

This morning, I am continuing in the sermon series “The power of one life,” looking at minor Biblical characters and what we learn from them about God and our relationship with Him. Today I want to look at a woman named Gomer, who is found in the book of Hosea. Hosea was a prophet, the last prophet to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel before it fell to the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. **The role of a prophet was to be a covenant mediator.** At Mt. Sinai, God had made a covenant with Moses and Israel – I will be your God, and this is what it means to be my people. Whenever the people of God were breaking the covenant and were in danger of bringing upon themselves the curses found in the covenant, God would raise up a prophet who would speak His words of warning to the people. **Chief among God’s expectations was not to have any gods before Him, and not to make or worship any idols.** In Hosea’s time, as was the case throughout much of Israel’s history, they were guilty of worshiping foreign gods, most notably Ba’al, the Canaanite fertility god, who the Canaanites believed lived with his consort Anath. The Canaanites believed that Ba’al was responsible for giving the water and fertility to their crops. Their method of “prayer” and worship was to stimulate him to acts of fertility by having sex with the sacred shrine prostitutes. Naturally, many Israelites came to believe that they needed to honor the local god, Ba’al, in order to have a rich crop.

Perhaps you can understand why God commanded them to drive the Canaanites out of the land, lest they be a stumbling block to them.

So that is the setting. God’s people are falling into idolatry and worshiping other gods, compromising their sexual purity in the process. They are violating their covenant with God and are in danger of bringing upon themselves the curses. And into this scene, God raises up a prophet named Hosea, and gives him a unique calling.

***Hosea 1:1** - 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: ² When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD." ³ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴ Then the LORD said to Hosea, "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. ⁵ In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel." ⁶ Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, "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." ⁸ After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. ⁹ Then the LORD said, "Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God. ¹⁰ "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. ^{NIV}
Hosea 2:1 "Say of your brothers, 'My people,' and of your sisters, 'My loved one.'

God tells Hosea to marry a woman who will be unfaithful to him, and so he marries Gomer. **Why would God ask this of Hosea? I can think of a couple reasons.** First of all, God might say, as my prophet who is going to be my mouthpiece, I want you to know my heart, understand how I am feeling about my relationship with my people, so that you can prophesy with power. And secondly, your marriage is to be a picture to the people of Israel of my relationship with them. **Their worship of other gods is not just idol worship, but spiritual adultery.**

"Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."

God wants Hosea and Israel to know that their sin is not just breaking His law but breaking His heart. It is like a spouse betraying her husband's trust and prostituting herself to others.

We read in chapter 1 that Gomer has three children, and God tells Hosea to give them all significant names:

Jezreel – **God scatters**. This name is a reminder of the battle of Jezreel in 2 Kings 9:7-10:28, a particular instance of Israel's sins that stands for the whole of the nations' sins.

Lo-Ruhamah – **not shown compassion, or not loved**.

Lo-Ammi – **not my people**. A particularly stinging rebuke for a nation known as the people of God.

But even in this judgment, however, you can already hear hints of what God is going to do, that though His people are faithless, He will be faithful to them and bring them back.

In chapter 2, God gets more vivid in his imagery of what Israel has done:

² "Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts. ³ Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst. ⁴ I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery. ⁵ Their mother has been unfaithful and has **conceived them in disgrace**. She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.' ⁶ Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. ⁷ She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.' ⁸ 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**. ⁹ "Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness. ¹⁰ So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. ¹¹ I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days-- all her appointed feasts. ¹² I will ruin her vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals **will devour them**. ¹³ I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD.

Israel has gone after the Baals and refused to acknowledge that everything good they had, including the rain and their crops, was from the Lord. And so He will reject and expose them for this. **They will reap what they have sown**. Like the name of their children, Israel will be scattered, stripped of the protective love of her divine spouse, and sent away from His life-giving presence. The other gods will not be able to save her from God's discipline.

But once again, discipline and punishment will not be the last word:

¹⁴ "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵ There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the

*Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. ¹⁶ "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.' ¹⁷ I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; **no longer will their names be invoked.** ¹⁸ In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. ¹⁹ I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. ²⁰ I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will **acknowledge the LORD.** ²¹ "In that day I will respond," declares the LORD-- "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; ²² and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. ²³ 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.'"*

In this passage, there is language of **renewing** with Israel – going into the desert and betrothing himself to them again. He will woo them back. Despite their sin, there will be a new covenant, and it will be an eternal covenant. ¹⁹ *I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.* They will be loved and will be called “my people” once again.

Continuing in Hosea 3:

Hosea 3:1-5 - *The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." ² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. ³ Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I **will live with you.**" ⁴ For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. ⁵ Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.*

The sacred raisin cakes were used in Canaanite rituals. God tells Hosea to take his adulterous wife back, just as God takes His people back, despite their adulteries. And so he buys her back.

What does this mean for us?

1) God's love for us is as intense as a perfect husband's love for his wife.

God's relationship with us is not meant to be just the relationship of a boss to an employee or a king to his servant. It is a relationship of love, like the love of a husband for a wife. This is a common metaphor in the prophets.

*Isaiah 54:4-8 - Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. ⁵ For your Maker is your husband-- the LORD Almighty is his name-- the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. ⁶ The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit-- a wife who married young, only to be rejected," **says your God.** ⁷ "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. ⁸ In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer.*

*Isaiah 62:4-5 - No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. ⁵ As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a **bridegroom** rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.*

Please note that this is not the language of God with individuals, but with His collective people. What does it mean that God uses spousal language to discuss our relationship with Him? **This is the best earthly language we have to communicate God's desire that our relationship with Him be one of ultimate priority and intimacy. There is to be nothing before Him, nothing between us and Him.** Think of the groom at the altar, waiting for his bride to come down the aisle. He is captivated by her, wanting to be one with her, willing to lay down his life for her. Do you see God's attitude towards you in this way?

2) Our sin is like spiritual adultery

Therefore, our sin is not just breaking a law. It's not just offending a king or a boss. It's like a wife cheating on her husband. It is cheating on God. It is rejecting the one who loves us, who calls us His own, who promises to protect us and provide for us. We are like Gomer, rejecting the love of our husband to whore after other lovers.

James 4:4 - You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God

Your choice to return to your addiction, your decision to live for money or status, to look to them for your provision the way the Israelites looked to Ba'al to provide rain for their crops, is spiritual adultery. It is breaking the heart of God in order to chase after lovers that will never satisfy you.

3) Out of His great love for us, God pays our debt, offering us forgiveness and a new covenant

Look again at chapter 3.

The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." ² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. ³ Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you."

Picture this scene. Gomer has left Hosea and become so lost in her adultery and prostitution that she is up for public auction. She is for sale – either in slavery or put out by her pimp. She would have been naked, so people could see what they were getting. And Hosea buys her back. He covers her. He brings her home. And he tells her to come again to live with him, to no longer be a prostitute or intimate with another man. You will be mine, and I will be yours.

And then look at v. 4-5: ⁴ *For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. ⁵ Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.*

Now remember, this prophecy takes place in the 8th century. David lived and died a couple of centuries before this. So how can they seek David their king if he is dead? David is dead, but **there will be a Son of David, Jesus.** **Look at how this points to Jesus. In our sin, we have become slaves. We are reaping what we have sown. We are spiritually naked and ashamed. Imagine if your secret sins were displayed for all to see.** And Jesus lays down his life, paying the price of his own life to buy us back, covering our sin with His righteousness. Jesus lived perfectly

that covenantal love with the Father that we could not live. And then He died for our sins, to pay the penalty for our sins. And then He rose from the dead to conquer sin and death. He offers a new covenant, one that is not based on how well we keep the law, but is based on trusting in Him as our Savior. It is an eternal covenant: ¹⁹ *I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.*

Jeremiah 31:31-34 - *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

Hebrews 9:15 - *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

Yes, they came back from exile eventually, but the true fulfillment came when Jesus came and established the new covenant. In His love, He offers us forgiveness and a new covenant.

4) In Jesus, we will enjoy the spousal love of God forever.

Nothing can separate us from His love. We are protected. We are provided for. We are loved. If you are single, or your marriage is not all you wish it could be, this is good news.

We lost his love, but now we will have it forever. **Romans 8:38-39** - *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

We were not his people, but now we are His people forever. **1 Peter 2:10** - *Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

In Christ, we have the love we have been longing for, and it is ours forever. Think about the desire we have for someone to know us completely and love us. As Tim Keller said in *The Meaning of Marriage*:

“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.”

The final image is of a wedding, as we are united with our Lord forever:

Revelation 19:6-9 - *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his **bride** has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) ⁹ Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."*

Revelation 21:2 - *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a **bride** beautifully dressed for her husband.*

In the new heavens and the new earth, we will have the love, intimacy, joy, and security we have longed for in this world.

Two last thoughts:

- 1) **You may identify with Hosea.** Perhaps you have experienced unfaithfulness in your marriage. There are legitimate grounds for divorce, but let this encourage you to perhaps persevere and forgive, so that perhaps your marriage could display the forgiveness and mercy shown in God's love for us. Perhaps God is empowering you to speak with prophetic power, communicating God's heart to others

- 2) **You may identify with Gomer.** Your God loves you and in Christ offers to forgive your sin, to cover your shame, and to welcome you back into His love

God desires a love relationship with you that has the priority and intimacy of a marital relationship. Sin is spiritual adultery. Receive the forgiveness and eternal covenant found in Jesus. Let us get to know the spousal love of God, so that we might be faithful in our love for Him forever.

Let me close with the words of JI Packer:

JI Packer – “Hearts on earth may say in the course of a joyful experience, “I don’t want this ever to end.” But invariably it does. The hearts of those in heaven say, “I want this to go on forever.” And it will. There is no better news than this