

"God's Redeeming Love"

Hosea 1

There's a false understanding that has been popularized over the years that the Old Testament is a book of judgment and war while the New Testament is about grace and love. Nothing could be further from the truth. The whole Bible is filled with God's love and God's justice. God is a balanced God. His delayed justice is an example of His amazing love. God is so patient and so reticent to judge that 2 Peter 3 says people have stopped believing that Jesus is even coming back because it's taken so long.

We were blessed this week with amazing summer like weather. Except for the unbelievers in the world, right? Did you see all those black rain clouds of doom over their heads while we God's people enjoyed sunshine? Of course not. God graciously sends the rain and sunshine on all as He chooses.

This morning we begin a series on the minor prophet Hosea. As a prophet Hosea's message does contain a fair amount of judgment, because God's people were not obeying Him, following the idols of their day. And yet, Hosea is mostly about the love of God. How God loves Israel so much He compares them to an adulteress spouse whom God will not let go in spite of their constant adultery. And this is portrayed in the life of Hosea himself and his adulterous wife Gomer. Since, as 2 Tim. 3:16-17 says

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So Hosea is a minor prophet. Minor does not refer to their status or doctrinal importance but simply to their size. Unlike Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Daniel who are considered the major prophets. Hosea is first because most of the minor prophets are arranged chronologically, Hosea ministering in the 8th century BC and Malachi ministers in the 5th century BC.

TIME We're given a time frame immediately as we open the text before us. We read,

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel:

The nation of Israel had a civil war after the death of Solomon and the two Southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) split from the 10 Northern tribes. The Southern kingdom kings still had Jerusalem as their capital and place of worship. All those kings were descendants of David. The northern kingdom kings were not descendants of David, nor did they want their people to worship in Jerusalem. So, Jeroboam I established a place of worship in the north (Dan) and south (Bethel) and set up two golden calves for idols. Not very smart.

Hosea's ministry would have begun late in Uzziah's reign and probably ended shortly after Hezekiah took the throne in 715 BC. He would have witnessed the Northern Kingdom going into exile in 722 BC, which is a major part of his warning message. He only mentions Jeroboam and not the other kings of the north. Most of the others had very short-ranged reigns. And all of them were evil leaders. Three of them would get assassinated. I think Jeroboam II is the only one mentioned because that gives us a good idea of the context of the northern kingdom during Hosea's ministry. Go to 2 Kings 14:24-28,

²⁴ He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. ²⁵ He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.

²⁶ The LORD had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. ²⁷ And since the LORD had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash.

²⁸ As for the other events of Jeroboam's reign, all he did, and his military achievements, including how he recovered for Israel both Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Yaudi, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

Yes, Jeroboam II did not follow God, but he did make life better for Israel in the north, as did Uzziah (who mostly followed God) in the south. So the context of the times were

CONTEXT – Economically healthy yet spiritual adultery

None of the kings of the 10 northern tribes followed the Lord. Each one did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They worshipped golden calves or Baal or Asherah, false gods of their day. This is what Hosea will attack, the spiritual adultery of the nation, who knew better. Whose God (Yahweh) led them out of Egypt and brought them into the very land whose success they were enjoying. Except, they were crediting Baal and not Yahweh for their success. Baal was the 'weather god'. If you gave him the right number of sacrifices he would supposedly send rain when you needed it and sunshine when you needed it. But God is the true God who said in Deuteronomy 28 if you obey Me I will bless you and your land but if you disobey Me I will curse the land and ultimately send you into exile. This is the consistent message of all the prophets. They pointed Israel to the covenant promises of God in Deuteronomy and said, 'Here's what God says and here's why things are not going well for you. Have you not read God's Word?

AUDIENCE – Israel, God's Covenant community (1:11)

Hosea's message will be a repeated 3-part message; there's sin you need to address and here it is. God's Word says judgement is coming if you don't repent (Deut. 28). But (Deut. 30) God will not leave you in your sinfulness; He will restore you and bring you back. And this is how God's Word to the Israelites speaks to us. We are the covenant community of God today. While the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy regarding Israel in their land don't directly apply to us, the broader principles of sin, judgement and restoration always apply to any of God's people all the time. So the Book of Hosea is God's message of love to us in that, He loves us too much to do nothing about our sin. He will discipline us if we don't listen but He will never abandon us and His plans for our future will never fail. And this recurring message speaks through three main characters in the book. First Hosea.

What can we learn from Hosea since we are also in a covenant relationship with God, through whom God wants His message to go through today?

Hosea: God's People are Sometimes required to Endure Hardship **(1:2-3a)**

Hosea was a prophet of God:

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri...

When the LORD began to speak through Hosea...

'Hosea' means 'salvation'. It's the same root word as Joshua and Jesus. God speaks through His spokespersons a message to save them. God is always 'saving' us. Salvation means deliverance. When we place our faith in God through His Son Jesus, we are saved positionally from the penalty of sin meaning, we won't suffer eternal separation from God because we chose to accept God's payment (Jesus' death) for our sins. Many people think God will accept them by their good deeds (or not as bad deeds as others). So, ultimately they think their good deeds are payment enough to cover their own sins. That doesn't work. None of us can pay for all our sins, because our deeds are sin-tainted sacrifices. Jesus' sacrifice for us was sinless. That's the only one God will accept.

However, at the moment when we accept Christ we are not saved perfectly from sin's power in our life. We have the Holy Spirit who now begins God's work in us to conform us more into the image of Jesus who has total power over sin. So, we are constantly being saved from ourselves (who still sin but as like we used) as we choose obedience over the temptations to sin by the Spirit's power. He who began a good work in us will complete it. We call this sanctification, a long word to simply say we're being saved from sin's power constantly as we yield to the Spirit and not to sin.

This is what God's message was through Hosea to Israel; stop sinning and turn back to God who alone can make better changes in your life. Yet unlike many other prophets, Hosea's message came even stronger as depicted the love of God for Israel with his wife Gomer. Hosea was asked by God to marry a harlot, a prostitute. And then have children through her.

But Hosea is obeying God; he's a prophet. Why is God making him do this hard thing? Shouldn't things go easy for God's people when they obey God? That's not the testimony of Scripture. God calls us to endure hard things in life. Also, as a word picture to the saved and unsaved around us what faith in God looks like when life isn't going well. Just before we read those verses in 2 Tim. 3:16 about God's Word Paul told Timothy these encouraging words for doing ministry:

¹⁰ You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Peter echoes the same in 1 Pet. 4:13

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

What ever happens to you on earth as a child of God is the worst it will ever get. God spares us from His judgment; eternal separation from Him in hell – but we will experience the world's judgment; harsh treatment, insults, persecution, martyrdom; none of which can separate us from the

love of God. Hosea was asked by God to marry a harlot and love her as a witness to God's continual love for His wayward people, who claim to know Him but are more interested in pursuing worldly health, wealth and status through the things the world worships. Or, in Gomer's case, the acceptance of others over God. Hosea becomes a message for us to endure the difficult situations and even do difficult things in obedience to God.

Gomer: God's love is Greater than our Sin – Repent (1:3b-9)

In spite of being in a marriage covenant, Gomer continues to break that covenant over and over again. Gomer becomes the word picture for Israel to repent of their spiritual adultery and give God first place and not the toys and joys of the world. The reason one worshiped Baal was because Baal promised you rain when you needed it and sunshine when you needed it for your crops. Why? So, you can become wealthier. Better crops mean more income. More income means a more comfortable life. This has always been the temptation for the believer; trust God to meet your needs and make you content or pursue what the world pursues so you can be happy. Contentment and happiness are not the same thing. Happiness is conditional based on circumstances. Contentment is being secure in God regardless of your circumstances.

Gomer was not content in the security of her marriage covenant with Hosea. She thought more lovers would give her happiness. God tells His people, trust Me to give you true joy. David would write in Ps. 16:11

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

The path of life is faith in the character and promises of God which God credits us as being righteous when we do. Knowing God – being in His presence continually because His Spirit dwells in us – gives us true joy now and we get to look forward to pleasures at His right hand. God pleads with His people through Gomer to repent and come back to Him.

God's People: We are to be a Living Testimony to the Grace of God, for the Glory of God (1:10-11)

God gives Gomer three children, whose names He gives to Hosea to call. These names demonstrate what God will do if Israel doesn't repent but also if they will. The names of the children take up more space than info for Gomer because the children are the theological framework for Hosea's prophecies.

First we have Jezreel, a boy. God says,

Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. ⁵In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel."

Jeroboam's grandfather Jehu was one of the better kings the Northern kingdom had. He's most known for obeying God initially by destroying Ahab and Jezebel in the valley of Jezreel but Jehu did not completely trust God. He turned away from God later on and God said He would put an end to Jehu's line which happened when Zechariah, Jeroboam's son was assassinated in a town called Ibleam which in the southern part of Jezreel (2 Kings 15:10). Jezreel is a famous place for many battles in Israel's past but also for the future too.

In time Gomer produces a second child, a girl whom God said to name 'Lo-ruhamah' which means no mercy. God explained,

Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. ⁷ Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God."

Judgment on the Northern Kingdom would happen by the hands of Assyria in 722 BC. God's mercy would be removed and Israel would fall. Judah, however, would be shown mercy for a little longer. They would fall to Babylon in 586 BC. But for now, God would have mercy on them. Which is ironic since Judah was only a little better than Israel. One can only show mercy on someone who deserves justice. God is saying, Judah is not walking with Me as they should, however, they are in a better place and I am going to spare them for some time.

Gomer has a third child, another boy whose name is to be Lo-ami. God explains,

Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.

Some scholars suggest that Lo-ami may also not have been Hosea's child but the child from one whom she committed adultery with. Yet Hosea is told to have children and love Gomer and her children as God loves wayward Israel and desires for her to come back to Him. God would temporarily send both the north and the south into exile and abandon them for a short time, but He would redeem them Himself. V. 10 continues,

Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.' ¹¹ The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.

These verses point forward even beyond Israel's return to their land in 536 BC to a future day when a future battle of Jezreel (also known as Armageddon) will separate God's enemies from Israel when the Anointed One, Jesus Himself returns and establishes Israel's kingdom on earth.

Hosea's love for his children and Gomer and the meaning of their names become a testimony to what God will do. Likewise, our families and our church family are a testimony to what God can do and will do through us if we follow Him or if we abandon Him. If our families turn their back on God over time, we will reap what we sow. This is what God was basically saying. Jeroboam, the sins you sowed in your time will one day come due and a harvest of destruction is forthcoming. God is patient. Harvesting doesn't happen in the same season as planting. It will happen when you are not expecting it. And the destruction we reap as family's and as a church if we turn our backs on God will be a testimony to our disobedience.

But even more so of our obedience. When your family chooses to follow God, God will bless. Some of you are 3rd, 4th or more generation Christian families. God is still harvesting from the spiritual seeds planted years ago. Some of us are new family fields still planting in the first generation, praying, growing, living by faith as a living testimony of God's grace (through the difficult times and good times of life) trying to glorify God with our lives.

These are the main things we will see as we go through Hosea. We are called to endure, to love those who don't love us back. Our families are called to give evidence of God's work in our lives,

preferably the blessings of obedience and not the reaping of sins sown. Whether we're enduring difficulty, enjoying blessings or struggling to obey, God's love is always there. Wanting us to return or encouraging us to keep growing in Him.

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. [Ex. 34:6-7]

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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