

Hosea 2:2-23

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 0 0] It's good to see you this morning. We're going to continue our sermon series in the book of Hosea, as Matt mentioned. So turn with me to Hosea chapter 2. We were in the book of Isaiah a little earlier.

If you turn back there, you can just keep going a few more books. You'll eventually get to the book of Hosea. The page number is in your bulletin if you want to just refer to the page number for the Pew Bible. So, as Matt mentioned, why are we doing this series in Hosea?

We're doing this series in Hosea because of three simple words. God loves you. And we're studying Hosea because that sentence, that idea, has the power to ignite our hearts and our lives like nothing else.

And we believe that the book of Hosea will give us a deep and rich understanding of what we mean when we talk about the love of God.

Because the fact that the love of God doesn't create a warming fire that melts away all of our other loves and desires that compete with Him is proof that we don't quite grasp it as well as we should.

[1 : 2 3] So we're looking at Hosea chapter 2 this morning. But before we jump into our sermon text, let me give just a little bit of context. Remember Hosea chapter 1. Hosea chapter 1 is basically a story, right?

God calls Hosea to be a prophet, to be his messenger. But the message that God has for Hosea to bring to his people won't be communicated with words, at least not at first.

The Lord's first direction for Hosea is actually this shocking command. He says, go marry a wife of whoredom. In other words, go get a wife, Hosea, who won't stay faithful to you, who will cheat on you repeatedly and leave you and break your heart.

And when people look at your marriage, Hosea, then they'll finally see what my relationship is like with my people. You see, Israel, the northern kingdom, had been unfaithful to God.

They had cheated on God with idols. They had strayed from Him to worship pagan deities. So God told Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman who would run after other lovers, just like Israel ran after other gods.

[2 : 3 2] And as chapter 1 progresses, we learn that Gomer, Hosea's wife, has three children. One we know for sure is actually Hosea's.

The other two, we're actually not sure. And God tells Hosea to give them very specific names, names that are about as shocking as the command to marry a faithless wife. Names like Jezreel.

No mercy. Not my people. Harsh names that spoke of God's coming judgment. Imagine Hosea showing up at the church picnic with his kids in tow.

Wanders over to the grill, where Alan's doing a great job as always. Someone comes up and says, Oh, Hosea, introduce me to your kids. This is no mercy. And this is not my people.

Because God will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel any longer, and he'll reject them as his people. You couldn't have just went with Mary or David or something like that, Hosea.

[3 : 36] But no, you see. Hosea's home life, his private life, was to be his public message. That was his call. And for all that, we've learned that chapter 1 ends with this glimmer of hope.

God promises one day that he will have mercy, and he will make them his people once more. So God one day will reverse the awful omen of those children's awful names. But what about Gomer?

What about the faithless wife? Well, we'll have to wait until chapter 3 to learn what happens between Hosea and Gomer. But in the middle of chapters 1 and 3, in the middle of this poignant story of love and betrayal, of judgment and hope, we have chapter 2.

And in chapter 2, the story becomes the sermon. Here God tells Hosea what to finally preach to the people. They've seen his messy home life.

They've been shocked and confused. Now God tells Hosea, make the message clear. God tells Hosea to plead a case with his mother.

[4 : 52] That is, with Israel considered as a whole. But you know, it's not just Israel that's meant to listen. It's for all of us, too. Because their problem is our problem.

And what God does to recapture their hearts and prove his love for them, he does for us as well.

So here's what God tells Hosea. Hosea chapter 2, verse 2. Plead with your mother. Plead. Plead.

For she's not my wife, and I'm not her husband. That she put away her whoring from her face and her adultery from between her breasts, lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst.

Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom. For their mother has played the whore. She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.

[6 : 06] Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them.

She shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then she shall say, I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now. And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her her silver and gold, which they use for bail.

Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness, and I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.

I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts, and I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, these are my wages, which my lovers have given me.

I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them. And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals, when she burned offerings to them, and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, declares the Lord.

[7 : 25] Let's pray together. God, would you speak to us powerfully this morning by your Spirit, through your Word.

Lord, our hearts are open and ready to receive, God, what it is you have to say to us. Soften our hearts and open our ears and our minds. Lord Jesus, come. Reveal yourself to us.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Now, if you went to a doctor and they didn't tell you the nature of your disease or the gravity of it, you would probably say that she or he was a very bad doctor.

Right? Just imagine, you have a terrible illness like leukemia or something that's immensely fatal, with a limited time to get the right treatment. Of course, the right thing to do and the loving thing to do would be to tell you about it immediately with as much clarity and urgency as possible.

Now, in the first five verses of our passage, two through five, we are shown both the nature and the gravity of our most fundamental spiritual problem. Hosea is telling us what's wrong with us at the most important and deep level.

[8 : 43] Now, of course, if you hang around Christians and Christianity long enough, you'll know that this root problem is identified as sin. But this idea is so misunderstood today that simply mentioning the word often tends to be not very helpful.

After all, in pop culture, labeling something sinful typically means it's something you should only eat in small quantities, right? Like a sinfully decadent chocolate cake. It's a guilty pleasure.

It's so good, we say it must be a sin. Now, of course, we're smart enough to know that that's not really what Christians mean by sin. But, you know, sometimes religious people have a somewhat faulty understanding of sin too.

Sin for them, sin for us, can sometimes just mean breaking rules. Now, don't get me wrong, there is some truth to that. The Bible does describe sin as breaking God's law. However, this understanding of sin doesn't tell the whole story.

And it can be misleading. It can mislead us into thinking that sin is just a matter of keeping or not keeping a bunch of arbitrary rules. Sin merely becomes a list of things you shouldn't do.

[9 : 49] And as long as you've done a moderately good job of keeping your nose out of trouble, well, then you're good. And you can go along your merry way. But Hosea 2 helps us to see things much more deeply.

You see, sin isn't merely breaking the rules. according to Hosea, what's really wrong with us at the most basic human level is that we all commit spiritual adultery.

We go after what Hosea calls again and again in our passage, our lovers. Five times he uses that phrase.

You see, our problem isn't merely that we do bad things. Underneath all that, our problem is that our hearts are captivated by something other than God.

Beneath your explicit sins is an inordinate love for something, for something that you think will give you what you really need. Look again at verse five.

[10 : 57] What does the mother say? I'll go after my lovers who give me my bread and water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink. Do you want to know who your lovers are?

Ask yourself questions like these. What do you think is the thing that provides your basic well-being? At the end of the day, what puts the bread and the water on the table, as it were?

Or how about this? What gives you a sense of being clothed? That's what wool and flax were for after all, clothing. Without clothes, we feel exposed and naked and embarrassed before others, right?

So what's the thing you go to so you feel okay in public, so that you feel clothed and acceptable before others? Is it your college degree?

Your athletic ability or some other talent? Is it the fact that you're married? Is it the fact that you're single? The fact that you have a great job? Here's another question.

[12 : 01] What is it that gives you delight or pleasure or happiness? What makes you your heart feel warm? What gives you a sense of fullness and abundance? That's part of what wine and oil were all about, right?

Or maybe you could ask the same question another way. What's the thing that if you lost it would make your life utterly bland and without joy? What would cast you into boredom and maybe utter despair if you didn't have it?

These kinds of questions will start revealing who your real lovers are. And there are other questions too that the idea of a lover suggests, doesn't it? What gets your heart racing? I remember when Beth and I were dating.

We were dating our senior year of college and whenever I would see her going across the campus I would sort of tune up and peek in and my heart would start beating and I would start to wonder what am I wearing? Do I look cool enough for her to come by?

Which surprisingly is what he says in verse 13. What do you adorn yourself for? As he says. And where does your mind wander to when you don't have anything else to do? After all, what does a person in love say?

[13 : 10] I can't stop thinking about you. I can't get you out of my mind. So when you're standing in the grocery store what fills your blank moments?

What fills your solitude and your quiet thoughts? Now as you answer these questions honestly you'll probably start listing things that aren't necessarily bad in themselves.

And if you're working with an understanding of sin as rule breaking then you'll probably think everything's just fine with that. Ah. But if you understand sin as spiritual adultery suddenly you realize that even good things can become lovers and replace God as the object of our affection.

You know it's not wrong to want a good career after all. But if that job becomes the source of your feeling clothed in public a feeling worthwhile and valuable and acceptable because you're such and such then your heart has been captured by it like a lover and you'll get all dressed up for it and you'll devote yourself to it and at night you'll burn your incense to it figuratively speaking and you'll go after it with abandon and in the midst of it all you'll forget God.

It will become adulterous and you will have betrayed him because he alone is supposed to determine your worth and value and your sense of acceptability before others after all.

[14 : 52] He alone is supposed to be your security and your identity and your meaning. He is supposed to be the thing that gets you up in the morning and lets you lie down at night in peace.

And we all do this. As I mentioned if we're honest we all do this. We all look to things other than God to give us all those things we just mentioned. And that just proves what God is saying in verse 4.

It kind of struck you probably and it struck me as a very harsh verse. But what Hosea is saying there what God is saying there through Hosea is that no one is without excuse. We're all guilty of committing the spiritual act of adultery.

Remember that the mother stands for all Israel so the children stand for the individual Israelites. The mother has given birth to children God is saying metaphorically who are touched by the same stain who have the same wayward heart.

But now this analogy of sin as pursuing lovers or of sin as adultery doesn't just help us understand the nature of sin and how pervasive it is among us. It also communicates importantly something of the gravity of sin.

[16 : 10] After all isn't adultery perhaps one of the most greatest personal injuries that one human can inflict on another? It's a kind of tearing of trust and intimacy that we all know should not be.

But how much greater friends that tearing of trust and intimacy when done with God. God has given us everything.

That's what verse 8 is all about when it says I gave her the grain and the wine and the oil. I lavished on her gold and silver. It's all from him. And if God has given us everything and we're constantly saying I don't want you maybe not with our mouths but with our hearts and our actions don't you see God would be perfectly within his rights to withdraw himself and end the relationship.

The beginning of verse 2 captures this gravity when God says she's not my wife and I'm not her husband. This sounds like an official statement of divorce but though God hasn't given up just yet he is functionally saying that the marriage covenant has been wrecked between himself and Israel because of their waywardness.

Because of your actions God is saying I have the right to put you away for good. And that of course would be more horrible than any of us could imagine.

[17 : 50] The imagery of verse 3 is basically God saying if you want me gone here's what will happen when I leave. You will be left naked parched like a wilderness because after all it's all for me.

So when I go what will you have left? And if that doesn't prove the gravity of our spiritual waywardness then certainly the end of 13 does.

Didn't it sting you when we read it? You went after other lovers God says and me you forgot. You know this.

There's only one thing worse than being actively rejected by someone you love. It's being ignored.

It's being forgotten. It's them acting like you don't even exist. You aren't even worth the time of my rejection.

[18 : 55] Don't you see that God is calling himself your husband in this chapter? That he's describing his relationship with us in the most intimate language he can find that will understand.

He's created you and he sustains you and he gives you every good thing you've ever experienced. Every jolt of pleasure. every spark of joy.

Every sigh of relief. Each of these moments and your very capacity to enjoy them are sheer gifts from him. And yet all the while we claim that they are the wages that I've earned from my lovers as it says in verse 12.

Friends, we are ignoring and spurning the greatest lover we've ever known. So every day that your heart chases after those other lovers, you commit the greatest offense you possibly could.

Imagine a man whose wife nursed him back to health after a debilitating disease. Imagine she spends every day of her youth at his bedside, caring for his needs, changing his bedpans, preparing his meals.

[20 : 18] And now her youth spent, her features worn, he finally regains his strength. What would we say if this man immediately took his newfound strength, owed completely to his wife, and sauntered out to find another lover and to forsake her?

Would we not think him to be worthy of the most harsh penalty imaginable? To spurn and betray the wife who had given him his life and had given him her own life?

And yet, friends, don't you see this is exactly our position before God? We owe him absolutely everything, and yet we forget him. And go running after another.

Do you see now how grave our situation truly is? And do you see why God has Hosea plead with Israel to put away her lovers, to put away her adultery?

And that's the big idea, friends. Put it away. And yet we know how hard, even impossible it is to put them away.

[21 : 40] Because just when we think we've gotten rid of one lover, another one crops up in its place. A great article that you should read this week is an article by a man named Thomas Chalmers called The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.

And in that article he says this, you know, once we outgrow our youthful infatuation with physical pleasure, right college students? You're youthfully infatuated with physical pleasure.

Once we outgrow that, and you do outgrow it, surprisingly, we only find that a midlife obsession with money and career has taken its place. And then no sooner do we overcome our tryst with our career than to discover that what really rules our heart is politics and power.

After we've made our millions, why not control the world too? So one after the other, the lovers come, and many more in and around them.

You notice it's always plural in Hosea, my lovers. Don't you see how hard it is to put them away? And now here's where Hosea's message truly begins.

[22 : 55] That was an introduction. Are you ready for the message? How will God respond to his wayward people? How will he liberate us from our lovers and capture our hearts for himself?

The passage mentions three things, each one marked with the word therefore. You have to love it when scripture is very clear for us, don't you? Therefore, and each one is fierce, and each one is shocking.

Are you ready to see how much God loves you, friends? First, verses five through seven, God will hedge up our path.

She said, I'll go after my lovers, therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I'll build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. Do you realize that God loves you enough to possibly frustrate your plans and your dreams to throw a hedge of thorns in your path so you won't reach the thing that you love?

Is it possible that being turned down from your dream job or being denied admittance to that highly sought-after graduate program could be one of God's ways of walling you off from an inordinate and self-destructive love of your career?

[24 : 18] Of course, many of us find it hard to believe that God would intentionally not give us what we want, especially if what we want doesn't clearly break one of God's commands.

And yet God wants your heart, and He wants all of it. And we see in verse 7 that God does this so that we might return to Him.

It's redemptive. The first way God responds, a hedge of thorns. The second way, related to the first, God takes back or takes away His good gifts so that we finally learn that they come from Him and Him alone.

Look again at verse 8. She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold which they used for bales. Therefore, I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness.

And then with each succeeding verse, God proceeds to take away another thing. I'll uncover, He says, and I'll put an end, and I'll lay to waste. Now, how could these fierce actions be the actions of a God of love to punish her for the feast days of Baal?

[25 : 50] One commentator that I like on the book of Hosea named Derek Kidner writes that what we see in these verses is God speeding the process of disillusion.

You see, the most unloving thing that God could do is leave us in the ignorance of verse 8. Because you see, the lovers are just that.

They are illusions. They cannot give what they promise to give. Like a specter, with each step you take forward, it will move further from your grasp. And sin tells us that we can find abundance and fullness if we follow it and give ourselves to it.

Come to me and I will give you grain and wine and oriole and you will find what your heart desires. Friends, it is a lie. And God is showing us in these verses that it is simply not so.

He is the giver of all good gifts. You see, the pagan idols of Israel's time and the idols of our hearts today are simply incapable of giving us what only God can give. But you see, in times of plenty, when things are going well, like when Hosea first started preaching, when everything is going your way, it is hard to believe that your lovers aren't giving you their wages.

[27 : 15] so it might happen that God will take things away to expose our lovers as the illusions they are.

And as one by one, we don't receive what they falsely promise to give, we are left more and more naked and parched, as verse three says.

But we are more and more unconvinced by their power. Now, of course, it must be said that not every hardship we will experience as Christians, not every deprivation that we go through is an act of God disciplining and weaning our hearts from its lovers.

In fact, perhaps not even most of the hardships we will experience will be this. But friends, are you open to the fact that when necessary, God might deprive us of temporal blessings to break the hold that certain idols have in our hearts and to win us back to himself in a deeper and truer way?

Are you willing to believe that God loves you enough to have your ultimate end and happiness in view? He loves you enough to use a stiff medicine and a severe mercy to break through and to transform your heart.

[28 : 52] What do you feel as if God has taken away from you this morning? Perhaps it's something you feel like you ought to have, something you deserve.

Friend, maybe this morning you're feeling naked, parched, and the question before all of us when we've reached that place is will we turn to God or will we curse him?

Perhaps God wants to do a deep and transformative work in your heart and as painful as it may seem, perhaps this is God's love at work toward you.

return to him. C.S. Lewis once wrote, and I think it sums up these first two points really well, he wrote this, he said, you asked for a loving God, you have one.

Not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, not the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire himself.

[30 : 11] The love that made the world persistent as the artist's love for his work, provident and venerable as a father's love for a child, inexorable exacting as love between the sexes.

To ask that God's love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God. Lewis goes on to say, because he is what he is, his love must in the nature of things be repelled by certain stains in our present character.

And because he already loves us, he must labor to make us lovable. We cannot wish, even in our better moments, that he could reconcile himself to our present impurities, or we might say our present infidelities.

So God will put a hedge in our way, and he might even pull back his good gifts. But you see, even that is not the last word.

Naked and parched, stripped and bare, God has yet one more response to his wayward wife. And this is perhaps the most fierce and surprising and shocking of them all.

[31 : 32] After all, you see the frustration and the deprivation, the hard to swallow at first, they have a certain kind of logic to it, don't they? A certain kind of poetic justice that we would unrobe ourselves for our lovers so God would take the clothing away.

It makes sense that God might take away and remove those things that cause us to keep going after our lovers. And what if we were to follow that trajectory out from verse 13? What would the next step be, do you think?

Maybe something like this, well, we have forgotten God, therefore at last God will finally forget us. That it will be the last straw. But no, you see, that's not what happens at all.

When all has been stripped away, we find that God has led us into the wilderness, not to abandon us, but to allure us.

Let me read the rest of chapter 2 for us, starting with verse 14. They went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the Lord. Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.

[32 : 51] And there I will give her vineyards and make the valley of Achor, a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me my husband, and you will no longer call me my Baal. For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more.

And I will make for them a covenant on that day, with the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens and the creepy things on the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety.

And I will betroth you to me forever. And I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.

I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord. And in that day, I will answer, declares the Lord.

[33 : 52] I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel.

And I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on no mercy. And I will say to not my people, you are my people. And he shall say, you are my God.

Do you see what's happened, friends? The wilderness goes from being a condition of judgment in verse three to being a place of encounter and hope here in verses 14 through 15.

In the wilderness, God speaks tenderly to us. That is, he speaks to our hearts. When all the noise and distraction is stripped away, he speaks. You know, the language of verses 14 through 15 are actually the language of courtship.

There we find that God's love for his wayward wife still remains. And he comes and he woos her once again.

[34 : 59] Though she had wandered into the bed of many lovers, God makes a fresh start. And he says, I'll make the valley of Achor a door of hope. Now you have to understand that Achor was a place of national shame.

The word literally means trouble. And the story is told in Joshua 7 about a man named Achan who steals, who covets, who takes some of the forbidden spoil from the city of Jericho just after they've come in triumphantly into the land.

And because Achan transgresses the covenant, God judges them. And they call the place the Valley of Achor. Achor was a reminder of their first failure in the promised land.

Achor stands for the shame that haunts our past. But here in the wilderness, when God comes in fresh love to court his beloved again, he tells you that such things will not just be forgotten, but renamed.

They'll not just be forgiven, but transformed all those black spots on your history are going to be taken up and swept up and renewed. And the Valley of Achor becomes a door of hope.

[36 : 21] And then in verses 19 through 20, we see the language of courtship giving way to language of betrothal. Betrothal language is legal, it's contractual, it's public.

The alluring, the tender speech of verses 14 through 15 becomes official and binding and permanent. I'll betroth you to me forever. And we see that this betrothal isn't just permanent, it's intimate.

You shall know the Lord, verse 20 says. But in between those two phrases, I'll betroth you to me forever and you shall know the Lord, is perhaps the best news of all.

Here God lists five attributes of his character. And he says, I will betroth you to me in each one. Now on the surface, it seems to be God simply saying that his commitment to us is as sure as his righteousness and justice and his steadfast love and his mercy and as sure as his own faithfulness.

And that indeed is great news. We have a God who is faithful. But you see, the meaning of these verses is even more stunning than that. You see, ancient practices of betrothal involved setting a proper bride price, which the suitor would come and pay to the bride's family, which would often become a gift to the bride herself.

[37 : 43] And the wording of these verses is the same kind of wording used to indicate the bride price that a suitor would pay to marry his beloved.

I will betroth you to me with righteousness and with my justice and with my faithfulness. So more than describing God's character to uphold his side of the marriage covenant, he is saying that he will offer those very things as a price.

He will pay as a gift. He will give us to us so that he might be the one who upholds our side of the covenant too. After all, God's faithfulness has never been in question.

It's been our lack of faithfulness that's been the issue, has it not? But in this new covenant that God makes in the wilderness, this new marriage, it will be different, you see.

What we so desperately need, God will provide. His righteousness is given to us as his gift. And so the covenant between us is made forever sure.

[38 : 59] Secure because it's all of his grace. In this new covenant, God gives what he requires. And this is the new covenant that Jesus Christ has come to establish.

You see, Jesus comes and pays the penalty on the cross for our unfaithfulness, for our unrighteousness. In return, he freely gives us his gift of faithfulness, his gift of righteousness.

You see, friends, Christ came to win a bride. She was a harlot, yes. She was a faithless and wayward woman, but she is still his beloved.

And he comes to win her no matter how far down she's fallen, no matter how many lovers she's courted, no matter how many encounters she's had. He's come to win her and take her for his own.

And how does he win her? By dying for her. By himself being naked and parched on a cross.

[40 : 06] I thirst, Jesus says, as he hung on the tree. He wins her by putting himself in her place so she can stand in his place.

So that united with a bond of faith, all that is his might become hers. And all that is yours, friends, will become his. You see, no lover compares to this great lover, our faithful spouse, Jesus Christ.

And in our own lives, the ability to put away our competing lovers comes finally from the alluring and betrothing and self-giving love of Christ. To the extent that we experience and internalize his love, the competing lovers will simply be forgotten.

As verse 16 puts it, as our lips speak the words, my husband, there's simply no room left for our mouths to say my Baal.

The names of the old lovers are removed and forgotten. This new name, my husband, this name of intimacy and exclusivity. This new name drives out the old.

[41 : 24] So here's the answer, friends. Here's how God liberates us from the lovers that have wooed us. Here's how we can progressively put them away.

It's not just that God exposes their powerless or strips us of any thought that they might give us what they promised, but that he comes to us in alluring love and makes us his bride once again and gives us all that we need.

So practically then, how do we take this reality of our betrothal to God and Christ, of our union with Christ, and use it to battle our prone-to-wander hearts?

What does it look like day to day? It looks like this. Say to your heart, friends, and then say to your lovers, you cannot give me what you promise to give me.

You are a dead end and a heartache. And say to your heart, I have union with the giver of every good gift who paid the price for me at infinite cost and betrothed me to himself in righteousness and in justice and in steadfast love and mercy and faithfulness.

[42 : 47] What would this would have sounded like for ancient Israel? It would have involved them looking at the Baals, which were the pagan gods around them, and saying, it's a lie.

He is no God and he is no true lover. And he could never give me the grain and the wine and the oil. And it sounds just like that for us today, friends. It's looking at the allure of whatever draws you and saying it's a lie.

It is no God and no true lover. It could never give me lasting satisfaction. It could never give me cover and approval. It could never give me lasting delight. It's no true lover because I found him.

I found the true one who's come and who's ravished my heart. Look to him and look to the future promises that he's given you.

The kingdom of God, the new creation. We see glimpses of it in the passage, verse 18, verses 22 through 23. The world set right, the grain, the wine, and the oil flourishing at the response of God's call throughout his shalom, healed creation.

[43 : 58] And the people of God, now called Jezreel, which means to sow, finally sown in the land, dwelling in the midst of God's blessing. Let me end with a couple applications, friends, and then we'll close.

Maybe this morning the reality of sin is setting in for you. Maybe you've been chasing lovers and they don't satisfy, but in contrast, you're starting to see the great love of Christ for you.

Know this morning that he extends to you his mercy and he is ready to make you his own. Even this morning, he might be alluring you and speaking tenderly to your heart.

And what you must do is answer him. That's what our passage says. Answer. Have you answered? Have you crossed the line in your heart and entrusted yourself to him?

Have you said to him, as our passage ends, you are my God? What is it that holds you back? Will you find another lover like him?

[45 : 08] One who is faithful even when you are faithless? Friend, this morning, answer him. Or maybe this morning you're in a wilderness and you've been in a wilderness and you're getting angry at God because he hasn't given you what you want and you feel like you have a right to what it is you desire.

Now, friend, I don't know. I don't know your situation. Maybe God will. Maybe God won't give you the thing that you long for. But he will give you himself.

And in that wilderness, he will give you himself in a deeper and greater degree. He will give himself to you in deeper measure and his alluring voice will come and speak tenderly to you.

After all, there are vineyards in the wilderness. There, I will give her her vineyards. Seek him there and you'll be satisfied.

Lastly, maybe you're sensing the depth of your sin and you wonder whether God could ever love you. You've got stains on your past that you don't think could ever come clean though you rub them and though you hide them and though you try.

[46 : 28] But don't you see what this passage is telling us. The great and liberating and free truth of this passage that God loves the unfaithful and he loves the dirty and the downcast and he loves the prostitute and he loves me and he loves you.

And no matter what's in your past, he can make that valley of acor a door of hope. Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, thank you for your alluring voice that calls out to us and says, Come, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Jesus, for those of us who are in the wilderness, for those of us who are feeling naked and parched, would you come and speak to us, Lord? Would you grant us the perseverance to wait on you?

And Lord, would we have the deep hope that you've betrothed us to us with your own righteousness and may that be the foundation of all of our lives moving forward.

[47 : 52] In your name we pray, Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen.