

Hosea 3:1-5

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[0 : 00] You pray with me.

God, this morning we confess to you that we need to hear your word. Lord, because our hearts are cold and hard.

Lord, I confess that that is true of me as well. Lord, how much we need your spirit to make your word come alive to us today.

Lord, we pray that you would take this word. Lord, and work it down to the very depths of our soul.

Lord, that we might know you.

We might see you. We might worship you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

[1 : 18] Amen. Imagine, if you will, a 16-year-old with these words in her mouth.

I can't do anything to stop his love for me. His love will never fail. This is what she says of her boyfriend, but she doesn't treat him with a whole lot of care.

She flirts with others, enjoys the attention of the many boys who find her attractive. She never commits, never gives any of them more than a hint of interest, just strings them all along, including this poor, long-suffering, faithful boyfriend.

One who has known her from childhood. One who has loved her always. She loves the security of knowing that he's there, but she wants to play the field.

She loves the attention. She loves the attention. Maybe you've known someone like that. Maybe you've been someone like that. Someone who's careless about his love.

[2 : 39] Carelessness, according to the dictionary, is not giving sufficient attention. It is being not concerned about. It is showing no interest in something.

Carelessness can show itself in many ways in our lives. It might be frivolous and flighty. It might be a determined neglect of something. I, for instance, if you ask my wife, might be careless about making our bed or about putting dirty clothes in the hamper in our house.

I might, on a more serious note, be careless about what others think about how I dress or how I regard someone else's importance of their words because of the degrees that they have or don't have.

However I think about it, carelessness is ultimately saying we don't really care. Or in our common, we could care less, which isn't gradically right.

We should say we couldn't care less. But be that as it may, we are careless in our hearts. But when we apply carelessness to things that have more importance, more value, for instance, our finances, you said you would pay that bill.

[4 : 01] Or our time, I've been waiting for two hours for you this morning. Where are you? Or of special occasions, did you know that yesterday was my birthday?

Carelessness becomes a much more serious thing. In fact, the offense of carelessness is directly related to the value or importance of the thing that we are careless about.

We may be careless about pennies with no offense. But if we are careless with millions, it is a whole other matter. How often are we careless about the most important things of life?

How often are we careless with those who love us? And most importantly this morning, the question I want to ask you is, how often are we careless towards our God?

Our passage this morning is meant to expose to us the carelessness of our spiritual lives, to help us see that our care is so often misdirected and misspent.

[5 : 14] But most of all, it shows God's response to our carelessness. And it is a shockingly beautiful picture of love.

So let's look at our passage. We're continuing in our series in the book of Hosea, page 752 in your pew Bibles. If you want to turn with me there, we're going to read Hosea chapter 3.

Hosea chapter 3 on page 752. And the Lord said to me, Go again.

Love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.

So I bought her for 15 shekels of silver and a homer and lethic of barley. I said to her, You must dwell as mine for many days.

[6 : 19] You shall not play the whore or belong to another man. So will I also be to you. For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.

Afterwards, the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. And they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness.

In the latter days. What kind of love does God show in the face of careful infidelity? What I want you to see this morning is three things, three characteristics of this love.

The first is that God shows a relentless love that pursues us. Secondly, he shows a costly love that redeems us.

And thirdly, he shows a severe love that restores us. So let's look at these in order. The first one, God's love relentlessly pursues us.

[7 : 26] Gomer must have been quite a woman. She played the field. She gave birth to women out of wedlock. She continued on a path of sexual promiscuity.

Whether she was whimsical and frivolous or driven and determined on her path, whether she was ever regretful, we do not know. When Hosea came into her life and married her, he knew that she had a wayward heart.

And it is clear that her heart did not change. She bore Hosea a child. But remarkably, the other two children that were referred to in chapter one, there is serious question about whether they were actually his or whether they came from another man.

She's gone off again. And that's where we find ourselves in the story again in beginning of chapter three. Hosea has gone off again. Seemingly, maybe this time for good.

And one commentator suggests that Hosea might have been relieved. She's gone. And at least the daily pain of having her willful infidelity shoved into his face every day is gone.

[8 : 46] Had he not done enough for the Lord? Hadn't he obeyed God and paid the price and learned the lesson? Well, it seems not. For God comes with a new command.

Go again. Go again and love her, even though she has committed adultery. And now, even now, lies in the arms of her lover.

Go after her. Track her down. Love her back to yourself. It is a shocking command. We have said for the last two weeks, if you've been here, God loves you is one of the central messages that Hosea has.

But God seems, God's love here, it goes beyond the pale. It goes beyond any reasonable expectation. The message isn't just God loves you. It's a God still loves you in the face of persistent and bald-faced infidelity.

Hosea and his life and his relationship with Gomer is meant to picture that. He is to love her back with a relentless love that will not be turned back despite the blatant injustice, the even foolishness of his love for her.

[10 : 09] God tells Hosea to do that because, as it says in the second half of verse 1, that's exactly what I am doing. That is what my love for Israel is like.

She has become an adulteress politically, religiously. The Northern Kingdom began their existence by creating alternate sites of worship, creating golden calves, if you would believe it, to worship in two places in the Northern Kingdom because they could not get back to Jerusalem.

From the very start, they willfully chose to worship in a way that was not the way God had commanded them to. And then they brought in and incorporated the worship of the Canaanite religions around them, asherah poles, high places, pillars, pillars of the God Baal that they would bow down to in their worship.

And it all became mixed and confused. Like a woman playing the field, they played by their own rules and worshipped as they pleased.

And politically, as Assyria rose in the North and threatened their existence, they desperately ran from one political ally to the next, from one political strategy, from appeasement to resistance, to try to protect their nation.

[11:40] And they forgot their God who said, I will be your protector. And so in their religious and their political lives, they showed an appalling carelessness.

They didn't care about God at all, to worship him, to trust him. They didn't care about God and living out a covenantally faithful relationship with him.

And we see one more aspect of this theme that you've already heard much about added to. Not only did they run after idols, but they set their love on raisin cakes.

Raisin cakes. What does this mean? A raisin cake is a simple, trivial, earthly pleasure of life.

It is a frivolous thing, a passing fancy. They are the little and maybe not so little things of our life that we give our hearts to, our care to, so easily.

[12:48] And as we give our care to these things, they make us careless towards God. So what are my raisin cakes? Well, a cup of coffee, preferably from Dunkin' Donuts, regular, which if you're from the South, you don't know, it means you get cream and sugar in your regular coffee.

If you order it with cream and sugar, you get it light and sweet, which is too sweet and too creamy for me. Thank you very much. That's one of my raisin cakes. Channel flipping at the end of the day. A mid-afternoon dip into Michelle's starburst on the desk and over in the office at Trinity House. Spending too much time reading online news, ESPN, MSNBC, so that I can know exactly what's going on at any moment.

Checking my email or my text messages every five minutes just to see if someone else. These little pleasures, these raisin cakes of life take my time.

They take my attention. I find myself mentally ordering my day about when am I going to have that cup of coffee. And in the process, my relationship with God becomes marginalized.

[14:07] I allow these real but fleeting pleasures to blunt my appetite for the real satisfaction that the psalmist in Psalm 16 talks about, that at the right hand of God there are pleasures forevermore.

You may know the great quote from C.S. Lewis in the essay, *The Weight of Glory*. He says this, he says, We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us.

Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.

We are too easily pleased by our raisin cakes. And do you see what C.S. Lewis is saying? That when we set our hearts on raisin cakes, it is in fact another form of idolatry.

Because we set our desires on trivial things. And in doing so, we crowd out the glorious things that God offers to us.

[15:15] That God, his kingdom, and most centrally his love are meant to be the wellspring of our deepest joy, of our greatest pleasure, of our fullest satisfaction in life.

And he loves us like this when we are so careless towards him.

Romans 5.8. God demonstrates his love for us in this. That while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God's love reaches into our careless spiritual lives. God loves you. The greatest lover of our soul. So we must ask the question, how are we, how are you, careless towards God in your life today? What are your raisin cakes?

[16:24] God loves you with a relentless love, pursuing you even as you pursue so many other things. He pursues us with a relentless love. That's the first thing we see in verse 1.

God says, go, Hosea. Love her again. The second thing we see is in verse 2, that God's love is a costly one.

A costly love that redeems us. So as shocking as the command is in verse 1, to go and love this woman who's an adulteress, the command, what we see happen in verse 2 is even more shocking. For Hosea to fulfill this command of going to love Gomer, he has to go and purchase her. He has to pay a price to set her free.

Somehow her infidelity, her adultery has put her in a place of indebtedness. Maybe slavery, but certainly indebtedness.

[17:32] Her lover has to be paid off to release her back. She cannot be wooed and have her simply turn around and say, okay, I don't love him anymore.

I'll come back to you. A price must be paid. The text is not very detailed on this, is it?

So we need to be careful not to over-speculate. But it's clear Hosea had to buy her at a cost. His very own wife.

So that she could be his again. And what a cost is it? 15 shekels of silver plus the grain. The grain suggests that Hosea may have scraped up absolutely everything that he had.

He spared no expense. There was nothing left in the 401k. There was nothing left in the bank account. He emptied it.

[18 : 36] He scraped everything he had in order to purchase his wife back. This is love most costly.

So let's think together a little bit about how costly love can look like for us. I want to look at it perhaps through the lens of forgiveness, which is a critical aspect of this kind of love and every kind of love, I think.

Forgiveness in a very basic economic terms is a monetary debt has been incurred and to forgive it is to just overlook it.

So if I owe John \$5, he says, eh, don't worry about it. What does that mean? It means I have no more obligation to John and John is out \$5. He has absorbed the cost of the debt himself.

And, you know, \$5, it may not seem like a big thing. But what if I owe John \$500,000? And he said, don't worry about it.

[19 : 46] Now let's take it from the economic realm to the relational realm. Perhaps someone has sinned against you. Someone significant. Something significant.

Something that has cut deep. Something that hurt and maybe still hurts a lot. Something you've struggled to forgive. A slanderous word that ruined a reputation.

An unwarranted attack that left deep wounds. An aggressive violation that left you vulnerable and feeling defenseless. A betrayal of trust that dashed hopes and dreams.

What does it cost to forgive in these circumstances? It costs you taking on the pain and the hurt of the situation.

And while rejecting, inflicting that pain back on the other person. The one who caused it.

Forgiveness is not dependent upon the punishment or the restitution being made.

[20 : 52] Forgiveness means you absorb the cost of the offense in yourself. This is the true cost of forgiveness.

The only reason we understand this actually is because of what God has done for us. Because when God looks at his people, God looks at Gomer.

When God looks at Israel. When God looks at us. He extends this kind of love. A love that incurs great cost.

In God's loving act of redeeming his people. The cost that incurred was something of greater worth than anything in the whole world. It was the cost of his very own son.

1 Peter 1.18 says this. Picking up in the middle of a sentence. It says, Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers.

[21 : 56] Not with perishable things such as silver or gold. But with the precious blood of Christ. Like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

The precious blood of Christ. It was his suffering. It was his death. It was the tearing of the fabric of the Trinity. The relationship between the father and son.

Who had always loved one another. And always lived in perfect union. Now separated by the sin.

Born on the back of the son. God the father turns his face away from the son.

And rain wrath and judgment down upon his beloved. Jesus the innocent one. Bore this cost.

Out of love for us. His very love was the cost God paid. His very life was the cost God paid.

[22 : 57] To purchase us back for himself. The life of his son was the ransom price. We read earlier from Revelation.

Jesus Christ sitting on the throne. Worshipped as the lamb who is worthy to open the scrolls of judgment. Did you hear the strains? Worthy are you to open the scrolls.

Why? For you were slain. And by your blood you purchased. You ransomed. People from every tribe and tongue and nation.

You've made them a kingdom. And priests to our God. And they shall reign on earth. Friends there is no greater love.

No greater cost. Than this. God loves us so much. Not because we deserve it.

[23 : 57] But in the face of the fact that we don't at all. How ought we to respond to this kind of love? It's so easy isn't it?

Even when we sin to in our relationship with God. Shrug our shoulders. Say oops. Sorry. Maybe with some sort of version of.

I'll try to do better next time Lord. The cost of the blood of Christ ought to lay bare. The shallow insufficiency of that kind of response.

Instead to call out a response of something more. We see the depths of the cost. The depths of God's love for us in Christ. It calls to mind the words of the hymn.

When I survey the wondrous cross. On which the prince of glory died. My richest gain I count but lost. And poor contempt on all my pride.

[24 : 58] Forbid it Lord that I should boast. Save in the death of Christ my God. All the vain things that charm me most. My raisin cakes. I sacrifice them to his blood.

Were the whole realm of nature mine. That were a present far too small. Love so amazing. So divine. Demands my all.

My soul. My life. My all. My man. The very blood. My life. My love.

My love. The very blood of Christ shed. For us. And this is what frees us from our carelessness.

because we see how precious and wonderful it is. And suddenly we can't not care about it because we see what a wonderful thing it is.

[26 : 01] And so God, in his love, his costly love for us, rescues us from our careless infidelity. And this brings us then to the last three verses of our passage this morning.

And the last aspect of God's love shown to us, verses three through five, we see that God's love is severe. It's a severe love that restores us to him.

And here's the last part of the story of Gomer and Hosea, and by analogy, what God is doing with his people. It is a picture of full restoration, but with an unexpected path to get there.

Having bought back Gomer, Hosea then says, here are now the standards, which really are nothing more than a marital fidelity commitment.

It's nothing new, but it has to be restated because of her recent betrayal and infidelity. Gomer, you must be mine. You may not wander.

[27 : 04] You may not go sleep with other men. You may not play the whore. You are to dwell with me and be mine. And the final words in verse three, I don't know if they struck you as odd.

Hosea says, and so will I be to you. And it's possible that that simply just means that Hosea would be faithful to her too. But why would he even need to say that?

He's just demonstrated incredible faithfulness. I think instead Hosea is saying something more than that. Hosea is saying, as you come back and as you cease from your pursuing sexual satisfaction, so also will I be to you.

You are to come back and to be my wife, but I will not come into you as a husband and a wife. The reason I say that is because of verse four.

Verse four begins with an explanatory statement. For, God says, this is what's going to happen to the nation of Israel.

[28 : 15] Look with me again. Children of Israel shall dwell many days, just as Gomer must dwell with Hosea for many days. But Israel will dwell without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.

What does that mean? All of these things were the trappings of Israel's national identity. What it meant to be Israel, what it meant to be the people of God, were wrapped up in these things. We are a nation with a king and priests and we worship in these ways.

And God says, I'm going to take them all away for a season. These things all could have positive connotations, but in fact here, they all also have negative connotations.

The prince and the king, according to Hosea 8.4, are not the ones that God has provided, but ones that the nation has run out and made them, made by on their own. The sacrifice and the pillar and the ephod, all could be about worship in the temple, but they also can be about the worship of Baal and pagan gods.

And God says, for a while you will dwell without any of these trappings. I will strip them away from you. And as we know, that's in fact what happened.

[29 : 38] In 722, Assyria came in and Israel no longer had a king or a prince and they never again worshiped in Israel in the same way. They were deprived of things that should have been, for the most part, their national identity, their national relationship with God, just as Hosea was depriving Gomer of something that would have been a normal part of a healthy relationship between a man and a wife.

Why? Why? Why would God do this? Why would God, what is God doing through this? I think what we see here is that this is a severe mercy of God, that he wants to win Gomer's heart back and it is a process of deprivation and discipline done in love in order to win her back.

Commentator Derek Kidner says it this way, a clean break was needed, deep enough and long enough to make a new beginning possible, a pure return in all humility to the Lord himself, a renewal of the marriage that had seemed beyond repair.

You see, it was at the very point of sexual fidelity and infidelity that Gomer went so wrong. And it was at the very point of religious worship and political alliances that Israel had gone wrong. And so God says, I'm going to take away these things from you for a season. Even as I set my love on you, I'm going to take these things away so that they can be recalibrated, so that your, for Gomer, so that your sexual desires will become reoriented as you lay set behind you what you have done.

[31 : 29] And as you look ahead to a different pattern. For Israel, it's the same thing, setting behind these running to other nations and these worship of Baal.

And for a season, you won't have any of that because I'm going to take you into exile so that you will experience cleansing, purification, and a recalibration of your desires.

Some ways, this is what we do when we fast, isn't it? We set aside something that's good for a season because ultimately, what we want is not those good things, whether it be food or entertainment, but what we want ultimately is God himself.

Here, God's severe love is imposing a fast of these things. So that, verse 5, might happen. Verse 5 is another strain in the song of redemption in the book of Hosea.

Verse 5 says, there will be a time when the relationship will be restored fully. The children of Israel will return and will seek the Lord, will come trembling back to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.

[32 : 48] They will no longer run to other things, but they will run to God. They will no longer set their heart on other gods, but they will seek his goodness, knowing that is their deepest satisfaction.

They will no longer run to political alliances because they will run to David, their king, the one who will have all authority, the one who will conquer all the enemies of God.

Of course, this reminds us that this never happened before Jesus came. There was no king who sat on the throne again in Israel uniting the nations.

There was no return from exile that has this kind of restoration pictured. So as we put our Bible together, we must see that the fulfillment of this is when Jesus, the son of David, comes and says, the kingdom is at hand.

The king has come and in his love he has set himself to win us back in our carelessness, in our idolatry, in our unfaithfulness.

[34 : 07] He will pursue us relentlessly. He will pursue us at the greatest cost to himself. He will love us severely to make us ours. We may never think that the message of God's love means that life will be as easy and as carefree as possible.

We must never think that the message of God's love for us means that we will always have everything we want and we will never suffer trials. This is the same thing Nick preached last week that God's love can have this incredibly stripping, refining, painful, alluring, dynamic for he wants to strip us of all these things so that we will be his and our heart will love him more than anything else. this then is the message of Hosea 3 for us. God's relentless costly love rescues us from cheap infidelity to make us his beloved bride.

What difference does it make? we began with a 16 year old who was careless about the love of a boy who is faithful who said I can't do anything to stop his love for me his love will never go away will never fail.

Imagine instead of that imagine a 75 year old woman saying the same thing about her husband. can't do anything to make him stop loving me his love has never failed.

[35 : 57] She's known the ups and downs of life she's seen the waywardness of her own heart she's seen how prone she is to wander in her affections from her husband and his faithfulness has captured her heart she's fully his she no longer longs for anything else because she has been relentlessly pursued costly in his love for her he has pursued her and pursued her and pursued her even in the face of the worst that she could do has cost him much and as a consequence she loves him much she's not careless about his love for her but it is to her the greatest treasure in the world friends may that be us may the message of God's love for us not be something that we respond to

carelessly but that we would know his joyfully that we respond joyfully wholeheartedly because he has made us his own let's pray oh God where else can we go to find this kind of love no human being can actually love us perfectly the way you do no human being can pay the cost that you paid no one can be as relentless as you

God where else can we go nowhere Jesus you are the one you have bought us back you have made us yours Lord I pray this morning that this truth would sink deep into our heart you would fill us with joy devotion and hope we pray this in Jesus name amen