

Hosea 1:1-2:1

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[0 : 00] God loves you.

It is the most simplest of statements in the Christian faith. Yet I wonder this morning, as you hear this phrase, how does it strike the depths of your heart?

How does it move you? As I think back on my Christian life, it was actually a sentence like this that brought me to Christ. I had heard the gospel of Jesus dying on the cross for my sins.

I had seen that I needed God. But it wasn't until I was convinced that the God who sent his son to die for me would take care of me because he loved me.

That I was able to respond. It was that sentence that God drew me to himself with. And one night, years ago, I agreed.

[1 : 24] I placed my faith in Christ and became a Christian. And initially, I was like one in love, or more accurately, one knowing how deeply he is loved.

But over time, over the years, I have seen how easy it is for that to fade. How easy it is for God's love to become less and less precious to me.

How the deep patterns of my heart not to trust in the love of another. To trust myself rather than God. My desire to be in control of how love comes to me.

All of these things have made living in the reality of God's love a struggle, a challenge.

What once was sweet and precious and exploded in my heart and overflowed in my life with joy and worship and sacrifice. Now lands with a dull thud in my heart at least some of the times.

[2 : 32] And I wonder if that's true of you this morning as well. And that's why we're beginning our series this fall in the book of Hosea.

And I need the book of Hosea. And my guess is so do you. Now I'm wondering if some of you are sitting there going, Hosea, Hosea, is that one of the minor prophets?

I'm not sure I'm familiar with that. Yep, it's one of the minor prophets. And don't the prophets usually preach doom and gloom, judgment and condemnation? Yeah, pretty much.

That's a significant part of it. So why in the world, if we need to hear messages of God's love, are we looking at the book of Hosea to help God's love be real to us?

The beauty of the book of Hosea is that it captures this. The central message of the whole book is that God shows a faithful, alluring love to his people in the face of their blatant infidelity, their spiritual waywardness that makes them repugnant, unattractive, repulsive.

[3 : 47] The book of Hosea is a lot about the sin of refusing and rejecting God, of turning to other gods, of trusting in ourselves.

It is about significantly the disciplining punishment of God that he brings on those who reject him. But even as we look at chapter 1 this morning, even as we look at these clouds, these dark clouds of warning and judgment that fill this book, we will also see a shaft of light bursting through.

We will hear the whisper of alluring love, the promises of undeserved love and mercy, of grace to unlovable people like us, and the hope of a great reversal that we who sit under judgment and condemnation instead find not only acceptance, but love.

And this idea of the great reversal is what we will capture and explore this morning. And the reason why it's so important is because the sentence, God loves you, will seem shallow and thin if we don't understand the depths of the context in which it is spoken.

If we see only this message, God loves you, grace accepts you, and we don't see the darkness in our own hearts. If we don't see the need, if we don't see how wayward we are, then our understanding of the message of God's love becomes a caricature, a cheap misrepresentation of the reality.

[5 : 39] So whether you're here this morning and exploring Christianity and having heard this message, God loves you, and wondering what does it really mean, or whether you are an old hand, knowing Christ for years and years and years.

I hope that you will go home today with the confidence of this, that we will only truly experience God's love as we understand the great reversal of our status, from disgracefully rebellious on one hand to gloriously accepted on the other because of Christ.

So turn with me in the book of Hosea, chapter 751 in your pew Bible, so you don't have to go to the table of contents. It's after Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, if you're flipping through and want to find it.

It's the first one of the minor prophets. Hosea chapter 1, page 751. Let me read this together.

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beerī, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel.

[6 : 57] When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom, and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.

And so he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Debalam, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the Lord said to him, Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. She conceived again and bore a daughter, and the Lord said to him, Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel to forgive them at all.

But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen. When she had weaned no mercy, she conceived and bore a son.

And the Lord said, Call his name Not My People, for you are not My people, and I am not your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered.

[8 : 27] And in the place where it was said to them, You are not My people, it shall be said to them, Children of the living God, and the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head, and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Say to your brothers, You are My people, and to your sisters, You have received mercy. Let's pray. Let's pray. O Lord, who are we that we might be the objects of your love?

Lord, we ask this morning that you, by your Spirit, would help us. Lord, show us the depth of our sin, and show us the height and the breadth and the length and the depth of your love.

Lord, that we might understand, that we might know what it means to be your people. God, I pray this morning you would help me to speak your words, and that by your Spirit we would all have ears to hear your word, this morning.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's look at our passage, Hosea 1, together. We're going to begin by looking at the dynamics of a disgraceful rebellion in verses 1 through 9, and then we'll move on to look at the dynamics of the glorious acceptance in verses 10 through chapter 2, verse 1.

[10 : 20] So what does the disgraceful rebellion look like here in Hosea? Verse 1 locates us in a time we are about, Hosea prophesied in about 750 B.C., and his primary location was the nation of Israel.

Now, you may have noticed that there were places in here where Israel was distinguished from Judah. So let me fill you in a little bit on the history of the Old Testament so you can remember. About 250 years prior to Hosea's time, King David sat on the throne over the 12 tribes of Israel, living in the promised land that was promised to them long ago through Abraham, through Moses. And this kingdom was established, but two generations later, after Solomon, the sons of Solomon were in a civil war. Rehoboam ruled over the south, and Jeroboam ruled over the north, and the northern kingdom was called Israel, and the southern kingdom was called Judah.

And for the next 200 years, the people of God were divided, and their kingdom was divided. And the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom, as it will mostly be used here in Hosea, when you hear Israel, don't hear everything, hear the northern kingdom, had kings who were characterized by this,

as we read in the book of Kings.

Over and over again, it says of the kings of Israel, he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin, which he made Israel to sin.

[12:02] There was not much good in the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom. And this sets us up for verse 2, doesn't it?

And the shocking command that God gives to his prophet. He says, go, go and marry a promiscuous woman.

As it says in the text, a woman of whoredom. And take on her children. Make them your wife. Make them your family. And this is not a parable.

This is real life. God was saying, go do this so that you will experience what I experience. God calls his prophet to do something scandalous and incomprehensible.

Go marry a woman who has gone from bed to bed, from man to man, who has flitted from one lover to the next. God is saying, go take this woman whose moral and social life, if not her very physical self, is clothed in dirty rags and dress her in white.

[13:12] Bathe her. Put perfume on her. Head to the church for the wedding. Knowing that she in her heart still cherishes what she has been and what she has done.

Gomer is not a lovely woman. Nor is she a victim. Though some in a similar situation today might be. She is not. She is a wanton woman.

And God says, go and make her your wife. Why? In the second half of verse 2, for the land commits whoredom.

The nation of Israel has again and again shown themselves to be spiritually promiscuous and unfaithful, characteristically unfaithful.

They have followed after idols of other gods. They have made alliances with other nations rather than trusting in God alone. And this vivid picture is meant for us to see how offensive the sin of Israel is against God.

[14:29] And friends, we need to make no mistake in this. We are not called to identify with Hosea and think, what a poor guy, how terrible it would be if God told me to do something like that.

For we are not Hosea in this story, but Gomer. It is our sin, our daily selfishness and pride, our cold hearts and self-reliance, the way we fill our lives with so little worship of God and so much pursuit of the things of this world.

We are Gomer in our unfaithful and wayward ways. Our love for God and our worship of Him is uncertain and inconstant.

God's message goes from bad to worse from here. For then, God tells, we see the story where Hosea and Gomer now have children.

And God names each of these three children in consecutive and building names to describe the consequences of this sin.

[15:46] What God will do because of their sin. And so, the first one is named Jezreel. Jezreel is the name of a place. But it is a place, if you went back and looked, it is a place of bloodshed.

It is a place of brutality where the house of Jehu, the reigning kings of Israel at the time, came to power by wiping out their enemies within the nation of Israel.

And God says, name him Jezreel for I will visit the bloodshed that you have committed upon your own home. I will end the line of this king and in fact, I will end this kingdom.

Israel will be no more. I will break its bow. It will have no more might and in fact, it will be scattered never again to appear on the face of the earth as a sovereign nation.

And in fact, that's what happened in 722 BC. The Assyrian nation came down from the north and conquered the nation of Israel and it never reappeared.

[16:53] But there's more for God not only calls the first child Jezreel but the second one he calls Lo-Ruhamah or, as it's translated, no mercy.

What God says is, I have been merciful with Israel though they have not walked in my ways, I have been merciful with them but now no more. There is no more mercy that I can show them for there is only punishment that will get their attention.

Like a parent gets to the point where there are no more warnings, there is just consequences. God says, there is no more for you.

He had been merciful and he contrasts that with what he's going to do with the southern kingdom. He says, I will continue to have mercy on Judah at least for a while but don't miss the subtle

undertone that even Judah listening in on this judgment of Israel ought to hear. Do not turn away from the Lord for his mercy may end for you as well. Domer has a third child. [18:12] It's called Lo-Ami, not my people. And it is hard to underestimate for us how horrible this name would sound to an Israelite.

How deeply it would resonate for those. For to be an Israelite is to be one in the family of the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and to Moses that God will make a people for himself. You will be my people and I will be your God. This is what it meant to be God's people. And now God is saying, you are not my people any longer. He is renouncing her. Stripping her of her position has the power of a father disowning a child or a husband divorcing his wife.

And it would be devastating to the ear of an Israelite to hear this. This is a minor prophet, yes? [19:21] This is the words of doom and judgment that we expect. And we need to hear how serious God takes this.

We've been studying Deuteronomy this summer and for those of you who weren't here we've talked about God's call for his people to be in a covenant relationship with them. To be wholehearted in their love and worship and obedience to this God who has saved them and brought them into a relationship with him and into a promised land.

Their unfaithfulness has consequences. And here in Hosea we see where it brings them. Cut off, disgraced, shamed, reaping the fruit of rebellion by finally being left alone.

Friends, we need to hear this not only as God's judgment and history upon his people but we need to hear the words of the New Testament that describes all people for all time who are outside of Christ.

Ephesians 2, 1-3 says, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath.

[20:59] Ephesians 2, 11-13 calls us separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in this world.

Friends, in our sin, we are cut off from God. And yet, and that yet in the beginning of verse 10 should be one of the most beautiful words that you have seen today, this year, in your lifetime. And yet, that is not the end of the story. That is not the end of God's message to us. Because God says, though you are in a state of disgraceful rebellion against me, I will bring you to a place of glorious acceptance.

Let's read the end of Hosea, starting in verse 10 again, so you can hear it. Yet, the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered.

And in the place where it was said of them, you are not my children, it shall be said of them, to them, children of the living God. And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head.

[22:32] And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. So say to your brothers, you are my people, and to your sisters, you have received mercy.

God is saying the condemnation and judgment on this unfaithful generation is real. And yet, I have promised to make a people my own.

I have covenanted to my bride that I will love her to the end. I will not forsake her forever. And in images evocative of the promise to Abraham in Genesis 22, he says that Israel, though now sitting under the promise of being destroyed and cut off, he says the people of Israel will be as numerous as the sands and the sea.

He goes on and he pictures God gathering Judah and Israel together again and flourishing in the land. This great reversal is captured in the reversal of the naming where once Jezreel meant bloodshed.

Now, as you see in the end of verse 11, Jezreel is a place of abundance again. For they shall go into the land, they shall be overflowing, both in the way that they as a people grow and in the way that they experience the abundance of God's blessing.

[24:00] So Jezreel becomes a picture of beauty and of abundance. And those who were called not my people are now called the people, the children of the living God.

And so we are to say to those who have had no mercy, now you have received mercy. Friends, this is good news.

The heart of the Israelite would have overflowed with joy at hearing this hope that God can do this greater reversal with even people like us.

We will sing this later in the service, but John Newton, the great slave trader who then was converted gloriously to Christ, sang of this great reversal in his own life, amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see. This reversal is a picture of redemption, of restoring things from a place of doom and despair to a place of hope and life.

[25 : 17] It is notable, I want you to see that in this chapter all we see is a picture. God isn't actually describing the depths of their sin.

We'll get there, we have 13 more chapters to understand the particular dynamics of how their sin played itself out. We don't see very much about the mechanisms of how God accomplishes this great reversal.

He just, the shift from 9 to 10 is jarring. I will judge them, I will cut them off, they're not my people, yet, yet I will.

I will reverse everything that I just said. How can this be? The text gives us two hints, and they're only hints, of how God might accomplish this.

The first is that the name Hosea is an unfortunate transliteration in the English language. It actually went through the Latin, and so they missed an H.

[26 : 25] So, if you're translating the Hebrew, he would be called Hosea, which sounds a lot like the same words as, say, Joshua, or, many, many, many years later, Jesus.

It's from a root that means one who will come to save. And though Hosea was called to marry the prostitute, to marry the promiscuous woman, so that he might understand the depths of the unfaithfulness of God's people, his name points ahead to one.

And you see it as well in verse 11, don't you? They shall appoint a head, one head, over all of them. There is one who is going to come, and he will accomplish this great reversal.

This one who will be a savior. This one who will come and take the shame and the disgrace of the unfaithfulness of God's people.

He who will bear the scorn and the repugnancy of the rebellion of God's people. He who will bear the wrath and condemnation, the consequences of sin, Jesus Christ on the cross.

[27 : 46] He will accomplish this great reversal for us. He who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God.

God loves you. What good news this is. What a great reversal. And when we understand this reversal, we begin to understand how profoundly the sentence, God loves you, ought to grip and transform our hearts.

It is instructive to look at how New Testament writers picked up on the language of Hosea in chapter 1. It changes, for instance, how we see the world around us.

In Romans 9, Paul picks up Hosea in the midst of a long discussion about God's sovereignty and how he can include Gentiles, people outside of the nation of Israel, people who would have been viewed as barbarians to the Israelites of the day.

And he says, these people who were not my people can be my people because of Christ through faith. So to hear the word God loves you means that there is no one outside of the scope.

[29 : 14] No one can be so bad that God cannot bring them back. And that is good news for us. And hopefully as it captures our hearts, it becomes good news to tell to the world.

There's a great story about St. Patrick, the Brit who was a missionary to Ireland. He quotes Hosea in his account of his life and ministry.

He says, and in Hosea he says, those who are not my people I will call my people. Those not beloved I will call my beloved. And in the very place where it is said of them you are not my people they will be called the sons of the living God.

So how is it that in Ireland where they never had any knowledge of God but always until now cherished idols and unclean things they are lately become a people of the Lord and are called the children of God.

The sons of the Irish and the daughters of the chieftains are to be seen as monks and virgins of Christ. Understanding the message of the love of God took St. Patrick to Ireland to preach to people

who would have been seen as the ugliest most repugnant people in the world.

[30 : 29] This is one of the ways that God's love is meant to capture and transform our hearts. The second way we see from the New Testament writers is in 1 Peter 2 the text that was read earlier today.

What Peter is saying is that you are now God's people based on the cornerstone of Christ. You now have this incredible status this incredible privilege a holy nation a royal priesthood a people belonging to God so that you might live your life in this world for Him so that you might live such good lives among the Gentiles here meaning those who don't know God live such good lives among those people that though they revile you for your faithfulness to God they will give glory in the end for the goodness of your life.

So my friends though the sentence God loves you may sound trite or simplistic to our ears I want you to see this morning how essential it is how essential it is that we understand God's love in the richness of this great reversal that God has worked in order to show us this love.

We must allow this message to drink deeply into the or to sink deeply into the soil of our hearts and we must drink deeply from the sweetness of this pool we must allow it to become to our hearts a priceless treasure.

I want you to know Trinity Baptist Church we have not chosen this series unadvisedly. Some of you know some of you may not that those of us in pastoral leadership have started we are now starting our second year and as we thought about what is it that we most want this church to be about what is it that we most want this church to be characterized by we could have come up with great plans and great directions and lots of programs to energize us and go do lots of stuff but you know what we spent this year preaching on Galatians the gospel of grace that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone apart from anything that we ever have done or could do to merit God's salvation and love and we have looked at Deuteronomy so that we might remember the high calling that it is to God's people that is meant to be a life consuming life capturing reality that we are God's people and therefore we are to love him with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength and now we are going to spend time in Hosea again reminding ourselves of this very central truth of the gospel because when we get this

[33 : 41] God will do great things in this church when we get this God will overflow through us into this city and throughout the world and it doesn't mean we will never have plans or programs I hope we will I think we will but those plans and programs will only be as rich and valuable as they will only be meaningful in the kingdom of God as we are a people who get this gospel this good news that God has loved us in Christ in this incredible way so my hope this morning is that this message will sink to you that though the clouds of judgment and condemnation are real against sin yet God in Christ has done something to rescue us that he might fill our lips with the confession of the hymn that we're about to sing beneath the cross of Jesus goes like this upon the cross of Jesus mine eyes at times can see the very dying form of one who suffered there for me from my smitten heart with tears to wonders

I confess the wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness let's pray God we thank you that you have shown such great love in this world in Christ and God we pray that Lord our hearts would be truly smitten this morning Lord that our mouths would be filled with a confession of our unworthiness how desperately we need a savior and how wondrous how amazing your love and grace is to us in Christ we pray these things in Jesus name Amen Friends we now come to a time of communion and what a wonderful thing to do to celebrate on the heels of the message of Hosea 1 for the communion table what we do here is to celebrate the death of Christ for us it is not a place for perfect people who have their lives together it is a place for sinners who know their need for the grace of God and the invitation is given to all this morning who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for all who have trusted in him to be that rescuer that savior the one who has worked this great reversal if you placed your faith in Christ in this this morning we invite you to join us in partaking of the bread and the cup and if you're here this morning and you haven't yet made that step if you are wondering if you are thinking we ask instead of taking these things which are meant to be a unified expression of our faith in Christ instead of taking these things and eating them we ask that you would simply spend this time meditating on the truths that we have talked about this morning that Jesus Christ loved you he died on the cross for your sins that you might repent of your sins and believe in him and be saved and be called a child of the living God those who are serving can come forward want to read the words of institution from the book of first

Corinthians first Corinthians chapter 11 for I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me and in the same way also he took a cup after supper saying this cup is a new covenant in my blood do this as often as you drink of it in remembrance of me for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes Nick will you pray for the bread let's pray Lord Jesus as we heard we heard this story of

Hosea is really ultimately this story about you Lord how you have come and you have found us wayward and unfaithful Lord and yet you bound us to yourself with cords of love Lord that you came and you found us and the names that we bore God both the names that you had given us because of our sin and the names that we had given one another in our sin Lord you struck out and gave us a new name because we had a new husband and a new lover Lord and you gave us the name daughters and sons beloved so Lord as we come to the table now to take this bread to see your body broken for us we realize that we have a great lover a great husband who's gone to the uttermost to the breaking of his own body on the cross so that we could be forgiven and reclaimed and made whole

[39 : 35] Lord thank you for this meal that you've given us feed our hearts Lord as we partake it together in Christ's name Amen