group Bible Study – January 30, 2008

Read Hosea Chapter 4

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Hosea 4 is very important to our study this year.

“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests” (Hosea 4:6).

Read this again. And again.

“Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests.” What is going on here?

In this story that seems to be all about our marriage to God—the loving and tortured relationship between spouses—all of the sudden we read that this people has rejected knowledge, and can no longer be priests on earth. The connection here is not obvious. But when you see it, you understand that Hosea is telling the same story that we read in Exodus last quarter. In fact, this whole set of scriptures that we call “Bible” is telling the same big story.

Do you remember the formation of God’s people? Abraham and Sarah were called to leave their homeland in Ur and set out to a new land that God would show them. And God said: “I will make you into a great nation… and through you all the peoples of the earth shall be blessed.” This was the whole point. The blessing of all the earth. This particular people was called apart not just for their own blessing, but as God’s method of blessing all. This is the purpose of the people of God—this is still our reason for being Church today.

All throughout Exodus we see this one nation, this one people, being set apart from all the other nations and peoples. They were given new worship practices and rituals. They were given new rules for living. And the purpose—God’s intention—is that this one people would be his priests on earth. A nation of priests. A priest is a mediator, one who stands in between two different parties. A priest of God is one who stands between God and humanity. A human bridge. “That through you all the peoples of the earth shall be blessed.” The priests—the people of God—are designed to be God’s gift to the masses, human lightning rods to channel the blessing of God.

But somewhere along the way, the people lost this knowledge. And because they rejected this God-given identity, God said: “I also reject you as my priests.” When the people became whores in their hearts, when they went looking for other lovers to satisfy their self-centered desires, they were no longer able to fulfill their purpose. They could no longer serve as the bridge between the living God and the whole earth.

When Hosea calls the people of God prostitutes, whores, he knows that the stakes are exceedingly high. This is about more than just our “personal relationship with God.” When we as God’s people seek after other lovers and do not “seek first the kingdom of God” (as Jesus would say 700 years later), the master plan for God’s blessing of the earth is in jeopardy.

Discussion Questions (for individuals or small groups):

- What are some of the other lovers in our lives today? Who do we run to for a sense of love and purpose and value and comfort? Is it mindless entertainment to numb our senses? Is it a pursuit of money or power of fame or self-indulgence? Think very specifically about your own daily life.
- What would it look like to replace these other lovers? What do we need to stop doing in our daily lives, or what should we start doing?