

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

Hosea | Relentless Love for a Prostitute People

North Center | March 13, 2022

Today, we are looking at the love story in Hosea.

There are a number of beautiful love stories in the Bible:

- Jacob & Rachel: Jacob works for Rachel's dad for 14 years in order for her to become his wife, and the Bible says that it seemed like just a few days to him because of how much he loved her (**Gen. 29:20**).
- Ruth & Boaz: Ruth leaves her entire life behind and moves to Israel, and Boaz is willing to give up his inheritance in order to marry this foreigner with whom he has fallen in love.
- Esther & the King of Persia.
- The love story in the Song of Solomon.¹

This morning, we are going to look at what I think is one of the greatest loves stories in the entire Bible: *the story of Hosea*.

One of the most famous passages about love in the Bible (or in any book for that matter) is **1 Corinthians 13**. If you have ever attended a Christian wedding, you have almost certainly heard this passage read at some point.

Love suffers long and is kind;
Love does not envy;
Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;
Does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
Does no rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth;
Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never fails...
~ **1 Cor 13:4-8**

That is an amazing description of love.²

There is no love story between a man and a woman in the Bible that gives us a picture of this kind of love like the story of Hosea.

- What does love look like when the relationship is **harder** than you ever imagined?
- What does love look like when your **heart** feels like it has been **shattered** to pieces?
- What does love look like when you've been **wounded** or **abandoned** by the one you love?
- What does love look like after **betrayal**?

¹ See also: Adam & Eve. Isaac & Rebecca. Salmon & Rahab. David & Bathsheba. Joseph & Mary.

² It sounds very similar to the vows that many of us make on our wedding day...

“I take you...to have and to hold from this day forward;
For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health,
To love and cherish till death do us part.”

- What does it look like to love somebody who has rejected your love?

Hosea shows us what it looks like.

PRAY

For the past month, we have been looking at the stories and messages of the Major Prophets who were preaching to God's people in Judah.

- **Isaiah**: preaching to God's people in Judah *before* Babylon came
- **Jeremiah**: preaching to God's people in Judah *while* Babylon was attacking
- **Ezekiel & Daniel**: preaching to the people of Judah *after* Babylon had deported them.

Now we turn to the final section of the Old Testament which is the twelve Minor Prophets.

As we open the book of Hosea...

- First, we rewind the scene about 150 years (before God's people were taken captive)
- And then we move from the Southern Kingdom (Judah) to the Northern Kingdom (Israel)

You remember that God's people had been divided into two different kingdoms for most of their history. They were one nation during the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, but after Solomon died, God divided the nation into two separate kingdoms:

- There was the **Southern Kingdom** (often referred to as *Judah* – the dominant tribe), and the capital city of *Jerusalem*.
- And then there was the **Northern Kingdom** (often referred to as *Ephraim*³ –the dominant tribe), and their capital was *Samaria*.

Hosea is one of the few prophets that we read about who was called to preach in the Northern Kingdom. While the prophet **Isaiah** was preaching in the *South*, **Hosea** was preaching to God's people in the *North*.

In fact, the first verse in **Hosea (1:1)** is almost word-for-word identical to the first verse in Isaiah.

“The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel”
(**Hosea 1:1**).⁴

Not only are these prophets ministering at the same time, but God has also given them essentially the same message to preach to the two different kingdoms.

Message: God has covenanted Himself to His people like a husband covenants himself to his bride. But when you look at God's covenant people, they don't really look like His bride. They certainly aren't acting like His bride.

³ Hosea 5:3, 5, 11, 13

⁴ So his ministry stretched for over 30 years... just like Pastor Stan.

How is a bride supposed to act, Pastor?

Well, I'll tell you:

- She has the coffee ready for you when you wake up in the morning. Maybe a bagel.
- She cleans the house while you are at work.
- As she spends time with her friends, she's talking about how amazing her husband is and how much she adores him.
- She dresses up everyday so that she looks all fancy for her husband when he comes home.
- When he comes home, she has probably baked him a treat that he can enjoy while she rubs his tired feet.
- And she rubs his feet, she thanks him for all the hard work that he does for the family.
- After enjoying the meal that she prepared for supper, she has probably planned a fun and relaxing evening so that he's well rested for work the next day.

Kidding! Just because that's the way that Liz treats her husband doesn't mean that's how every wife is expected to act. 😊

How is a bride supposed to act?

She is supposed to act like a woman who loves her husband.

And that's not the way God's people are acting. They have rejected the love of God and have fallen in love with the world instead. Instead of acting like a wife, they are acting like a harlot. A prostitute.

“Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity,
a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters!
They have forsaken the Lord;
they have provoked to anger, the Holy One of Israel;
they have turned away backward.”

~ **Isaiah 1:4**

“How the faithful city has become a harlot...”

~ **Isaiah 1:21**

God's chosen people are living like prostitutes, and He is calling them to return to Him. He is calling them to leave their lovers and come back to Him.

While Isaiah was giving this message in the South, Hosea is preaching the exact same message to the people in the North – but with one MASSIVE difference: before Hosea tells the people what it's like for God to love a people who are continuously choosing to live like a harlot, God wants Hosea to experience what it feels like firsthand.

“When the Lord began to speak by **Hosea**, the Lord said to Hosea:
‘Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry,
For the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.’
So he went and took **Gomer** the daughter of Diblaim...”

~ **Hosea 1:2-3**

Whenever I read a story in the Bible (like the one here in Hosea), it's easy for me to get so focused on the application (how does this apply to my life) that I can forget that this is actually a true story – about real people. Yes, this story applies to me (and it applies to you), but let us not forget that it applied to Hosea & Gomer first. Yes, this story is for me, and it is for you – but first, it was for a prophet named Hosea & and prostitute named Gomer.

And I think the best way for us to see how stories like this apply to us is to first try to see the story through the eyes of those who lived it...

- What must it have been like for Hosea to walk into the red-light district in Samaria, choose a prostitute, and then marry her?
- What made him choose Gomer?
- What was going through his mind as he approached her? What did he say?
- What did she think about Hosea?
- Did she want to marry him? Did she have a choice?
- Did she trust him, or did she see him as just another male pig who planned on using her & then losing her?

We get very few details about Hosea & Gomer, but we can make several educated guesses about this scene:

1. This wasn't what Hosea wanted. He **probably** didn't grow up dreaming about marrying a prostitute.
2. This was **probably** one of the hardest things that he had ever done in his life. He is marrying a woman who has sold herself to anyone and everyone who would have her.⁵ **Most likely** none of his friends or family members approved of his decision.
3. This **probably** wasn't the life that Gomer wanted. She **probably** didn't grow up dreaming about being a prostitute. Throughout the history of the world, most of the women who end up in a life of prostitution hate it, but they stay because they can't see any way out.
4. She **probably** felt miserable. In that time, there was no lower place a woman could have been, and everybody knew it. She **probably** felt used, rejected, dirty, lonely, hopeless... Men paid to use her body to satisfy their lusts, and then when they were done using her, they walked away. She **probably** felt unloved and unlovable.

So, the day that Hosea met Gomer, neither of them were living the life they dreamed of when they were kids. But then Hosea swoops in to rescue her, and they lived happily ever after... **Not exactly!**

They get married, and she gives birth to at least three children. God tells Hosea what to name the children, and each of their names are significant.

- Jezreel (vs. 3–4) | a place of death and bloodshed (e.g., 2 Kings 10, 21)
- Lo-Ruhamah (v. 6) | not pitied, no mercy
- Lo-Ammi (vs. 8–9) | not my people

⁵ Ezekiel 16:15

Not only does God want to give His people a picture of what it is like for Him to love a continuously sinful people, but He also wants to show them what a life of sin gives birth to. Continued rebellion against God only results in:

- Death, judgement, and separation from God.

When you finish reading the first chapter, you might think that this story is heading toward a fairy tale ending: the hero rescues the girl, they get married, have children, and then we hear God giving really good news to their children:

Say to your brethren, “My people,” and to your sister, “Mercy is shown.”

~ **Hosea 2:1**

But...that’s not where the story ends. In **chapter 2**, Gomer leaves Hosea and goes back to playing the harlot.

For their mother has played the harlot;
She who conceived them has behaved shamefully.

For she said, “*I will go after my lovers...*”

~ **Hosea 2:5a**

Q. Why did she leave? Why did she abandon her husband and go back to the red-light district?

A. Because she thought that “her lovers” would satisfy her.

...**For**...I will go after my lovers,

Who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen,

My oil and my drink.”

~ **Hosea 2:5b**

She thought that if she left her husband and went chasing after her old lovers that her life would be full – that she would be satisfied and happy.

And God says, *this is what my people have been doing since the beginning of our relationship.*

Think back to the story that we have seen so far (as we’ve made our way through the OT):

- In **Gen 12:1–3** God chooses Abram and his family to be his special, chosen people, and then God tells Abram to leave his country and go to the land that God was going to show him.
 - But then a famine hit the land, and instead of trusting in God to provide for him, Abram goes running to Egypt looking for bread (**12:10**).
- In **Gen 15** God makes a covenant with Abram and promises that his descendants will be more numerable than the stars in the sky.
 - But then it was taking longer than Abram thought for him and Sarai to get pregnant, and so (instead of trusting God to fulfill His promise) they go looking for someone else to give them what they want. In **Gen 16** we read that Abram ends up sleeping with his wife’s servant girl.

- In the book of **Exodus**, we read how God rescued His people from slavery in Egypt and brought them through the Red Sea and provided for them as they journeyed through the wilderness...
 - And we read that they grumbled and doubted the whole way.
- In **Exodus 19–31** God teaches them how to love Him with all their heart, and He makes a way for His glory to dwell in the midst of His people.⁶
 - But then, as soon as God was done speaking with Moses (**31:18**), the people commissioned Aaron to make a golden calf; and then they made an altar to the golden calf and worshipped it instead of God (**Ex 32**).

And they never stopped: God continued to rescue them and provide for them and pour out His love on them (over and over and over), and they continued to leave Him. They continued looking for happiness and satisfaction everywhere else.

The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me...
They eat up the sin of My people; they set their heart on iniquity...

~ **Hosea 4:7–8**

Their drink is rebellion, they commit harlotry continually...

~ **Hosea 4:18⁷**

So when Gomer leaves Hosea and goes back to the brothel, Hosea is getting a taste of God's relationship with His harlot bride. God had promised them "*fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore*" (**Psalm 16:11**), and they traded it for the fleeting pleasures of sin.⁸

Hosea makes around 150 comments about the sins of Israel.
So what is this sin that kept pulling Israel away from God?
Answer: everything.

Read Hosea 4:2

They have broken all the commandments.

Maybe you are thinking, "Well, I'm not that bad!"

But do you know what their greatest sin was?

They didn't love God with all their heart...

Of the 150 Commands, over half are about how other things were more important to them than God.

Read Hosea 5:4

That word "know" isn't just a head word, it's a heart word.

- Adam knew his wife, and they had a baby as a result.
- It's the kind of knowing that makes a baby.

⁶ I.e., Ex 29:45–46

⁷ See also 9:1; 11:7

⁸ Heb 11:25.

- It's the most intimate, experiential, emotional, close kind of knowing.
- And they don't know God.

So, what does God do?

What does Hosea do?

- His wife has committed adultery. She's left her husband, abandoned her family, and gone back to her lovers. After everything he's done for her, she left.
- That's grounds for divorce, right?
 - Not for God.

Then the Lord said me,
 "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and committing adultery,
 Just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel,
 Who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans."

~ **Hosea 3:1**

Go back and get her, Hosea! Rescue her again & love her all over again!

Q. Why?

A. Because that's exactly the way God loves His bride. This is exactly the way that God loves you and me.

He knows all about the darkness in my heart and in your heart.

He knows all about the ways that you reject Him and look for satisfaction in the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He knows all your secrets.

He knows every single sinful thing in your life (past, present, and future)

...and He never stops chasing after you in love.

Are there **consequences** for your sin? *Oh yeah.* Is there **rejection**? *Never.*

We read about the consequences of Israel's sin throughout this entire book – in every chapter.

But we also read this...

READ Hosea 2:14–23

Go get your wife, Hosea. Bring her home. And love her all over again.

And so that's exactly what Hosea does. He goes back to brothel, and he gives everything he has (and more) to buy his bride back.

So, I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver,
 And one and one-half homers of barley.

~ **Hosea 3:2**

She didn't just go back to prostitution, but she sold herself into prostitution. She has become a female slave. Somebody owned her, and so Hosea couldn't just take her. Even though she was his wife, he had to buy her back.

I think the reason that he paid for her partly with money and partly with grain is because that was all the money he had. I think the picture we have here is a man giving everything he has for his prostitute wife.

Because that's the picture of God's love for you and me.
On the cross, Jesus gave everything He had to buy back His bride.

That's the big picture of the book of Hosea.

Before we close, here are four things about sin that I think God wants for us to see from the story of Hosea:

1. Sin is personal.

- a. When you and I choose to engage in something sinful (grumbling, worry, bitterness, lust, prayerlessness, giving God the leftovers of your resources...) it's not like a citizen disobeying the laws of the state; it's like rejecting the one who loves you.
- b. I tend to think of sin as "disobedience", but here in Hosea we see that God thinks of sin as "an affair." In that sinful moment, I am turning away from God and giving my heart to someone or something else.

2. Sin never satisfies | 4:10

- a. As you read through the book of Hosea, you see that Gomer never finds what she's looking for in the arms of her lovers.
- b. And the same is true for us: when you go looking for happiness & satisfaction away from God, you will never find what you're looking for.

3. Sin always costs more than you think it will.⁹

"My people are destroyed...
Because [they] rejected knowledge"

Sin is like a cancer that eats away at your joy and your peace and relationships.
It eats away at your time and your energy and your strength.
It eats away at your thoughts.
Until the day when your heart looks like a valley of dry bones – or a harlot in whorehouse.

⁹ Sin also turns you into a reflection of itself (9:10).

4. God knows all about your sin, and He has never stopped pursuing you with everything He has.

- If you have never trusted in Jesus Christ as your Rescuer and Redeemer...if you have never experienced the unrelenting love of God:
 - The message of Hosea is that there is a breathtaking salvation for you in Jesus.
 - Hosea's name means "salvation". It comes from the same Hebrew word as Jesus.
 - Just as Hosea came to save Gomer from her slavery as a prostitute, Jesus came to save you from your slavery to sin.
 - God has already come into the red-light district of your heart to save you from a life of shame and sin and hopelessness.
 - You don't have to live there anymore!
 - Maybe you are thinking, "God could never save me."
 - The message of Hosea is: HE CAN.
 - Maybe you're thinking, "God would never want me."
 - The message of Hosea is: HE DOES.
- And if you are a Christian, but nobody would guess that you are by the way you live.
- Maybe you have been looking for happiness and satisfaction and pleasure in the things of this world...
 - Looking for happiness in your hobbies
 - Looking for peace in your finances
 - Trying to find your identity in your job or in your friendships or social media
 - Looking to your family to give you a sense of purpose or meaning
 - Turn to the television or alcohol or parties to try to fill this sense of emptiness or loneliness or boredom that you feel in your heart...
- But as you read the story of Gomer, you can relate to her.
- You look at her and think, "I know what it's like to keep looking for happiness away from God."
 - The message of Hosea is: you can start again.
 - God is leading you back to the place where He redeemed you the first time, and He's saying, "Let's begin again."
 - His mercy is new every morning!