

'God's Relentless Love for His Wife'

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[0:00] Please turn your Bibles back to Hosea chapter 2. Our passage today is Hosea 2 and 3, but we only read chapter 3 because in this sermon I'm going to take you through chapter 2 and only make a quick reference to chapter 3.

So hopefully you are listening to chapter 3. Last week as we began the book of Hosea, we were introduced to one of the strangest marriages in the Bible.

God told Hosea, his prophet, to marry Goma, a promiscuous woman. And their marriage became a living picture of the relationship between God and his people.

Israel belonged to God. And Israel was married to God, so to speak, just like Goma was married to Hosea, but Israel chose other gods instead.

And here in chapters 2 and 3, we see that relationship in more detail. We see Israel's unfaithfulness in more detail. But we also see God's faithful grace in more detail.

[1:17] So we read in verse 2, God says, Rebuke your mother, 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. So the mother here represents Israel as a people.

And the children represent the individuals within Israel. And so here, God is talking through the children to rebuke the mother.

God is not speaking to the mother directly because the mother is no longer his wife. She has betrayed him. Israel has run after other gods.

But notice God's graciousness, even here at the start. The very fact that he rebukes her and calls her to turn back shows that God still cares, even though she is no longer his wife.

[2:23] And so he tells Israel to remove her adulterous look and her unfaithfulness. That is, Israel has to stop presenting herself as available to other gods.

She's sold out to the Lord, so to speak. She's not available. And that's the problem, isn't it? Even from chapter 1, Israel is selling her love.

And so Israel is called to repent. And what happens if they don't? Verse 3. Otherwise, I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born.

I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst. Israel has behaved like a prostitute.

And so God says she will be stripped naked, exposed like a prostitute. It sounds a bit harsh to our modern ears. But actually, although the image of nudity is a fitting picture for prostitution, it also reminds us of the innocence of a baby, which God says in verse 3, as on the day she was born.

[3:45] And this, combined with the image of the desert, which God also said, actually creates a picture of restoration. The desert, or the wilderness, if you remember, is a place where Israel started her covenant relationship with God, when God redeemed them from Egypt.

It was a time when Israel was like a baby, helpless. Didn't have anything, didn't have any food, didn't have any water, and so they depended on God. And so here, even though this is a picture of judgment, we also see, sprinkled on top of the judgment, is grace.

Israel has forgotten that she's God's wife, and so God is going to take her back to the beginning, back to the wilderness, back to the time when she cried out to God for help.

Often, God's judgment and grace do meet in the wilderness. And that's true for us too, isn't it? Even today. Sometimes God allows us to be stripped, so to speak. God allows for our idols, the things we depend on, to be taken away, sometimes.

[5:08] And that's painful. Because when we realize that we are naked, we discover our need for God to clothe us. When we realize we are thirsty, we discover our need for God to satisfy us.

And He does. But it's a judgment, nonetheless, because it's painful. Now, the judgment continues in verse 4 to 5.

I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery. Their mother has been unfaithful, and 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 olive oil and my drink.

So Israel has sought love from other lovers, or other idols, and so her children, that is the people of Israel, are not loved by God.

We've encountered this judgment in chapter 1. Now, who are these lovers? As verse 8 later indicates, they are the Baals, the fertility gods worshipped by the nations around Israel.

[6:28] People believed that these gods could give them land fertility, like food and water, food, wool and linen, olive oil and drink, land fertility and economic prosperity.

And so Israel joined in that worship. And therefore, verse 6 to 8, God says, Therefore I will block her path with thorn bushes. I will wall her in, so that she cannot find her way.

She will chase after her lovers, but not catch them. She will look for them, but not find them. Then she will say, I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.

She has not acknowledged, that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold, which they used for Baal.

So God is the one who gives Israel the blessings of the land. But Israel attributes the blessings to Baal. They say, Oh, Baal gives us these.

[7:33] And they even use these blessings as offerings to Baal. And so God will block her path, so that she can't go to Baal, and instead, she will come home, back to God.

There might be two things here, at least, to notice. First, first, we can notice that God's love here seems a bit forceful. He blocks Israel from going after idols, and so she comes home.

In a modern world, this might sound like a violation of personal rights, or freedom. So is this forced love? Is God forcing Israel to love him?

I don't think so, because notice that in verse 7, she can still go and chase after her lovers, and look for them. She's free. So what does that blocking of her path mean?

Well, I think in the context, the picture of blocking her path with thorn bushes here, is the same as turning her into the wilderness, in the previous judgment, in verse 3.

[8:53] That is, God will take away his blessings, and instead of fruits and grains, the land will produce thorn bushes, instead. And that is further detailed in the next verses, in verse 9 to 13.

Therefore, I will take away my grain, when it ripens, and my new wine, when it's ready. I will take back my wool, and my linen, intended to cover her naked body. And so now, I will expose her lewdness, before the eyes of her lovers.

No one will take her out of my hands. I will stop all her celebrations, her yearly festivals, her new moons, her Sabbath days, all her appointed festivals.

I will ruin her vines, I will ruin her vines, and her fig trees, which she said, were her pay from her lovers. I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them.

I will punish her, for the days she burnt incense to the Baals. She decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot, declares the Lord.

[10:00] And so if we go back, the punishment of blocking her path in verse 6 is the same as God taking away his blessings, either through a season of drought, or through a military invasion, like when the Assyrian Empire attacked.

The land stopped producing, and their festivals stopped. When that happens, Israel will look after her idols.

She's free to do that. Israel will look after her idols to give her the fertility of the land again, but she won't find them. Because the gods of fertility are proven to be false.

When the real God takes away his blessings, the gods of fertility cannot have any power to give Israel any blessings.

So that's the punishment. The second thing that we can notice here is what Israel does afterwards. When that happens, she will say, Israel will go home, but at least initially, Israel's return seems to be driven by what she gets out of the relationship.

[11:28] She returns because she wants the blessings, not really God himself. Whether it's the Lord or Baal, whoever can provide for her will be her lover.

Israel returns, but she doesn't really return based on personal relationship. Her love is transactional. Again, we can be like that too, right, sometimes?

Even though as Christians, we have been redeemed, sometimes we still have the same sinful tendency. First, we can be like Israel in the way we attribute good things in our lives to our idols rather than to God.

We have our modern idols, and so we too can look at our prosperity around our lives and say, oh, my career gave me this.

The Australian economy gave me this. I depend on the Australian economy. If it falls, then my life just disappears. And of course, on one level, those statements can be true.

[12:41] Our jobs and businesses do give us money, but they're not the ultimate giver. They're just the means, the pipes through which the water flows.

But they're not the fountain. The ultimate giver is the God of heaven and earth. And second, we can be like Israel in the way we return to God only because of His blessings rather than because of love.

When we need something from God or when God gives us what we want, we're happy coming to church every Sunday to worship Him. But when life gets busy, when our other idols of career or money or family demand more from us, God gets the second chair.

And we spend time and energy chasing after our idols. We have no time for God anymore, no time for church or for Bible reading or for prayers. We go after our lovers.

If we do that, we need to ask ourselves, is our devotion to God out of self-interest or out of love?

[14:15] We need to ask ourselves, is our love actually on sale for whichever God can give us the most things? or is it faithful?

It's like God, God's love is faithful. Now Israel has been unfaithful. She's been using God's blessings and attributing them to Baal and even giving them as offerings back to Baal.

And so God is going to punish them. But here comes the surprising part in verse 14 to 15. God says, Therefore, I am now going to allure her.

I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards and will make the valley of Echor a door of hope. There she will respond as in the days of a youth as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

Therefore, this might be one of the most astonishing therefores in the entire Bible. Because the previous verse says, Israel decked herself with rings and jewelry and went after her lovers but me, she forgot.

[15:40] Straight away, God says, therefore, I'm not, I'm going to punish them. No, therefore, I'm now going to allure her.

We see God's long-suffering, faithful love, don't we? God's judgment is real, yes.

The Assyrian Empire would later come to bring God's judgment to Israel but when dealing with his people, judgment is not God's final word. He is, after all, gracious and merciful and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

His love is steadfast. So, God will allure Israel and speak tenderly to her.

If previously, Israel wants to return out of self-interest and not love, here, when God himself takes the initiative, we see God going after her heart to arouse love in her heart by speaking tenderly to her.

[16:57] And where does God take her to allure her? Again, into the wilderness. The same wilderness we saw in verse 3 for the same reason, so that God becomes the sole provider, the sole love, no other idols.

There's only God speaking tenderly to her heart. And there in the wilderness God will again provide her vineyards and will make the valley of echo a door of hope.

This is where we can find out where this promise, when this promise is fulfilled. The valley of echo literally means the valley of trouble.

It takes us back to Joshua 7 and the story of Achan who stole some things devoted to the Lord and therefore was punished. So the valley of echo became associated in Israel with sin and judgment and trouble.

But God says, I will make the valley of trouble or the valley of punishment a door of hope. The place associated with judgment becomes the doorway of hope.

[18:20] And surely as Christians we know what this means. It leads us to the cross. The cross is the valley of achor a symbol of judgment and punishment but when Christ took it he turned it into the door of hope.

That's how God speaks tenderly to his people. Not by giving them law but by coming after them and dying for them.

And so despite Israel's unfaithfulness God promises to allure her out of faithful love for her. This is a picture of God's grace.

And this picture of grace continues in verse 16 to 17. In that day declares the Lord you will call me my husband you will no longer call me my master and remove the names of the Baals from her lips no longer will their names be invoked.

In Hebrew the word my master is literally my Baal. And so the word Baal in Hebrew doesn't necessarily refer to the God of fertility.

[19:41] It's a neutral term. but because of their Baal worship God doesn't want to be called master or Baal anymore but husband.

The names of Baal will no longer be mentioned. This is exclusive covenant love in that day. That is in the day when Jesus came. But notice that verse 16 and 17 is not a command.

God doesn't say I will forbid you from mentioning Baals anymore. Nope. God says in that day I will remove the names of Baals from her lips.

It's a promise. In that day the names of Baal will not be invoked. This is a promise of enablement. God's people will be enabled to see God as their husband and will not invoke the names of idols anymore.

And again, this is fulfilled in Jesus. Because in Jesus we get the Holy Spirit who writes the law in our hearts. So we've become faithful to him from the inside rather than just by obeying the law.

[21:03] Now God's promise of grace continue again in verse 18. Now the promise here is there will be perfect peace not only with the rest of creation but also with each other.

There will be no more battles. It's a picture of the world being made right. And there will be perfect peace because there will be a reversal of judgment.

We'll jump a bit to verse 21. In that day I will respond declares the Lord. I will respond to the skies and they will respond to the earth and the earth will respond to the grain and the new wine and the olive oil and they will respond to Israel.

I will plant her for myself in the land. I will show my love to the one I call not my loved one. I will say to those called not my people, you are my people, and they will say you are my God.

The three names of Hosea's children which picture God's judgment will be reversed. And particularly Jezreel, which in chapter one shows God's judgment towards the violence and idolatry of Israel is reversed.

[22:37] This time Jezreel is reinterpreted because in Hebrew the word Jezreel literally means God sow. And so here it becomes the promise that God will replant Israel as a new people.

And so the whole judgment that Israel will be a wilderness will be reversed too. The land will now produce grain because the sky will answer its cry for rain and God will answer the sky to provide rain.

Israel will not be a wilderness forever. forever. So in verse 18 and verse 21 to 23 there are promises of peace and prosperity in that day but notice that at the center of this restored world of peace and prosperity is the promise of a restored marriage.

In verse 19 to 20 God says I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you in righteousness and justice in love and compassion.

I will betroth you in faithfulness and you will acknowledge the Lord or literally you will know the Lord. God says that he will betroth his people again three times.

[24:10] This is not God reluctantly saying alright if you want to come back I suppose I will take you back. The repetition gives the promise weight and certainty.

I will betroth you. I will betroth you. I will betroth you. We see God eager to take his wife back. We see the same eagerness in the parable of the prodigal son.

If you remember the story. The father runs to embrace the son who is coming back. That's what happens when someone repents.

We don't see God reluctantly taking people back. We see God running to take people back. God is saying I will betroth you three times and each time the nature of the betrothal is made clear.

First forever. this relationship will not be broken again. And second, God will betroth her in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.

[25 : 20] The language used here refers to the bride prize that God will pay. Because in ancient times, to betroth a bride required a bride price, a payment to secure the union.

And what's the price that God pays? On the one hand, righteousness and justice, and on the other hand, love and compassion, or steadfast love and compassion.

And again, we know what this is. These things meet perfectly at the cross when Jesus paid for our redemption. At the cross, God's justice for sin and God's love and mercy meet.

the cross is God's payment to betroth his people. It's a high price, the death of the Son of God.

And the betrothal will be realized more fully when Christ returns, because in our New Testament reading from Revelation 19, it shows us that when Christ comes the second time, we, his people, will be made ready for the wedding.

[26 : 36] And our clothes will have been washed by his blood. That's the prize of our betrothal, for our redemption. And that's what Hosea later has to reenact in chapter 3.

In chapter 3, even though Gomer has born children for Hosea, she's not with him, but with her lover.

And so he's called to redeem her, to buy her back, because God has promised to redeem Israel.

Friends, Jesus has purchased us with the price of his blood. We don't belong to our idols anymore.

We belong to Jesus.

And then the third time, I will betroth you in faithfulness. No more betrayal. God will enable his people to be faithful.

And again, this is the promise of the new covenant in Jesus as the Holy Spirit dwells in us and enables us to be faithful. people. These chapters, Hosea 1 to 3, is a journey, isn't it?

[28 : 04] And in this journey, we encounter so many different themes that will come up again and again as we go through the book of Hosea. We get reminded of God's people's unfaithfulness and therefore our unfaithfulness because we are God's people.

And even though we have been redeemed, we still have the same tendency to look after idols and then we repent again and then we do that again.

But we also get reminded of God's faithfulness that he chases after us. So perhaps the questions that Hosea 2 and 3 leave us with are similar to the questions that we encountered last week.

What are our idols? What are the lovers that we chase because we think that they can give us the life that we want? Where are we looking for life and happiness and meaning and hope?

What is it that if we have it will make our life more complete? but as we ponder upon these questions and perhaps feel a bit disappointed by ourselves because we find that the answer to the questions is not God but another idol let's not despair.

[29 : 39] We need to remember that the great news of Hosea 2 and 3 is not that God's people have been faithful the great news is that God has been faithful and he has not forgotten us and that God has come for us more intimately when he came down here in the person of Jesus to chase us, his wayward wife and to die for us to pay for our redemption salvation.

And when we realize the goodness of our God, surely it propels us to respond, yes Lord, you are our God and we are your people.

We want to be your people. Let's pray. Lord, we praise you for your faithfulness and now that you have redeemed us through your son, defend our hearts by your spirit.

In Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen.