

Yahweh Renews His Rebellious Bride

Hosea 2:16-23

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In the Garden of Eden, God performed the very first wedding. Imagine with me what it may have been like. Adam and Eve are standing there looking at one another with wide-eyed wonder. The LORD God presiding over the ceremony in the sanctuary of the Garden He had only created seven days earlier. Everything was still fresh with a sweet aroma of newness hanging in the air.

God was the florist for the wedding. The flowers He has just made flowers were now being used to celebrate the union of Adam and Eve in holy matrimony. No florist could match what God had just created.

There was no need for candles because God had just created the sun, moon, and stars. The entire creation He had just made was going to witness the uniting of this couple in marriage.

Which means, perhaps, all of the animals that God had just created were there as well. Only recently had they been paraded before Adam in order to be named. Now they were witnesses to the very first wedding.

If you remember, Adam, in the process of naming the animals, realized there was not a helper fit for him. That was when the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall over Adam so that He could fashion the woman, Eve, out of Adam's rib. Now Adam and Eve being given to one another in marriage by their Creator.

I want to suggest that while it may have not happened exactly the way I just described, the language in Scripture is clear that Adam and Eve's marriage to one another was designed by God in order to reflect God's marriage to His people. In other words, *just as Adam and Eve were united to one another so also Adam and Eve who represented God's people were united to God as His bride and He as their Husband. Covenant marriage is the wedding photo of God's relationship to His covenant people.*

Now, consider what happened in Genesis 3. In Genesis 3, no sooner than God's people had been united to God in holy covenant; they broke their covenant vows with God. The serpent tempts Adam and Eve and they sin by eating fruit from the forbidden tree.

Wow! These first three chapters of Genesis 3 almost make it sound like that Adam and Eve committed adultery on God on their wedding night. When you think about it like this, we have to ask: *who in the world would want to be married to a bride that committed adultery on her honeymoon?*

God's covenant relationship with His people had been broken. Their relationship was severed because of their sin. Not only was the relationship between God and His people broken but it was broken for all of creation. As a result, all creation now groaned under the curse of their sin.

Think about it, the creation that just witnessed the wedding to begin all weddings now feels the effects of the sin of God's bride. Adam and Eve's sin was spiritual suicide and all creation feels the effects of sin's collateral damage.

Here is what is amazing. Although Adam and Eve broke their covenant with God, He told His adulterous bride that in the future He would renew His covenant vows with her. He promised to take her back.

Now think with me about where we left off in Hosea 2:14-15 last Sunday. Verses 14-15 give us the picture of Yahweh leading His bride, Israel, into the wilderness to renew their covenant marriage.

However, this is not a happy couple who is renewing their vows after 30 years of marital bliss. This is a Husband, the Ultimate Husband, Yahweh, renewing His commitment to His unfaithful bride whose infidelity and prostitution began in Genesis 3. Yahweh still remained faithful to His covenant vows although His bride, Israel, almost never kept hers. Israel would only be faithful to Yahweh for short periods of time. Eventually, she would go back to her infidelity and prostitution with false gods and this went on over a thousand years.

When you think about Israel as Yahweh's bride and her sin that broke covenant with God and how it severed their relationship with God and not only their relationship with God but how it subjected creation to the curse of sin, we should see sin in a whole new light. Sin is serious. Sinning against a holy God is a very serious crime.

Sin is not simply to be viewed as, *"Oh well, God will forgive me."* Instead, sin ought to be viewed as, *"Oh no! I have broken my marriage vows by my sin! I have committed adultery against my Husband! Our relationship is broken! My heart is broken because I have broken His heart. Not only that but His wrath is on me for my sin. Woe is me for I am in the hands of the Living God!"*

Friends, this is our situation apart from Christ. We have broken our covenant vows and our only hope is that Yahweh will take us back and renew our vows. This is exactly what we see happening in Hosea 2:16-23. Yahweh is about to renew His covenant vows with His unfaithful bride. Let's look at why and how Yahweh renews His bride to her covenant vows. Only ONE point this morning . . .

I. Yahweh lays down His life to renew His bride (vv. 16-20)

These verses are the plan for the covenant renewal and how it will work. It is no mere external marriage renewal. There will be no more mouthing of the vows and crossing of the fingers by the bride hoping she can keep her covenant vows this time. This time the covenant renewal will be different. This time the vows will stick because there will be a change of heart.

In vv. 16-17, not only will Israel call God her husband but she will forget the names of the Baals she has worshipped. In other words, her heart has been cleansed and so her worship has been cleansed.

To understand the change in the relationship, we need to understand the difference between the word "*Baal*" and the word "*My Husband*" in v. 16. The word *Baal* actually means *master or husband* but the word for "*My Husband*" is the Hebrew word *ish* which means *loving husband*. Yahweh was telling His people that this change was not one of mere externals. He was going to change their relationship with Him by changing their hearts. Remember Jesus said that the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart. With the change, Israel will understand that Yahweh is her loving husband and they have a love-relationship.

Verse 18, helps us to understand that the covenant renewal is not only for Israel but for all of creation. Just as all creation witnessed the marriage of God and His people in the Garden, now they will be called on to witness the renewal of the marriage.

Remember the severity of Adam's sin and how it cursed all creation. Romans 8:20-21 tell us that all creation has been groaning since Adam's sin, "*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*"

When you hear Romans 8:20-21, we hear words of hope of redemption woven into corruption that sin has brought. We hear the same words in Hosea 2:18, "*And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety.*"

Here is what we need to know about covenant renewal in Hosea 2 and Romans 8. It is part of what theologians call the *already and the not yet*.

Here is what I mean. When Jesus came and gave Himself as our sinless sacrifice on the cross by dying in our place and for our sin and then He was buried and rose from the dead on the third day, He defeated sin and death and saved His people from Hell. This is what we call *redemption*.

Do you remember how *the redemptive storyline goes*? One way to trace it is: *creation, fall, redemption, consummation*. So far, this morning we have seen *creation* and *fall*. Now in Hosea 2:16-20, we are seeing redemption and getting a taste of consummation.

The redemption God is talking about in Hosea 2:16-20 is the *redemption* that came in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The person and work of Christ ushered in *redemption* and the curse of sin has begun to be reversed. Now every crack and crevice of creation where the curse of sin had seeped into will now begin to be cleansed by the power of the gospel which is the renewal of God's covenant vows to His church.

The picture we see of covenant renewal in Hosea 2:16-23 is of both *redemption* and *consummation*. In other words, the gifts of *redemption* have not been fully *consummated* yet.

What we see in Hosea 2:18 is the picture of the fully *consummated* covenant renewal between God and His people. In that day, all creation will witness Jesus take His Bride. There will be no more war and all of God's people from all time will sit down with our beautiful Savior at the *Marriage Feast of the Lamb*.

Brothers and sisters, we need to realize we are not there yet. The Lord has given us a down payment in the gift of the Holy Spirit. We taste the gifts of the Spirit and also know what it means to have a cleansed heart by being born again although we still struggle with sin. However, our desire is to be in an intimate love relationship with God through Christ and follow our Savior in holiness. So, this means we live in the *already redeemed* but not yet *consummated*. This is what I mean by the *already but not yet*.

So, vv. 16-18, when we hear that we will call God our Loving Husband because we know we are in a love-relationship with Him. We do that right now BUT we do not see v. 18 fulfilled yet. That part of consummation has not happened. So, we already call God *My Husband* but we have not yet seen all creation redeemed. Are you tracking with me?

In vv. 19-20 we find more of the gifts we taste in the already but not yet. Listen to vv. 19-20 again, “*And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.*”

We taste these gifts because the Lord Jesus has laid down His life for His bride. The Spirit says through the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:25-27, “²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*”

First, we need to understand that *betrothal* does not mean *engaged*. In Hosea’s day, betrothal basically meant you were married. The only way to get out of betrothal was to get a divorce. So . . . basically, betrothal meant married but not fully consummated.

Second, Yahweh uses the word *betroth* three times in vv. 19-20. The use of this word is similar to Is. 6 where Isaiah says the angels cried out, “*holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.*” This means infinite holiness. So, when we hear the Lord God Almighty says to use that He will be *betroth, betroth, betrothed* to us, then He is talking about an infinite marriage that will last for all eternity.

The marriage renewal vows in vv. 19-20 are saying there is nothing that will ever break our bond of marriage. In other words, once Jesus comes and pays the price for our marriage renewal, divorce cannot touch our marriage anymore. God’s betrothal to us is *forever* (v. 19).

The betrothal in vv. 19-20 also means we will be betrothed in *righteousness*. In other words, no matter what your sin is or was, you will be completely cleansed and your heart will be made perfect.

We will be betrothed in *justice*. This justice means the perfect relationship where we are declared the perfect bride. We will be betrothed to Yahweh in steadfast love. The covenant bond is finally and fully realized in how it was meant to be as in the Garden of Eden.

We will be betrothed in *mercy* or *grace*. It is only the ocean of God’s love and mercy that came to us in Jesus that can accomplish this. Look to the cross to see how much God loved His adulterous bride. God came in Christ and reconciled us to Himself so that we may become the righteousness of God.

Finally, we will be betrothed in *faithfulness*. Let me tell you that when God ties the knot with His bride it is tied tight and there is nothing that can break it and nothing that will take our hand out of His.

For the first time in history there will be a true happy ending that ends in marital bliss and intimacy. That is what it means to *know the LORD* in v. 20. The Hebrew word *know* means physical intimacy between a husband and a wife but this is not talking about physical intimacy with God. Instead it is referring to *a deep love relationship with God*.

The applications to the passage are endless but I want to make three applications:

First, if you are not a Christian you need to know that Christ went to the cross and died in your place. He paid for your sin on that old rugged cross so that this promise can be true for you. He went through Hell so that you will not have to. Listen, I do not know what your sins are in life but you need to know that whatever they are, Christ will forgive them if you will but turn from your sin of unbelief and trust Him as your only hope of salvation. *Everything in your ugly past will be forgotten and you will be given a new start in life.* Just come to the end of yourself and give up by trusting Jesus Christ.

Second, when we consider Yahweh’s marriage to us as His people there is something to be said about our marriages. The Apostle Paul made this abundantly clear in Ephesians 5:25-33. Here is what I want to do. I want to primarily talk to the husbands for a few minutes because what we see in Hosea 2:16-20 is the role of what a husband does. Also, the bulk of Ephesians 5 is God calling husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

Brothers, what I see in this passage is how a husband wins the heart of his bride by loving her like Christ loved the church. Jesus loved His bride the church to His own death. He spent His life showing mercy, speaking the truth in love, enduring our sin, and forgiving us of our sin not grudgingly but lovingly. He nurtured His bride by serving her and loving her as He loved Himself.

Brothers, how are you doing? How are you serving your wife and laying your life down for her? Let me give you an assignment this week. Ask your wife if you are loving her as Christ loved the church. Read Ephesians 5:25-33 together and ask her if you are loving her this way. *I am not trying to cause problems in your marriage but if you are not loving your wife as Christ loved the church then you already have problems, you just have not seen them yet.* Then if you are not loving her in this way, repent and ask for God’s and her forgiveness and begin to make real changes.

I want to make my last point of application in vv. 21-23. Verses 21-23a are like the liturgy for the covenant renewal ceremony. Listen to them:

²¹ “*And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,*

*22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,
23 and I will sow her for myself in the land.”*

Yahweh answers the heavens that have been groaning under the curse of sin. Now He will *consummate* the marriage and He will pour out His blessing of renewal. He answers the heaven, then the earth answers, then the Marriage Feast of the Lamb is filled with grain, wine, and oil. Blessings are overflowing. God's people are finally and eternally planted by God Himself and will have returned to the Garden as God meant it to be in the beginning.

Taking the Lord's Supper as a church is the last point of application. The Lord's Supper is our foretaste of the *wine* and the *grain* that will be fully consummated when we eat this meal with Jesus in Heaven. It is our covenant renewal with God on this side of Heaven. The covenant renewal we celebrate this morning was made by the broken body of Jesus who laid down His life for His church. It is established by His blood.

If you are a Christian, then I hope you are a covenant member of a local church. God's people are covenant making people. We have made a covenant with God and now we covenant with one another to live life together as a local body of Christ.

In the last part of v. 23, God tell us who we are because of what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross:

*“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.’ ”*

Brothers and sisters, you need to know that the Lord's Supper is proclaiming what v. 23 says. The Lord's Supper is saying we have received mercy, we are God's people, and Yahweh is our God.