The bride wants to be her best for her wedding day. She wants her wedding to be perfect. The bride gets to the church

early. She double checks the layout of the room. She tries to make sure her dress is perfect. Men, let me talk to you for a moment. Your bride will have more hairspray in her hair on her wedding day than any other day of your married life. Why is that? She wants her hair to be perfect on that day.

Guys, we are a little different. A bride is lucky if she can get her husband to shave a second time and put on an extra stroke of deodorant. That is about the extent of our preparation.

Now in 2 Corinthians 11, what did Paul say he was doing? He was helping the Corinthians look their best for their wedding day with Jesus. That didn't mean he was telling them how to use hairspray and take diet pills. This is moral beauty. It is spiritual beauty. It is becoming every day more and more like Christ in our thinking and actions. Most importantly of all...it is virgin beauty. It is the beauty of exclusivity. For a husband, the ugliest bride is the one that doesn't have a heart that is faithful to him.

## **The Wedding**

For the sake of completeness, let's finish the story. Jesus is coming back. He is coming back for his bride, the church. When he does, there will be a serious party. It is going to be a party that will put the Prince William and Lady Catherine wedding to shame. Christ will finally be united with his bride for all eternity. Christ will be with us.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 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; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and

pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. Revelation 19:6–8 (ESV)

I believe none of us can begin to comprehend the massive joy of this wedding. When it comes to weddings, we don't celebrate long enough or hard enough in our culture. In Jewish culture, the wedding party lasted an entire week. They tried to nauseate you with happiness.

While we don't party enough at the wedding, we do understand the joy of being married. When marriages are healthy, there is a huge joy that comes from being together. In a good marriage, you don't want to be apart from your spouse for 24 hours because your relationship is so rich and fulfilling. There can be immense joy in a marriage. The rich joy of the marital love we experience now is just baiting us for the marriage greater relational joy that will be ours when we are with Christ; when we enter into the ultimate marriage.

### **What does all this have to do with James?**

We need to understand this love story if we are going to understand what James says in our text.

What would you feel like if you were the husband-to-be and you discovered that your fiancée was sleeping around, two-timing, shacking up, and flirting with other guys before your wedding day?

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? James 4:4–5 (ESV)

Pretty strong language! The ESV and the NIV go with adulterous people, but if you look at the footnote, you will see it is more accurately translated

*adulteresses*. It is in the feminine. Is James just picking on the ladies in the group? No. James is picking up on the Old Testament picture that these Jewish Christians knew so well. Jeremiah, Hosea, and Lamentations describe Israel's wandering affections for other gods as an act of adultery on her husband. God calls his peoples whores, sluts and prostitutes. In the Old Testament, God's bride had a hard time not sleeping around on him. The Israelites worshipped Ashtaroath, which meant womb. I will let you guess what the worship services were like. They worshipped Baal, which was a male fertility God. You can guess what worship for that fertility God was like. They worshipped Molech, which required people to throw their children in the fire where they were burned alive.

Why did the people of ancient Israel do this? They wanted to keep their bases covered. Ashtaroath, Baal and Molech were the gods of their neighbors. They promised good crops and a good life if you worshipped them. The Israelites figured that if they worshipped Yahweh plus Baal, Ashtaroath, Molech; they kept everybody happy. The problem is that behind all the false gods are demons. The Israelites weren't covering all their bases. They were sacrificing their children and practicing sexual immorality in the name of worship. Most important, they were two-timing on their fiancé.

Husbands, is there anything that would get you hotter than discovering your fiancée was sleeping with other men before your wedding night? That is exactly the way God felt.

(for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), Exodus 34:14 (ESV)

We have talked about jealousy in the negative sense in previous weeks, but this is jealousy in the positive sense. Men, if your woman can be in the arms of another man and it is not taking every bit of your strength to keep from disemboweling the guy with your bare hands, there is something wrong with you. That white hot anger for the woman who is your wife is a good jealousy. It is part of being a man. Jesus is the most masculine husband out there. He is furious when his bride sleeps around and finds joy in men other than him. Are you beginning to understand how Jesus feels?

Some of you are wondering how we two-time on Jesus. We aren't sacrificing our children to Molech. We don't go to temples where male and female prostitutes are part of fertility worship. Aren't we in the clear? James says friendship with the world is two-timing on Jesus.

### **What is friendship with the world?**

**Friendship with the world** - It is the wish to retain the world's favor, even as we wish to enjoy Christ.

Friendship with the world is saying, "I'm going to be dead someday and when I die I have as my savior Jesus so I am sure to go to heaven. But before I get there, I am pretty excited with all the world has to offer. I will go to church on Sunday, then switch masks and live like everyone else Monday through Saturday. I want to be able to be married to Jesus on Sunday, but I am pouring out my affections to other men who interest me on Monday through Saturday."

God doesn't play that game for the same reason a fiancé won't play that game. I think you know why.



Just so you understand, when the New Testament talks about friendship with the world, it is not talking about the physical world. The physical creation was God's idea. It is a good idea. It is fallen and submitted to sin until it is finally redeemed, but it was and in many ways still is, a good thing. When the New Testament talks about the world, it is talking about the value systems that are diametrically opposed to God. That is hedonism which says pleasure is the god we serve. It is materialism, which says stuff is the god we serve and the temple we worship at is the mall. It is sensualism, which says we live just to express our sexual urges in any and all ways we can. It is ethical utilitarianism, which says there is no ultimate accountability, we do whatever we must in order to get the results we want. What I just said to you is part of the fabric of what it means to be an American, but it all falls under the banner of *friendship with the world*.

In what ways did the churches James wrote to have friendship with the world and cheat on Christ?

- James 2:1-13 talked about the sin of partiality. They played favorites in the church snuggling up to the rich and powerful while they told the poor and unimpressive to find their own seats.
- James 3:1-12, they spoke negatively about others. Rather than building others up, their words tore others down. Their tongues were starting fires which were raging out of control.
- James 3:13-18, the thinking of their minds was filled with bitter envy and selfish ambition. They were self-promoting like a politician running for political office. They tore others down to try to push themselves up.

Let me give you another example. Loving the world is the teenage girl who grew up in church. She went to Awana and learned all the verses. She made a commitment to Christ early on, but in her teenage years, problems developed. She became consumed with what her friends thought of her. She craved their affirmation so much it drove her to do things that she never would have dreamed of when she was a little girl. Other teens in the church know there is a problem, because she is one way at youth group but a completely different way at school. When the pastor speaks from James, and friendship with the world, she feels uncomfortable and squirms in her seat but not enough to change. She says to herself, “I will hope for the best with God, but I can’t live without my friends.” She is a friend of the world and God is *outraged* at the infidelity of his bride.

James’ point in this passage is...make your choice. You can’t have it both ways. If you say you love Christ, stop flirting, Facebooking, texting and tweeting the world. Be sold out for Christ. You wouldn’t tolerate it in the love story of your life, why should Jesus tolerate it in the original and greatest love story of all? Jesus died in your place to save you from an eternity of God’s wrath. *How dare you sleep around on him. It is disgusting unfaithfulness.* Repent and give all of your affections to him.

How do we repent and come back to Jesus? The same way a bride repents of a heart that wanders. She fixes her eyes back on her groom, and she puts the other lovers out of her life. She puts her groom’s picture back on the dashboard of her car. She eliminates the other men from her life. She calls her

fiancé on the phone daily. She texts him during the day. She thinks about him. She focuses on pleasing him and anticipates that incredible day when they will finally be married. We repent the same way when our hearts wander from Jesus and we fall in love with the ways of the world. Make no mistake about it. This is serious stuff. In the end, when it comes to the wedding day, a bride that refuses to repent of her wanderings will not find herself with her fiancé, because she never really loved him in the first place. If she did, she would have repented and returned to him.

## Conclusion

I remember one wedding I did a few years ago with a unique couple. The guy was a young Christian and was a beast of a man. He made me look small. He looked like a combination football player and body builder. In the back room, before the wedding, he was crying. As his bride came down the aisle he was shaking. When he said his vows tears were running down his cheeks, and he could barely talk because he was so choked up. When I asked him what was wrong, he said they were tears of joy. This was the moment he had waited for. He could finally be with his beautiful bride forever. They would be together forever.

But that wedding was only a shadow. That groom's love for his bride is just a little picture of the way Christ feels about you right now! He delights over us like a groom trembling with the anticipation of finally being with his bride. Can the world offer us anything better than this? Jesus trembling with passion and love as he looks forward to his wedding with us. My friends, fix your eyes on that

day when we will finally be with Jesus. Everything you love about the closeness and joy in marriage is just an appetizer for a much greater closeness and joy that will be between us and Jesus. Our wedding day with Jesus is coming faster than you think.

But before we get there, I have a question. Did you commit adultery this week? Are you being an unfaithful bride by giving your heart to the ways and values of the world? After this message, are you beginning to understand how that makes Jesus feel? Our groom loves us. He died for us. He is faithful to us and is waiting at the altar trembling in anticipation of the moment when we will finally be together forever. Repent.

Let's pray.



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