

God's love for an adulterous people

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[0:00] Disney has managed to build up an empire worth \$179.5 billion, based on Forbes' website, because of the classic love story. Boy meets girl, there's an instant connection, and everything is peachy keen after 90 minutes of slight drama. There might be some Avengers and a Star Wars franchise thrown in there, but the love story is pretty much the bedrock of Disney's success.

And this idea of love is the bedrock of countless films, trashy novels, childhood imaginary weddings, a love that is easy, and a love that is cheap. Our passage in Hosea this evening takes us to the middle of God's love story with his people, Israel. Instead of being done and dusted by the end of the chapter, we're going to see the ugly reality of what God got himself into when he made a covenant agreement with Israel, an unfaithful partner who never made things easy.

It's going to be stomach-churning, gut-wrenching stuff. It's going to be hard to listen to. But by the end, we will also see the love of God, which is far more gritty, far more long-lasting, and based on a wonderful commitment that is alien to any Disney film or Kate Hudson rom-com.

First of all, let's look at the context, both historical and theological. The word of the Lord comes to Hosea during the reign of Jeroboam II, who's in 2 Kings chapter 14, and he did evil in the eyes of the Lord and continued to follow the idols that had been set up in Israel since it first split away under Jeroboam I. Israel had been plagued by evil kings who led the people astray time and time again ever since the first Jeroboam. And within a relatively short period after this book, Israel would be invaded and destroyed by the Assyrian Empire. That's the historical context of what's going on here. The theological context is based in the building blocks of the Old Testament.

We need to get these right in order to really understand the seriousness of what's going on. And we're going to look at God's covenant with his people. Israel is the recipient of several covenants with God. Covenants being agreements between two parties which form the basis of their relationship. And the primary covenant, the primary agreement which undergirds most of Israel's relationship with God is the Mosaic covenant. Back in Exodus 19, God states that that if the people obey his law and if they are faithful to him, then they will be his people.

[3:02] They would enjoy his blessing. He would be their God. They would be his people. On the other hand, if they were unfaithful to God, the God who saved them from Egypt all the way back in Exodus, well then there was curse and there was judgment.

We're going to look at two aspects of this passage. We're going to look at the nature of sin, the nature of unfaithfulness which is shown by Israel. But we're also going to look at the love and the commitment of God. And both of these come wrapped up here. So we'll start with the sin of Israel. This is our first point, sons and mothers, the reality and consequences of sin.

At the very beginning of the book of Hosea, we encounter something very odd and shocking. God tells his chosen prophet Hosea to go and marry an adulterous wife, to devote himself to her, and to have children with her. The NIV does a marvelous job of being politically correct here.

The language for an adulterous woman throughout the passage is not just adultery or not just unfaithfulness or promiscuity. But actually, the picture is a shocking one of prostitution.

Hosea is called to go and marry a prostitute. Someone whose very job is to be unfaithful to him. Why has God asked Hosea to do this? Well, it reflects the nature of God's relationship with his own people. The people Israel are being compared to Gomer, this prostitute.

[4:59] They are guilty of the vilest unfaithfulness against the Lord. The image that confronts the reader of Hosea instantly as you get into the book is of shocking, indecent, disgusting behavior for someone who's in a

faithful commitment to God. I think that's precisely the point. Two verses in to this book, this is the image that we're confronted with.

God has committed to his people in a covenant agreement. He saved them from Egypt. And then he says, you are my people. I have saved you to be my people. Now be my people by following me. He has committed himself to Israel. And they have acted in complete unfaithfulness.

In the manner of a prostitute against the Lord their God. This is the pure, unadulterated picture of what unfaithfulness to God is like. God describes himself as being devoted to a people who are like a prostitute. Those who are in covenant relationship with him.

For these people, what's being said should hit right here, close to home. As they see Hosea do this, as they see Hosea marry a prostitute, as they see his children walking around as sons and daughters of an adulterous woman, as they hear him explain these actions, it should cause them to examine how they have treated God.

[6:50] We've been left at the very beginning of Hosea with absolutely no doubt about how God views unfaithfulness to him. We'll jump forward a lot into chapter 2 to see exactly what this unfaithful behaviour was.

In verse 2, God says, Rebuke her, for she is not my wife and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.

The picture here is of actually actively seeking out other lovers who are not God. Sometimes I think we like to depict ourselves as being victims of our sin.

Like, I can't help it. I can't stop doing this. But actually, God looks at Israel here and it's active. They are doing it.

They are actively pursuing it. It's images of seduction and images of going after others. Their sin is not something beyond their control.

[8:04] No, in fact, it's active unfaithfulness against God. And in so doing, Israel's current generation, after years and years of unfaithful kings, well, they are now children of adultery.

These children, the children of Israel, this current generation, are now conceived in disgrace, out of covenant relationship. I am not her husband.

I will not show my love to her children because they are the children of adultery. What is the behavior?

Well, Israel has run after other gods. In verse 5, their mother has been unfaithful. She has conceived them in disgrace.

She said, I will go after my lovers who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink. Israel had sought after other gods, other idols, and basically said that all the good things they enjoyed are from them.

[9:16] All the good things that Israel had as a nation, all the blessing, well, that was not from God, their covenant partner. Instead, it is from gods who are no gods at all.

It's because of Baal and Asherah and all manner of other gods, gods who are not real and did not give them a thing. What Israel do is they remove from God, the creator and their covenant partner, a fundamental element of who he is.

God is the creator and the sustainer and the one who has saved Israel and given them the land in which they are currently residing.

To remove this from him, to say this is not true of God, well, that is the worst kind of unfaithfulness.

It's to say of an idol, something which should only be ascribed to the God who has saved them.

Israel removed the honour due to God's name and they give it to other things.

[10:28] And the result of this sin, in the way it's been described, is God's judgment. The covenant said that if Israel were God's people, then they would be blessed.

Deuteronomy 28 lists a long list of blessings and good things which God would give his people for being his people, for being his bride.

But if they broke faithfulness, well, there is another long list of curses. And in verses 2 to 8, not 2 to 8, 9 to 13, we effectively see these curses being brought to bear against Israel.

All of the good things, the grain, the new wine, the wool, the linen, the gold that they have been given, even from the base to the greatest luxury will be removed.

The vines and the fig trees, pictures of what it meant to be in God's land, well, those would be removed and taken away. They were ascribed to idols, well, now they will be removed entirely. [11:39] Israel's unfaithfulness will be exposed so that even the people and the gods that Israel sought after, well, they would see how unfaithful Israel was.

This happens in 2 Kings 17. Under King Hosea, the last king in Israel, well, Israel makes a pact with the Assyrians that have been standing for years and then goes and seeks after the Egyptians. And Shalman Asar, the king of Assyria, he sees this unfaithfulness, moves in and destroys the land of Israel. But as awful as this is, there is something far more serious than the destruction of the people and the removal from the land.

This is the removal of God's covenant entirely. Chapter 2, verse 11 says that God will stop all celebrations, yearly festivals, new moons, Sabbath days, all the appointed feasts.

The covenant agreement between God and Israel, because of Israel's unfaithfulness, has been broken down.

[12:47] And now all the things that set apart Israel as God's people, these special celebrations where they took joy in who God was, well, they've been removed.

You don't celebrate an anniversary after breaking up. That's the picture here. And we go back to chapter 1, looking at the significance of how Hosea is commanded to name his children.

These are strange names. Why were they named this way? Well, these three children are to be walking advertisements of God's judgment against unfaithfulness.

Jezreel. Well, Jezreel, the valley of Jezreel, was the site of an awful massacre carried out by King Jehu in 2 Kings 10. Jehu was the instrument of God's judgment.

And now this image is being applied to how Israel will be treated. The bow will be... Israel's bow will be broken in the valley of Jezreel in an awful fashion.

[13:52] Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Amai, they're called not loved and not my people. Worse than the crushing realization that the nation is going to be destroyed is that these people are no longer the people of the living God.

They've taken it too far. The covenant is over. There is no forgiveness. No love for Israel now. Fellowship with the God who was their partner has been lost and destroyed.

And at the end of this point, the picture is very clear. Israel's unfaithfulness is awful. And because of it, they face God's judgment.

Perhaps we should take a breather for a moment because this is heavy stuff. And it's no doubt intended to be heavy stuff. I can imagine if you were an Israelite, hearing Hosea's words, if you had any kind of conscience, there'd be a pang in your stomach.

And that's because the reality of what Israel had done in their unfaithfulness against God, the way that he describes it, and the judgment that he brings against this sin is a terrible thing to behold.

[15:14] The reality of rebelling against the covenant God is stomach-churning. The reality that God leaves us with as we see the sin of people who should have been his people, where the reality could not be any different, of any, the reality that God leaves us with could not be any more different from how we tend to view sin.

As something small, as something blasé. As the world tends to view it, well, I've done some things which God doesn't like. I've broken a few rules. No, the picture that God leaves us with is that sin is not just a problem to be cured or a brokenness, but it is absolute evil.

Committing to something other than God is akin to cheating on God. God puts his finger right on the button and presses until it hurts and it's ugly.

Now, to be sure, we are not Israel and we are not under the Mosaic covenant whereby our actions result in blessing and curse in the land of Israel, but that does not make the picture of unfaithfulness to God any less shocking.

Calvin said that our hearts are idol factories. We constantly look at things other than God and ascribe to them things which should only be ascribed to God.

[16:58] The application here is that our sin is not a small thing and it is not a light thing and to tolerate idols in our life are, well that is,

I hope you can see, absolutely outrageous.

We move on to our second point and as far as love stories go, we might be forgiven for thinking that this one is over before it's even begun.

Walt Disney can't save it, it's a flop. However, I hope as Phil read through the passage, we picked up one or two hints of grace, scattered in amongst the mess, even amongst this divine diagnosis of Israel's awful condition.

And these hints of grace, these hints of God's faithfulness, of God's love, were these are utter gold. The first one comes in chapter 1, verse 7.

And here we have the promise that even though Israel will be destroyed, Judah will be saved. Israel has lost its covenant relationship with God but this is not the end.

[18:30] You see, for the nation of Israel, well, they were the ones that God had committed to in the Old Testament. They were the ones that as the nations looked at them, they were to see the living God. They were to glory at God by looking at Israel.

Now if they were destroyed, then that's it for all of humanity and yet, God preserves Judah, the breakaway faction of the nation of Israel. God is not going to leave humanity without relationship with him.

He is going to save Judah. In verse 7, they are not saved in a typical way. They're not saved by bow, sword, or battle, a military victory which was often given as the sign of blessing and salvation by God in the Old Testament.

Instead, God delivers them himself. This can be seen that when the Assyrians traipse up to Judah, well, their army is destroyed in a night.

God preserves a remnant of his covenant people and even when Judah is unfaithful and goes into captivity with the Babylonians, all is not lost.

[19:41] God continues to care for them. And the reason for this stems from one of God's promises at the very beginning of the Bible, a covenant promise which runs right through the spine of the Old Testament which God is utterly committed to upholding.

Back in Genesis, God made a promise with a man called Abraham that he would bless him. And the language used of this covenant is deliberately picked up in chapter 1, verse 10.

The Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them you are not my people and they will be called sons of the living God.

The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land for great will be the day of Jezreel. Now I don't know about you, as Phil was reading through this, this passage is like, it's a massive roadblock to what's been going on throughout the entirety of our passage elsewhere.

It's kind of judgment, removal of covenant and here where there is a solid reaffirmation of God's covenant to Abraham. In the midst of judgment God puts a reminder right in the middle that he is faithful to the promises he made to Abraham.

[21:10] It's the same language. Your children will be like sand on the seashore which cannot be measured or counted. God's people will be returned to him.

2 verse 1 They will love one another. Idolatry and evil in the Old Testament is often related to people cheating one another, hurting one another, scamming one another, but here they will love one another.

1. As we look back as people in the 21st century we can see how some of these promises were fulfilled as the remnant of Judah was restored to the nation of Israel.

There is some partial fulfillment in the Old Testament. Israel did become a nation again. However, there was only a very slight partial fulfillment.

God's covenant promises which he made which run through the Old Testament well we have to wait until we get to the New Testament and we see their true fulfillment.

[22:19] In Romans 9 Paul quotes from Hosea in this specific bit saying that God's word the promises he made to his covenant bride well they have not failed.

No, instead this passage in Hosea points forward to the time where God will bring people from all nations Jews and Gentiles to the foot of the cross.

The people who are not God's people will be made God's people. In the midst of his judgment against Israel God shines a light back to the Abrahamic promises and then forward to the promises and then his people the promises that he made to Abraham will all be built and fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Israel did everything it could to steer God's promises off track. Their unfaithfulness shows that God's and yet the road they were driving on was God's covenant promise to Abraham and he is absolutely committed to keeping that.

Paul says in Romans 9 God's word has not failed despite the best efforts of his beloved people all the unfaithfulness that tracks through the Old Testament which is seen starkly in Hosea where God is committed to building a covenant people for himself.

[23:58] We see God's faithfulness to his covenant when to be perfectly honest most of us would have just given up on Israel. We see this as a real love a longing for his people when we go to 2 14 15 the last bit we're going to look at I'm going to allure her I will speak tenderly to her I will give her back her vineyards her blessings I make the valley of Achor a time previously of trouble of great strife a door of hope there she will sing as in the days of her youth as when Israel was first saved as the days she was redeemed well here we see a God who is loving his people and these promises are all fulfilled at the coming of Christ the God has allured a people that he speaks tenderly to them that which was a hopeless situation is now a situation of joy with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of judgment of evil sin we see a God who is utterly committed to that which he has committed himself to so much so that to fulfil his covenant promises where he sent Jesus to die on the cross to form a people that all those who would have faith in him would be part of his covenant people he is committed to keeping his promises he has committed to keeping his promises and they will not fail as we start this new year

I hope we have seen the nature of our sin of how offensive how awful it is to God because let us not let 2016 be a year where we will be blasé and say that our sin does not matter instead let us seek faithfulness to God who has formed a new covenant with us let us root our idols and seek him but also as we start the new year I hope we have seen much much more of God's commitment to his own promises even in the midst of an oracle of judgment well there is grace there is God pointing back to the promises he made which he will not give up on the promises he made to us as a people that whoever has faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ will not perish but have eternal life turn to the Lord and be saved seek me and live well God is committed to his covenant word God is committed to his people and God has made us a new people in Christ and God is committed to us despite our unfaithfulness warts and all let this be a comfort a great assurance a drive to long after our heavenly father in this new year ending Thank you.