

'God's Love for His People'

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[0:00] And please open your Bibles back to Hosea chapter 1. That's the ideal reality that marriage is supposed to point towards.

Well, this week we turn to the book of Hosea, and we find ourselves thinking about marriage again, but from a completely different perspective. In Hosea, human marriage still points towards the relationship between God and His people, but in a broken way.

In Hosea, God deliberately puts before His people Hosea's marriage, which is at the very least a questionable marriage.

A marriage marked by unfaithfulness, betrayal, and shame. And the reason is that God is using Hosea's marriage to tell Israel a story about their broken relationship with God.

So, verse 1 to 3. The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, son of Beri, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam, son of Jehoash, king of Israel.

[1:41] When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, Go, marry a promiscuous woman, literally the word there is a whore, and have children with her, literally have children of whoredom.

For like an adulterous wife, literally, for like a whore, this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord. And so Hosea married Goma, daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. We might blush at one mention of the word whore, but here in one sentence God says the word whore three times.

It's shocking, isn't it? God tells Hosea, his prophet, the prophet of the Lord, to marry a sexually immoral woman and have children with her.

This is a horrendous command. The reformer John Calvin did not like this, and so he thought, Oh, I think this is just a vision.

[2:57] This is not a literal command. It is a horrendous command. God is essentially asking Hosea to commit social suicide, to bear public shame, to bring dishonor onto himself.

And I think it's a literal command. But that's precisely the point. The dishonor and shame that Hosea had to suffer is the same dishonor and shame that God had to suffer when he chose a people for himself and his people chose to be unfaithful to him and worship Baal instead.

This is going to be mentioned later in chapter 2. And Baal was the god or the idol of their surrounding culture. God's covenant with his people is like a marriage union.

The Lord will be their god and there will be his people. They are for each other. And so by worshipping other gods, Israel has betrayed her husband and has committed spiritual adultery.

If you have heard about cases of infidelity or cheating in marriage before, or if you've been a victim of infidelity before, you know how much pain and damage infidelity causes.

[4:24] That is how seriously God views idolatry. In fact, idolatry is even worse because God is not just someone equal that is married to us.

God is the maker of heaven and earth, the king of kings. And out of his graciousness, he stooped down to bind himself to his people like in a marriage.

Idolatry is so much worse than infidelity. And this is important to establish before we move on, before we look at the consequences of idolatry.

Because often, society can make sin sound much less serious than it really is. We can talk about sin only as making bad choices.

And so when we hear about what the Bible says about the consequences of sin, as we will read soon, we often think, why so harsh? Everyone makes mistakes.

[5 : 34] But Hosea gives us a deeper category for sin. Sin is relational betrayal. In a sense, it is like infidelity in marriage.

And no one who has been caught being unfaithful in marriage should say, why so harsh? Everyone makes mistakes. If we should not do that to our partner, we should not do that when we sin towards God.

Everyone knows that infidelity is serious, and so idolatry should be seen as much worse. So much worse. And in case we don't realize, in case we read this passage, and think that only the Old Testament Israel did this, let me tell you that we do this too.

God created all humans to be with Him, to know Him, to love Him, to live with Him, to enjoy His goodness. And yet all of us, not just the Old Testament Israel, all of us take the love and trust and dependence and hope and devotion that belong to God and give them to other things and lift them up above God.

That is idolatry. After all, an idol is just an embodiment of our greatest desire, something that we adore, something that we put our money or effort into, like those people who go to the temple, in the hope that it will bring us something that we desire.

[7 : 27] We worship idols. And so if the idol of the surrounding nations in the Old Testament was Baal, what are the idols in our surrounding culture?

Korea can become an idol. Children or grandchildren can become an idol. We are called to love them, yes, but if we love them above God, then they become an idol.

Comfort can become an idol. Sex can become an idol. Self-actualization can become an idol. All good things that God has given us as gifts can become an idol if we lift them above God.

Anything that becomes the ultimate thing that we derive meaning and purpose and happiness from, above God, can be an idol. And we all either have run after idols in the past or still do now.

We are Goma. We are Goma. And what makes it so tragic is that by running after these idols, we are abandoning the only God who already loves us and who binds himself to us and gives himself up for us.

[8 : 52] He is the faithful husband and we are the unfaithful wife. That is the picture Hosea puts before us.

Now that we understand the horrible nature of idolatry, we can hear the consequences of idolatry. Verses 4 to 5. Then the Lord said to Hosea, Call him your son Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel.

In that day, I will break Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel. So if Hosea's marriage to Goma becomes a picture of Israel's relationship with God, all three of Goma's children become pictures of the consequences of Israel's idolatry.

The first child is called Jezreel, which is the name of a town in Israel with a terrible history of violence and bloodshed.

[10 : 07] The name Jezreel takes us back to events like when King Ahab, if you remember King Ahab and his queen Bathsheba, is that it?

No, that's David's. Jezebel. When King Ahab wanted a vineyard belonging to a farmer called Naboth, and so Ahab arranged for Naboth to be killed so that he could take his vineyard.

That took place in Jezreel. But more importantly, it reminds us also of when Jehu, a military commander, took the throne of King Joram, who was King Ahab's son.

Now the coup was commanded by God as judgment against Ahab and his son, but Jehu did it with a kind of brutality and bloodlust that God didn't approve of.

And so the name Jezreel would have carried memories of violence and injustices. It would be like the way certain place names today immediately evoke terrible events.

[11 : 17] You could say Port Arthur, Bondi Beach, 9-11. But Jezreel is more than just violence and injustice because both King Ahab and Jehu worshipped Baal.

And so it was also associated with a kind of spiritual adultery that's being judged in this passage.

And so God says that Israel will be punished for what happened at Jezreel, for the bloodshed and injustices and idolatry.

Their bow will be broken. The bow represents military strength. And so Israel's military power will be broken.

The nation that has trusted in their military strength for violence and bloodshed will discover that its strength cannot save it from God's judgment.

And this would later come true when the Assyrian Empire came and destroyed all of the northern kingdom of Israel, including Jezreel itself.

[12 : 31] And so Hosea's first son was named after a town associated with violence, bloodshed, and idolatry to show that God would later repay them for that violence, bloodshed, and idolatry.

And then comes the second child, and the punishment gets worse. Verse 6 to 7. Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter.

Then the Lord said to Hosea, call her Loruhamah, which means not loved, for I will no longer show love to Israel that I should at all forgive them.

Yet I will show love to Judah, and I will save them, not by bow, sword, or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but I, the Lord their God, will save them.

Might have been some period of time before the first child and the second child, so the first child would have been a warning for the people. If you don't repent, you'll be repaid. It's like what happened in Israel.

[13 : 37] But then, because they didn't repent, the second child became another sign. Notice that verse 3 says that Gomer bore Hosea a son, but here in verse 6, it only says that Gomer gave birth to a daughter.

The child is not attributed to Hosea for some reason. So is she Hosea's daughter, or is she just a product of Gomer's whoredom?

We don't know. The passage doesn't say one way or another. It's ambiguous. But I think that's the point. The text leaves it as a possibility to convey the message that Gomer's sexual immorality caused all kinds of social ambiguity.

The Israelite community might have noticed the same ambiguity about these children. Gomer was a promiscuous woman. Could any of these children actually be Hosea's?

The people around Hosea might look at this girl, Loruhamah, and think, what a terrible thing to happen to this little girl.

[15 : 01] She's called Loruhamah, not loved. Maybe she doesn't belong to him after all. Maybe Hosea doesn't want her. But upon hearing that, Hosea could then answer, just as this child is called not loved, so you are called not loved by God for the spiritual whoredom that you have committed.

This is a deeper judgment than Jezreel. Can you imagine every time the girl's name was called Loruhamah, God's message to Israel was proclaimed.

not loved. No compassion. This is a horrible consequence of idolatry.

God's love is taken away. What would that look like? The word Ruhamah, meaning love or compassion, occurs again in another form in Isaiah 49, where it says, where it says, can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion, Ruhamah, on the child she has born?

That's what's horrible about this particular judgment. God taking away his love from Israel is like a mother taking away her compassion from the child that she has born.

[16 : 31] A child longs to know that his father and mother love him. A child wants to know that someone will care when he cries. Loruhamah is the opposite picture.

Israel's creator, Israel's savior, helper, provider, Israel's husband will take away his love from them. But isn't that the natural consequence of infidelity?

Broken relationship. And this was not merely a threat. Like I said, the northern kingdom of Israel would eventually be destroyed by Assyria and God did not protect them.

But like verse 7 says, God did protect Judah, his southern kingdom. When the Assyrian army was attacking Judah, they suddenly got a plague and had to flee.

You can read about it in Isaiah 37. These judgments came true. But still, ultimately, Judah too would be destroyed by the Babylonian empire.

[17 : 48] They were also judged by God because of their idolatry. Then comes the third child and the judgment gets even worse yet again.

After that, after she had weaned Loruhamah, Gomer had another son. Then the Lord said, call him Lo-Ami, which means not my people.

For you are not my people and I am not your God. Hosea naming his son Lo-Ami, not my people, is like naming him not my son.

He doesn't belong to me. Again, it would have raised some eyebrows in the community. Oh, is that true? Does this son really not belong to him?

And yet again, Hosea would have used that to say to them, No, he's a sign that you don't belong to God. Out of the three, this is the name with the shortest explanation, but it's the most devastating name of all.

[19:05] Israel's entire identity was built around being God's people. God had entered into a covenant with them and said, You will be my people and I will be your God.

And now Hosea takes that covenant formula and turns it upside down. You are not my people and I am not your God. This is not just unloved by God.

This is the equivalent to being disowned by God. In their spiritual adultery, Israel chose Baal instead of Yahweh, and so as a consequence, God is basically saying to them, If you want to worship Baal, be his people, you're not mine.

That is the consequence, isn't it? If we don't want to say to God that your will be done, God will say to us, let your will be done.

I'll let you run away. You're not my people. You're not God will be done. I might have told you before that every night when I put one of my kids to bed, Hannah and I take turns, but when I put one of my kids to bed, I always lead them in a prayer starting with thanksgiving for the day, which always changes because the day changes, confession of sin, which always changes because the sins change, the sins change, but ending with, Lord Jesus, thank you that I belong to you, which always stays the same.

[20:49] One day, Kai, my eldest, asked why I always said that over and over again, every single day. And then he said, does God forget that I belong to him?

Is that why you say over and over again? So I said, no. Jesus always remembers that you belong to him, but you don't, do you?

You don't always remember that you don't belong to God. I don't always remember that I belong to God. And so I do it every day to remind you every day that you belong to him. He needs to remember, we need to remember that because belonging to God is a great comfort for us because he loves us.

He has given up his life for us in Jesus. He gives us comfort, joy, love, grace. He gives us eternal life, forgiveness of sins.

He gives us satisfaction. And so being disowned by that God is a nightmare. It's a nightmare. Out of the three judgments, this is the worst.

[22:02] It means life without his love, protection, comfort, satisfaction. It means when we cry out to him, he's not going to answer. And because he's our maker, being disowned by him means we lose our identity altogether.

This is the worst punishment. Now, these three things are what spiritual adultery deserves. And if we today persist in our spiritual adultery and rebellion, we will also get those things.

Jezebel, payment for our own violent and idolatrous ways. Lo-Ruhamah, not getting God's love. And Lo-Ami, not being God's people.

Ultimately, that's what we get in hell. Where God lifts up his countenance, blessings, love, and grace from us because we keep rejecting him in this life.

Hell is the product of God saying to us, let your will be done. God's God's God's love. But then at the end of this passage, the passage takes a turn from a message of judgment to a promise of grace.

[23:31] Verse 10, yet 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, they will be called children of the living God.

The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together, they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land for great will be the day of Israel. Say to your brothers my people and of your sisters my loved one.

You see the reversal here in this passage. In verse 10, the promise that God had made to Abraham is reinstated. The people of God will be like the sand on the seashore.

Meaning the covenant is renewed. And Israel will not just be God's people, they will be children of God. They will be loved again.

God is so good, isn't he? He's so good. It is as if God could not bear judging his people. within 10 verses, God moves from harsh judgments to promises of grace.

[24:52] Remember how the word Ruhamah occurs in Isaiah 49 where it says, can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born? God says God will not forget you.

God says this, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are ever before me.

I will always remember you. God is the kind of God who cannot forget his people, who cannot unlove his people, who cannot be angry for too long, as long as we keep being his people. But notice how this promise of grace would be carried out in verse 11. It would be carried out through one leader who would unite the two divided kingdoms.

Who is this? Jesus, the king, the one leader, who unites the two groups, as Paul says in Ephesians 2.

[26:05] And not just Israelites, but also Gentiles, that's us, so that we can be called children, people of God. And this is why in our New Testament reading from 1 Peter, Peter applies the language that Hosea uses to the church.

We were not God's people, but we've been made God's people in Jesus. We were not loved, but now we are loved beyond measure. That is the gospel, the good news.

We are the unfaithful wife. We have run after other gods, and sometimes we still do in our daily lives. We deserve Jezreel, we deserve Lord Rahman, we deserve Lord Ami, we deserve to hear, you are not my people, but if we repent and return to him, God will say, you will be called children of the living God.

Children. Why? Because of Jesus. Because on the cross, Jesus bore those three punishments. On the cross, Jesus got Jezreel for us as he faced unjust, violent punishment for our idolatry. On the cross, the beloved son of God became Lo-Ruhamah, not loved, so that we can become loved.

[27:40] On the cross, the true son of God became Lo-Ami, as he was abandoned by God, so that we can become children of God.

God. This is the great reversal of the gospel, because of God's grace. So what does Hosea call us to do?

Well, I think there will be more concrete applications as we dig deeper into the book of Hosea, but for now, let's go back to the basics. First, let's keep exposing our idols.

let's keep asking ourselves questions like, what is the one thing that, if I had it now, would definitely make my life complete?

As if our lives now in Jesus are not complete. Or the flip side, what is the one thing that I have now, which, if I lost it, would make me despair without hope?

[28:45] those questions can expose our idols. And then, after we repent from those idols, let's return to the beauty of the gospel, that God loves us, and he has made us his people, his beloved people in Jesus, over and over again, until praise springs up.

And we praise Jesus. Let's pray. Father, we praise you, for you are gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Help us to see your beauty more and more in Jesus, so that we can fix our eyes on you daily, abandoning all idols. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Thank you.