

Title: Sin as addiction - Jeremiah 2v1-25

Purpose: To look at the another side of SIN as a power, an attraction, an addiction and its remedy via our appetites.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible's use of many images

We have been seeing, over the past 7 or so weeks quite a number of different images that the Bible uses for SIN. So, for example, we have seen:

- **SIN** through the lens of **different trees** AND where they have **their roots**
- **SIN** through the lens of **a wild animal crouching small** AND seeking to **chew us up**
- **SIN like leprosy** - all **ugly & destroying**
- **SIN like yeast** - getting into **every area of our living, sucking out all the sweetness bit by bit**

You might very sensibly ask:

Q. Why the Bible is so fond, why God is so fond, of giving us images and pictures to depict how things really work?

Warren Wiersbe in his book: "**Preaching and teaching with imagination**" comments on that famous preacher during the Great Awakening in the 1700's in America, **Jonathan Edwards**, he says:

"**Edwards** used **IMAGINATION** in his preaching.

Like every good teacher and preacher, he turned **the ear into an eye** and helped people **to see** spiritual truth..."

He goes on to say - and this statement has always stuck with me since I read this book many years back:

*** "He knew that the mind is ***not* a debating chamber—it is a PICTURE GALLERY.**" ***

Jeremiah 2 - Two messages

This morning we are coming to that chapter that was read earlier on - Jeremiah chapter 2.

And in this chapter, it is not hard to see that there are **two messages**, if you like, **two words from the LORD**:

- **THE FIRST ONE** - is just very brief, and forms a good backdrop for the second message.

Let me read the first "Word of the LORD" - Verses 1 to 3:

" The word of the Lord came to me:

'Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem:

" 'I remember the **devotion of your youth**, how **as a bride you loved me and followed me** through the desert, through a land not sown.

Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them,' " declares the Lord."

Here we have the LORD God looking back to the way things were between Him and His people Israel.

It is using the picture of a bride who is in love with her lover and who, in her worship and adoration of Him will

follow Him, will pursue Him anywhere - even out into the desert wastes.

- **THE SECOND** - word from the LORD is much longer - taking us right through the rest of the chapter and beyond.

It details that a change has taken place - that things are no longer the same, and that something has taken hold of Israel's affections - God has been pushed out of the picture and replaced!

*** Now what we do well to observe is that:

God uses the same picture of intimate relations, the same image of sexual attraction to describe BOTH situations:

- **WHETHER** it is the **FAITHFUL WORSHIP** of Yahweh
- **OR** the **FAITHLESS WORSHIP** of their many idols

Sexual imagery, a sexual vocabulary, is that which God deliberately chooses to use. ***

Our structure

This morning as we try and unpack what is being said, in this rather shocking chapter here in our OT's - I want to break it down three ways - which will give us some headings that we can work with and generally hang things upon:

- **#1 - Attraction**
- **#2 - Addiction** & lastly (by way of conclusion)
- **#3 - Appetite**

So then #1:

1] ATTRACTION

Now this chapter is probably well-known, (if it is known at all), because of what we read at Verse 13 (and I can imagine that as I read it some of you will internally nod your heads because it sounds a little on the familiar side):

(Jeremiah 2 verse 13) "My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me, the spring of living water,
and **have dug their own cisterns**, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

And this certainly is a very key verse - it explains in a very succinct manner, what has taken place - put very simply the Israelites have REPLACED GOD - and in God's place they have introduced a whole variety of idols.

Verse 19 describes it as a "**wickedness**" and a "**backsliding**" - it goes on to say:

(Verse 19) "... Consider then and realise how **evil** and **bitter** it is for you when you **forsake** the LORD your God and **have no awe of me**, declares the LORD."

The idolatry that they are engaging in is, on the one hand -> **VERY DEFINITE**:

Verse 27 " They say to **wood**, 'You are my father,' and to **stone**, 'You gave me birth.'"

They have turned their backs to me and not their faces;..."

And as well as this, the idolatry is also, on the other hand -> **VERY DIVERSE**:

Verse 28 "... For you have **as many gods as you have towns**, O Judah."

Now if these are:

- some of the **key verses**, some of the **most memorable**
- there is **still one more** which is the **most striking and shocking**

It is what we read at:

Verse 20 it says: "Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, **on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute.**"

Pagan worship

In pagan worship the **high places** were the **ideal venue** to meet OR be seen by your particular god. And when it came to ensuring the fertility of your crops and of your family, then you would call upon the appropriate fertility god or goddess and engage in some "sacred sex" that would induce, or remind the gods to bring about the requested fertility on the land and in your family.

Along with this, **spreading trees** were considered to be symbols of evident fertility.

Now Verse 20 is actually a rather "**shocking verse**" because of the way the verse ends.

If we were to guess how it ended we **would probably would have expected something like**:

"... on every high hill and under every spreading tree **they worshipped their idols.**"

BUT in fact, the Hebrew text is **rather explicit** - in fact it is **pretty well "X-Rated"!!**

I think the closest Bible translation I found was the NET Online Bible which said:

".. you gave yourself to other gods on every high hill and under every green tree, **like a prostitute sprawls out before her lovers.**"

All worship - is comparable to sex

You see this chapter is establishing something very key,(and I have already and that is that:

*** "**ALL WORSHIP** (whether of the LORD, or whether of the countless varieties of IDOLS:
- is **LIKE UNTO SEX**
- it is **LIKE UNTO PHYSICAL ATTRACTION**" ***

So an obvious question:

Q. Why is this a particularly fitting image for all WORSHIP?

Well the answer is *not* to do with it being some shock tactic - we know this BECAUSE He uses this imagery for TRUE WORSHIP as well. REMEMBER that He is **the Bridegroom, the Lover, the fairest of ten thousand** and we are the **spotless virgin Bride, the beloved.**

God is saying that when you forsake Him and turn to something else - deep down in your hearts, in the deepest recesses of your soul, **you are putting yourself in the arms of another, you are lying down spiritually** for that other thing, that other person.

The power of the sex instinct

It is important, reading these verses, that we get a clear view of **THE SHEER POWER OF ATTRACTION** that is involved in **ALL VARIETIES OF WORSHIP**.

Observe how God portrays Israel in "**their WORSHIP**", in "**their running after IDOLS**":

Verse 23ff reads: " "How can you say, 'I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals'? See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done.

You are **a swift she-camel** running here and there, **a wild donkey accustomed to the desert**, sniffing the wind in her craving— in her heat who can restrain her? Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves; at mating time they will find her.

Do not run until your feet are bare and your throat is dry. But you said, 'It's no use! **I love** foreign gods, and **I must** go after them.'

If we ask why sexual attraction is so strong - the answer is not so difficult to identify. Put simply we are incomplete on our own and we cannot reproduce ourselves. Without a "completer" then the human race is finished. We instinctively know that we need to find something or someone that will "complete" us.

As one person has expressed it:

"You cannot produce your own meaning in life. You cannot by yourself produce your own worth. You cannot produce your own security.

Everybody has to have some meaning in life, or else life is empty. Everybody has to have some affirmation of your worth, or else you feel worthless. Everybody has to have some security, or you can't face life, but you cannot produce it yourself any more than you can reproduce your own species or your own life."

So - to put this simply if you are not in God's arms spiritually, then you are in the arms of another lover.

THAT relationship is **just as deep, just as far-reaching**. You are **just as vulnerable** as you are in any intimate love/worship relationship.

Not a quiet pond

It is a **mistake** for us to think that our souls, our spiritual side, is a bit like a **quiet pond** and so the best way to nurture it is to go to some quiet place and toss in odd stones to create a few gentle ripples!

No! Not at all! Our souls, our worship centres, **are turbulent places**, they are **passion centres**, they are always CRAVING FULFILMENT - and they will not stand still - as Verse 25 expresses it: "**I MUST** go after them."

BUT YOU KNOW - what is important for us to realise is:

- that when we RE-ATTACH our WORSHIP to another
- when we SIN and place ourselves in the arms of another

we then find that:

***** we are not merely in the arena of ATTRACTION but that of ADDICTION *****

Which naturally takes us on and into our second point - #2:

2] ADDICTION

I guess we all know that when we "HAVE" **TO HAVE something**, then we have become more **tightly embraced** OR **entangled** than we thought.

***** You see whenever we think of WORSHIP - we should think of POWER: *****

- if God is the endpoint of our worship - then we experience **the wonderful POWER OF GRACE**
- if another is "in the arms" of our worship - then we experience **the crushing POWER OF SIN**

The addiction cycle

I want to outline what might be called the "addiction cycle" and hopefully help us to see the true extent of **the POWER OF SIN upon us** - it's truly a "bear-hug" of the worst kind!!

And you don't need to have ever been addicted to drugs OR alcohol OR work OR sex OR shopping - to be able to identify with these 3 dynamics that I'm just going to mention:

- **the FIRST "trapping aspect" of addiction** - is what is technically called TOLERANCE.

What that simply means is that what has satisfied your craving, your longing today, **will lessen & pale tomorrow**. And so what that means is that you will need more of your idol and then even more - just to get the return that you are looking for.

What you are experiencing in this TOLERANCE effect is an EMOTIONAL SHRIVELLING, your senses are becoming more and more numbed, more and more dulled as time proceeds.

- OK - **the SECOND "trapping and destructive aspect" in regard to addiction** - is that of DENIAL.

This is where your **CRAVING** makes you **rationalize things in strange and ever more contorted ways**.

Israelites craving meat - Numbers 11

You remember that story of the Israelites when they are in the desert in Numbers chapter 11 and they have had enough of the diet of heavenly manna and **they start to CRAVE meat** - and maybe you remember what they say:

Numbers 11 Verse 5 "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

You can see how their **thinking** has **become all garbled!!**

They **do not seem to remember** the whips of the slave masters. **There is no mention of** the bricks without straw. **Nothing of** their infants being thrown to the crocodiles in the Nile River **ONLY** the "fish at no cost...".

What you are seeing in **DENIAL** is **a SHRIVELLING OF THE MIND**, their thinking becomes all twisted up - their brains are becoming "adled"!

- **the THIRD "crushing aspect" that tends to accompany addiction** - is that of **DEFEAT**.

As some of you will know, we have a working fireplace at home and over the past couple of months we have been enjoying log fires.

And it is a truth that **fire really does have an insatiable appetite** - just as **Proverbs 30** tells us FIRE is one thing that, like the grave, never says ENOUGH!

And we are seeing here that SIN, **WORSHIP OF ANYTHING ELSE BESIDES GOD** - is **a matter of PASSION**, it is something of **DEVOTION** that will not be easily or quickly denied.

It is a **FIRE** that **BURNS** and the higher it goes, the more the drawing power, the more oxygen it sucks up.

What you are seeing in **DEFEAT** is **an OVERWHELMING OF OUR WILLPOWER**, the conscience when it has been overridden repeatedly becomes weak - it is scored and no longer functions well.

As we all know when the winds blow down our fence panels down - we can usually just nail them back up again - BUT when the winds are strong enough to break the slats in the panels - then only strategy that will be effective is to buy a new panel.

As you can see a pretty devastating and damaging three-fold picture of ADDICTION - effecting HEART and MIND and WILL - and why because SIN is POWER and:

- though all ADDICTION does not qualify as SIN
- All SIN will soon enough take up the nature and the form of ADDICTION

I want to close off by seeing whether there is any help to hand - for we should not think that we are better than the Israelites in the OT, that we are somehow exempt from SIN's ALLURE and our tendency to dig our own cisterns that cannot hold water.

So #3:

3] APPETITE

Now we all probably know that getting rid of enslaving habits - is really not that easy. We talk about "habitual sins" and we can feel that where once we thought we were in control, now we are not really so very sure.

These POWERFUL ATTRACTIONS that have replaced our genuine worship of God and have enslaved us with strong ADDICTIVE CHAINS can only be released by a better worship.

Just as Thomas Chalmers said in one of his old sermons with the title "The expulsive power of a new affection" - we cannot simply hope to expel or "delete" persistent sins from our lives - BUT we can DISPLACE them by the power of a new, a better affection.

If what you worship now - is killing you - what you need is a better affection, a qualitatively better worship.

You see there came a time, just as with the people of Israel, when their love for God grew old. You see they were no longer experiencing the "**daily wonder**" of their God - as Lamentations puts it:

(Lamentations 3 verses 22-23) "The steadfast love of the LORD **never ceases**; his mercies **never come to an end**; they are **new every morning**; great is your faithfulness.

There is a great secret here that we can easily miss and that is that this type of worship does not suffer from the TOLERANCE effect that is part and parcel of ADDICTION.

You see anything we worship aside from God will become old and thus you have to have more and more each day to manufacture a sense of freshness.

But with God everything is ever new - you cannot exhaust the fullness of God and you will experience new life bubbling up within.

Why we don't experience this

So a question or perhaps objection that might be in your minds at this point - which is:

Q. So why, if this is the case, do we ever go running after "lesser gods"?

Distance in relationships

Well think of any relationship - if you are married then you can think of how it is with your spouse - and you will probably realise that there have been times, maybe many times when it seems that a distance creeps in and you are not so intimate, you're not enjoying your marriage.

Q. Why does this tend to happen? Well often it is because both of you get busy with career, with kids etc. etc. and you become a bit like "passing ships", as they say, and before you know it you are not exactly walking side-by-side, hip-to-hip anymore.

You can't quite remember when was the last time you had that all important "quality time".

"Quality time" needs "quantity time"

Q. So what do you do? Well you will say - we need to go out and have a meal, or go to a play or something.

Now although this is, without a doubt a step in the right direction, it does not usually fix things just like that.

Q. So why?

Well here's the simple answer - and it might be you've never really looked at it like this - but:

*** Quality time will only really come about when you have Quantity Time ***

The reality of life and real people is that you can't somehow legislate when quality time will be achieved. I can't say to Bola - I'll see you at 7pm tonight for an hour and we'll have "quality time" and you will tell me all your deep and meaningful things.

It is rather like JOY - it is something spontaneous, *not* something planned & scheduled. In fact the more you try to pin it down, the more it grows wings and eludes you.

Grow you appetite once again

So what we are saying is that you need to once again GROW YOUR APPETITE FOR GOD - you need to once more TASTE that the LORD is good and for this you need time - QUANTITY TIME.

And then you will discover your appetite returning and then all things will become new and fresh and delicious and your old tastes and passions and loves will be displaced. The chains of addiction will be loosened and then broken.

As we consider where we personally are on this continuum of worship - **attraction** - **addiction** - **appetite**

let us quietly and responsively come to a time of prayer - let's pray shall we...AMEN