

## **The Story – Hosea**

After a break for Mother’s Day and Pentecost, we are back to our year long series of messages on the great stories of the bible. If you have been following along with us on the reading guide, then you have read the books of Hosea and Amos. We talk about these two, along with ten others, as being the minor prophets, referencing not their importance, but simply the length of the book.

The prophets were God’s voice to his people. They spoke God’s word, calling the people back to God. They reminded the people of God’s covenant, the covenant upon which they had all agreed. They spoke, indicting the people for their disobedience, reminding them of God’s faithfulness and love but warning the people of the inevitable consequences of their sins. They spoke of the destruction and exile that would come because of the people’s refusal to repent and return to God, but they also spoke of God’s promise, of a day when God would bring them back to the land. They also spoke of a coming Messiah and of a future day of the Lord. Hosea was one of God’s prophets and his story is one amazing love story.

Hosea is called to preach in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam the II. Remember at this time it is a divided kingdom, Judah in the south, Israel in the north. It was a time of prosperity in Israel, at least for some, but it was a time of spiritual and moral poverty. The prophet Amos came from the southern kingdom of Judah and spoke against Israel during this same time, pointing out their national sins, their mistreatment of the poor, their immorality and injustice. They enjoyed the blessings of God but they ignored Him, worshiping and expressing their gratitude to idols instead. They were guilty of spiritual idolatry (worshiping idols) and spiritual adultery (being unfaithful to God and to the covenant they had made with God when they entered the promised land.)

The nation of Israel was guilty of spiritual adultery because they had entered into a covenant with God, just like a man and a woman do in a marriage covenant. Once again it’s why God takes marriage and the marriage covenant so seriously. God had basically said, “I take you Israel, to be my people, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse. You will have no other gods before me, and I promise to love, honor and keep you until death do us part.” And the people said, “We, Israel, take you to be our God. We will have no other god but you. We will love, honor, obey and keep only unto you as long as we live.” That was the covenant, and Israel broke the covenant and began to serve idols and break all of God’s

commands. They were adulterers and they cheated on God! It is in that context that God speaks to Hosea and says, “I’m going to ask you to do a hard thing. Your life and ministry is going to be like a reality show lived out in front of the whole nation. You are going to get married and you and your wife are going to symbolically show the nation what is happening to Israel. Hosea, you will play the part of God and your wife will play the part of Israel, but sadly, your wife will end up treating you the way Israel is treating me. You’ll feel as bad as I feel.”

Here’s the story, with a little embellishment. Hosea, a single young man is preaching out on the street one evening when he sees a beautiful young lady listening to his sermon. She lingers after the message, Hosea strikes up a conversation with her and the next thing you know Hosea has fallen in love with this girl named Gomer. He knows she has a rough past, but he loves her in spite of it. He figures his love is strong enough for both of them. They get married and before long they have a baby boy. Everything seems to be going well for a couple of years, but then Hosea notices that Gomer has gone back to some of her old ways. She stays out late with some of her girlfriends. She doesn’t come home till the early hours of the morning and sometimes she didn’t come home at all. She says it was late and she spent the night with a girlfriend. Hosea is worried but before you know it another baby comes along, this time a girl. She doesn’t look a thing like Hosea, but Hosea loves Gomer and love covers a multitude of sins. He continues to show her love and kindness. Anything she needs or wants he gets for her. He is so kind and loving to her but she continues to pull away from her husband. Not long after the daughter is born Gomer gets pregnant again and has another son. This time she doesn’t even try to hide the fact Hosea is not the father of the child.

It all comes to a head and Gomer leaves Hosea. His friends all say, “It’s about time. Good riddance. I don’t see how you could live with her when you knew she was cheating on you.” But Hosea is heartbroken. He loved Gomer. Left at home with three children, two of which aren’t even his, Hosea continues to preach and care for his family while Gomer spins out of control. She abandons the family, but Hosea finds out where she is living, who she is living with. He pleads with her to come home, telling her to leave her lovers, repent of her adultery and just come back home but she refuses. She laughs in his face. When he learns she is out on the street, Hosea pays the rent and leaves money for food, but instead of being grateful to Hosea, she thanks her lover for taking such good care of her. Continually unfaithful, Gomer tires of this guy and moves on, going from one man to the next, using and being used.

Hosea contemplates his options. He says, “she is not my wife and I am not her husband. Not anymore. I have every right to divorce her and call it quits. I’m done with trying to convince her to come home.” He tells his kids, “Tell your mother the next time you see her I’m done.” But then he thinks again of how much he loves her. “I can cut off the money, cut off the help I’ve given her and let her see how life really is without me. Then maybe she will come to her senses and realize she was better off with me than pursuing all of these men.” Hosea the faithful husband remains faithful to his marriage vows, faithful to the covenant, hopeful she will return to him and the children, but with no other alternative, Hosea cuts off all support. He stops all contact with her and without Hosea and his help, Gomer sinks lower and lower into immorality and sin. Finally, with her life so broken and messed up, Gomer becomes a slave to a man and is to be auctioned off to pay her debts. Hosea hears about it and comes to the auction where he sees her stripped naked before the men that have gathered. Imagine the anguish in his heart as he sees his wife, the love of his life, shamed and exposed before all these wicked men.

Hosea must have been the last person Gomer thought she would see at this point in her life. She figured she had burned her last bridge. “What is Hosea doing here? Maybe he’s come to laugh at me the way I laughed at him the last time I saw him.” Instead of mocking her, Hosea purchases her for fifteen shekels of silver and a few bushels of grain, covers her nakedness and brings her home. “No more men. No more adultery. The past is in the past. You are to live with me and I will live with you.” What a guy! But how does it end? Does she stay with him? Is she done with her adultery and her affairs? Good question. We will come back to it in a bit.

Remember that Hosea and Gomer, while this is their real life story, it is also the story of God and Israel, his people. What a powerful image of the love God has for his people. God entered a covenant with them. He is married to Israel. Like a faithful husband, God provided all they needed, yet they rejected him and turned to worshipping lifeless idols they made. Imagine the pain and betrayal, the heartbreak God felt as he watched his people serving idols. God said of his people, **“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.”** Hosea 2:8 Think about this: God gave them the silver and gold which they took from God, fashioned it into an idol and said, “Here is our god” and then they took the grain, wine and oil God gave them and offered it to the idol to thank him for being so good to them. How foolish and cruel is the heart of man!

So what happens to Israel? They refused to heed God's warnings, ignored his appeal to them, just like Gomer refused to listen to Hosea's plea for her to leave her lovers and come home. They laughed at the prophet and refused God's pleading with them so finally, with a broken heart, God allows them to follow their own passions and bear the consequences of their sin. In 722 BC, while Hosea is still trying to warn them and call them to repentance, Assyria attacks and destroys the nation of Israel, enslaving the people and carrying them into exile, scattering them among the nations. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom would be lost. Two questions arise. 1) If God loved Israel so much, how could he punish them and let the nation be destroyed? 2) Will they ever be restored or are they cut off forever?

If God loved them so much, how could He allow them to be carried into exile? It's a question often raised about how could a God of love allow judgment to come to his people? It was for sure a tough love but it wouldn't be love to let them continue in their sin. It's not love that says "Live anyway you please," that's indifference. Love says, "Stop because you are destroying yourself." Indifference says "I don't care about your future." Love says, "I will punish you now in order to redeem your future." Peter Kreeft wrote, **"God is love. Wrath is how his love appears to us when we sin or rebel or run away from him. The very light that is meant to help us, appears to us as our enemy when we seek the darkness."** Peter Kreeft

God's judgement, what looks like wrath in the Old Testament, is really God's love reaching through their rebellion and sin, shining light upon them to ultimately save and redeem them from eternal destruction. God punished Israel for their sin but did he cut them off forever? No. Remember that third child of Gomer's, the other son that wasn't Hosea's? His name was Lo-Ammi which meant "not my child" or "not my people." God called it what it was, but that wasn't the end of the story. God told Hosea, **"In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people', they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" Hosea 1:10** The Lord told Hosea the day would come when Israel will once again call the Lord, "my husband." The people will repent and turn again to the Lord and the relationship will be restored. God says the day will come when, **"I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called '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.'" Hosea 2:23**

When did that happen? I think it is happening now as Jews from around the world return to the land of Israel. God is planting them in the land, but there is another day coming, another

promise to be fulfilled. God spoke through the prophet Zechariah of a day when, **“I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him.” Zechariah 12:10** God isn't finished with Israel yet. The story of Hosea tells us that. But it isn't just a story for Israel.

You see, we are in this story as well. Sadly, we are in the role of Gomer. Like Hosea called to Gomer, and like God called to Israel, God called us to himself. He loved us, but we sinned and kept on sinning. God provided for us, but we ran after other loves, other lovers. God provided for us but instead of thanking him and loving him, we thanked everything and everyone else for our grain and new wine and oil, for our silver and gold, just as Gomer and Israel did. We loved who we wanted to love and lived as we wished to live, ignoring God, ignoring the covenant we had, ignoring the fact that he loved us and we were breaking his heart.

In Hosea 11 we hear God saying, **“How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?” Hosea 11:8** Ephraim is another name for Israel. Hear the anguish? “How can I give you up?” God is not willing that any should perish the bible tells us. God isn't looking for a reason to cut you off. He calls you to himself to come home, like Hosea pleaded with Gomer. He doesn't want to give us up to ourselves, to our sin, to destruction.

God calls to us and pursues us, but like Gomer we refuse his call, we resist his love and we sink into the pits. We find ourselves enslaved to a master that intends to use and abuse us until there is nothing of us left. Here we are, standing naked in our own guilt and shame. We got here by our own choices, just as Gomer did. Here we are being auctioned off to someone else that won't love us or care for us. Then we hear a familiar voice, the voice of one who said he would never leave us nor forsake us. Maybe it's the last voice we ever thought we would hear in our circumstances. It's the voice of the one who won't give up on us, no matter how far we've run, no matter how far we've fallen, the one who will not let us go. The world casts its bid for us and hell bids high, but heaven's Love incarnate, Jesus steps up with the ultimate price. This time it's not 15 shekels of silver like Hosea paid for Gomer but the bible says in 1 Corinthians 6 we were bought with a price. A price was paid for us, to redeem us from our sin and our slavery. Peter tells us what that price was. **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” 1 Peter 1:18-19**

We sinned, but Jesus loved us and wouldn't give up on us. He knew us, he knew it all, yet he loved us. Donald Grey Barnhouse, a pastor from the middle of the last century wrote, "The pursuing love of God is the greatest wonder of the spiritual universe. We leave God in the heat of our own self-desire and run from His will because we want so much to have our own way. We get to a crossroads and look back in pride, thinking that we have outdistanced Him. Just as we are about to congratulate ourselves on our achievement of self-enthronement, we feel a touch on our arm and turn in that direction to find Him there. 'My child,' he says in great tenderness, 'I love you; and when I saw you running away from all that is good, I pursued you through a shortcut that love knows well, and awaited you here at the crossroads.' We have torn ourselves free from His grasp and rushed off again, through deepest woods and farthest swamp, and as we look back again, we are sure, this time, that we have succeeded in escaping from Him. But, once more, the touch of love is on our other sleeve and when we turn quickly we find that He is there, pleading with the eyes of love, and showing Himself once more to be the tender and faithful One, loving to the end. He will always say, 'My child, my name and nature is Love and I must act according to that which I am. So it is that I have pursued you, to tell you that when you are tired of your running and your wandering, I will be there to draw you to myself once more.'" Donald Grey Barnhouse

Does God really love us like that? Will he really be there to love me and forgive me and restore me if I call upon him? If Hosea did that for Gomer, don't you think God could do that for you?

I asked the question earlier, "How did it all work out? Did Gomer stay with Hosea this time? Did she stop running after other lovers and commit to her husband?" The book of Hosea doesn't tell us. The truth is, we are writing the ending to that story. The name Hosea is another form of the name Joshua, Yeshuah. Sounds familiar doesn't it? Hosea is a picture of Jesus, coming to redeem us and that reality play that Hosea and Gomer were in, it's still going on and now we are in it. We're in the role of Gomer and we get to write the ending to the story. Jesus says to us what Hosea said to Gomer, "You are to be mine and I will be yours." How about it? What will the ending be? What will our story be? We can write a happy ending. Let's stop our running and surrender ourselves to Jesus and to his love that will never let us go!