

Yahweh Pursues His Rebellious Bride

Hosea 2:2-13

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Jan. 19, 2020

Have you ever thought that God's love and grace towards you means that it does not matter if you sin because God will forgive you anyway? There is probably not one of us here who has not had that thought and have acted on it. Tim Chester says if you have never had that thought then you may have never really understood the radical nature of the gospel of grace.

So, does it matter if you sin? Hosea 2 teaches us that the answer is an emphatic—Yes! Sin is not simply breaking God's law but as we will learn in Hosea, sin is also breaking God's heart.¹ The fact is, God's love for rebellious, adulterous, sinners is so much better than we could ever imagine. His love is incomparable to any love we could ever invent or dream up.

The flip side of the coin is that, as sinners, we are much worse sinners than we could ever imagine. Our sin against God should shock us but, the problem is, often it does not. Jeremiah 2:12-13 says:

¹² *Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord,*

¹³ *for my people have committed two evils:*

they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters,

and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

The reason we forsake the Fountain of Living Waters for broken cisterns that hold no water is that we have a low view of God and His glory. The *broken cisterns* Jeremiah is talking about is other gods that the people were turning to in order to find life, meaning, contentment, and satisfaction. They were seeking all of these things in everything else except Yahweh and this was their great sin. So, God called all creation to be shocked and appalled because the people were not ashamed of their sin. Sin is breaking God's law but it also breaks God's heart because sin is our turning away from the all-satisfying fountain of life and joy—God.

So, just as Gomer had forsaken Hosea to go back to prostitution, the people of Israel and Judah had forsaken the glory of God and returned to the worship of idols which give no life, no joy, no contentment, and no hope of eternal life.

Guess what? We do the same thing every day. What we are going to see in Hosea 2 is that God will allow us to pursue our sinful ways for a season but then with a *severe mercy* and *tough love*, He aims to bring us back to Himself through faith and repentance.

I. Yahweh will allow us to pursue sin to our own destruction (Hosea 2:2-5)

² *"Plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—*

that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts;

³ *lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst."*

¹ Tim Chester, *Hosea: The Passion of God*, 51. Chester opens his study of chapter 2 with this very relevant question as to how we view our sin in relation to God.

In v. 2, God makes His plea for Israel to return through her *children*. He speaks to her and says, *“Plead with your mother.”* The word *“your”* is the individual people of the nation. *“Mother”* represents institutions like the government and system of worship and its leaders. Yahweh appeals to the individuals both faithful and unfaithful to call their leaders to enact institutional reform. God calls for a grassroots movement of the people in the nation.

Yahweh illustrates His point about the nation of Israel and its prostitution with Baal in the way Gomer dressed as a prostitute. He says, *“that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts.”* Cult prostitutes dressed seductively from head to toe. They put seductive makeup on their faces, wore seductive jewelry, and wore seductive dresses in an effort to attract men into the temples of Baal.

Verse 3 concludes Yahweh’s appeal with a warning, *“lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst.”* God was planning to punish the nation severely.

Now, in v. 3, the metaphor changes to a baby born in the wilderness. The connection is that Israel was born in the wilderness when Moses lead them from Egyptian captivity to Mt. Sinai. In other words, God was going to strip Israel of everything: no covenant relationship with God, no land of milk and honey, no promise of a hope and a future, and ultimately no people. Every covenant blessing will be taken away.

Essentially, Yahweh has given Israel a death sentence. He plans to kill Israel horribly and painfully, if the people will not repent. Failure to repent reveals they have not chosen life but have chosen death by neglect, by drought, by exposure, and by slow dehydration in the desert.²

Verses 4-5 conclude the judgment on Israel.

⁴ “Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom. ⁵ For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’”

Verses 4 and Verse 5a basically reiterate the message of Hosea 1:8 where Yahweh declares that He will show no mercy or compassion to His people for their sin. Ultimately, the national sin of Baal worship is also the sin of the individual people and will result in judgment that will come crashing down on the nation like a tidal wave that will wipe out the nation.

The last half of v. 5, identifies why they pursued the false gods. So, instead turning to Yahweh to have their needs met, they turned to the Baals to find hope and life. They were like a prostitute who turned to lovers to make money in order to buy the things she wanted and needed, Israel turned to false gods to provide the basics of life: food, water, fabric for clothes, flax for making clothes and cooking, oil for heat and trade, and finally wine for drinking. So, at the very foundation of life, the people were not looking to Yahweh to have their needs met but to Baal. Whether they ate or drank, they did everything for the glory of Baal.

Just a quick word on the worship of Baal. As we move in to Hosea 4, we will look closer at Baal worship. But for now, what I want you to see is that Baal was not only a false god but he was a practical and functional false god. They people turned to Baal to have their everyday, practical needs met. So, bottom line: They were not worshipping the Baal because it was fun but because they were anxious about having their everyday needs met.

Here is how this works for us because most of us are not lining up at the temple to worship of some false god. Now granted that does happen in the U.S. but for our discussion this morning that is not how I am going to apply it.

² George M. Schwab Sr. *ESV Expository Commentary, Vol. VII, Daniel-Malachi*, ed. Iain Dugid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, 187.

False functional gods compete for our love to the True and Living God. They compete for the control of our hearts. In that moment when worry, anxiety, heartache, pain, loss, suffering, or any kind of need comes to mind will we turn to God or to some false functional god?

The late Biblical counselor, David Powlison says:

Consider when you become anxious, preoccupied, and filled with fretful concern. Something happened—you can't get it off your mind. Something is happening now—you're consumed with it. Something will happen tomorrow—your mind turns it over and over, chewing on every possible contingency. As the sin of worry tightens its unpleasant hold on your soul, perhaps you jump for some escapist quick fix raid the icebox, watch TV, masturbate, read a novel, go shopping, drink a beer, play a game. Or perhaps you mobilize to seize control: make a string of phone calls, work all night, build a faction of supporters, clean your house, get mad.³

When these things happen in your life, where you turn to have these needs met reveal whether you are trusting in the Living God or some false functional god.

But here is the thing, God will do with us exactly what He did with Israel. He will let us go for a little while but He will not allow it to continue. He may allow us to seek to try to find relief through food or drinking alcohol. He may allow us to seek satisfaction by going shopping. He may allow us to escape into sports or pornography, or books for a little while but because He loves us, He will not allow us to continue down those dead-end roads. Eventually, all of our little functional gods or saviors lead us not to life. Instead, they lead us to destruction.

As soon as we head down those roads and begin trying to find life in false functional saviors, God begins to immediately call us back. The question is, how long will it take and what will it take for us to listen? Are we being hard hearted or stiff-necked? How long will God allow us to go before He steps in with severe discipline? That is the question.

For those of us who are not Christians, you need to know there is a death sentence hanging over your head. Romans 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin is death."* Oh, sure we are all going to die a physical death but the kind of death this verse refers to is eternal death in hell. The idols of your heart may give you temporary relief by easing your current pain and smoothing out your problems or even helping you to forget your problems for a while but it will not last. If you do not turn to Jesus they will lead you to eternity in hell. Call on the name of the Lord while there is time.

II. Yahweh will pursue us with discipline to bring us to repentance (Hosea 2:6-13)

When we come to vv. 6-13, we learn that God is going to pursue His bride with punishment. Yahweh's goal is not to be mean. He is not trying to be vindictive. God loves His bride. He wants His people to return because their love for Him has been re-awakened. The problem is, they had forgotten their first love.

So, God has a two-fold strategy to re-awaken the love of His people and cause them to willingly turn from their sin and to Him. They were going to be confined and cut-off.

God's strategy is found in the two sections of vv. 6-13. Each section begins with the word, *"Therefore."*

First, in vv. 6-8, Therefore God is going to confine them. In v. 6, Yahweh says *He will corral her with thorns.* Back in that day they didn't have barbed wire fences to corral their cows and sheep so sometimes they piled and wove large thorn bushes together to make a fence. The thorn bushes had very large and very sharp thorns and were very effective fences. If a sheep or a goat tried to escape by running through the thorn bushes the bushes would rip them open.

³ David Powlison, *X-posing Our Functional Gods by Using X-Ray Questions*, 1.

Next, the last part of v. 6, He says *He will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her path*. The animals could beat their heads against the walls all they wanted but they were not going to get through it. So, this discipline is going to be painful. God was showing them tough love for their own good and benefit in order to bring them to repentance.

Look what happens next in vv. 7-8. In order to get what she wants, Israel begins to act out. Things go from bad to worse. Instead of turning to Yahweh, she pursues her *pagan lovers, her false gods*. Israel begins to act like a spoiled child. She decided to do more and try harder but it does not work. What does a parent do when a spoiled child throws a kicking and screaming fit? Sometimes the parent has to physically restrain that child. A dad may take that child in his arms and just hug and hold him.

Then in the last part of v. 7, when the child realizes he is confined, he gives in to the parent, *“Then she shall say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.’”* Like a spoiled child who only wants what he or she wants, Israel wants to return to Yahweh, not because the people love Him but in order to get what they want. This turning is only external. After being ripped open by thorns and beating their heads against the wall, Israel then says, *“I will return to my first husband. I really don’t want to but I will.”*

Now in v. 8, it is obvious Israel did not have a heart change. Israel still did not realize that it was Yahweh that gave her all of the things she desired: the wine, the oil, the grain, flax, silver, and gold. Yahweh had given all of these things to her and yet she did not give God thanks but instead used them to worship Baal. She gave Baal thanks.

I was reminded this week of an old America’s Funniest Home video where the little girl was caught with her hand in the cookie jar. It is pretty old video so you may not remember it but Israel was like this little girl in the video. By the way, we are often the same way.

Here is what happened. The little girl climbs on the kitchen counter and begins to dig in the cookie jar for cookies. The mom knew what she was doing so she grabbed her video camera and eases into the kitchen and says, *“Sweetie, what are you doing?”* The little girl angrily snapped back, *“What are you doing in here? Go away!”* Her the mother says, *“You have chocolate on your face.”* Then the little girl softens and says, *“I love you mommy.”*

That’s us. We can’t get what we want in life. We are confined and caught in the consequences of our sin and so we limp back to God and say, *“I love you Lord. Please forgive me . . .”* We are so fickle and shallow.

However, the problem is worse than we think. We are not only confined by the destruction of sin’s consequences, we are also cut off from God.

Look at God’s second strategy in vv. 9-13. Verse 9 begins, *“Therefore, I will take back . . .”* Then He begins to list all of the good gifts He has previously mentioned: grain in its season, wine in its season, wool, and the flax. He removed their joy, times of feasting, new moon festival, Sabbath celebrations, and any other festival that brought joy and a remembrance of Yahweh. Not only were they confined, Israel was also cut off from God. It was what Isaiah had told Judah in Isaiah 59:2, *“But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”* Israel was truly under a death sentence.

The last part of v. 12 says, *“These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.”* In other words, the wages of their sin was death. They had taken all of God’s good gifts to them and they had spent it by prostituting it on false gods. Truly they had forgotten God.

When I was a youth ministry back in the 90’s, I had a young lady in my youth ministry that was one of our strong leaders. When she got into her junior year of high school she just decided to walk away from God and she did not do it quietly. She was an angry and rebellious girl. I mean she did everything she could to break her parents’ hearts and she accomplished it. They worked with her and worked with her for about a year until finally they decided to pull her out of public school. She was confined to being with her mother, reading God’s word,

and also working with a godly stay-at-home mom who would disciple her. She lost her car, her phone, her friends, school, and any other privilege you can think of that teenagers value. The family had just built a very large, very beautiful house in the country with a swimming pool and lots of land. One night the dad informed the family that they were better off when they lived in their little duplex and so he would be selling the house.

Finally, after a few months of being confined to home, cut off from her “so-called” friends, being in God’s word, being disciplined, and with her dad’s announcement of selling the home, the Lord broke through her hard heart. She went to her parents and asked for their forgiveness and told them she wanted to follow the Lord. She was sincere about her repentance. Then one night at our youth group meeting with about 90 students at our meeting she stood up in front of the whole youth ministry and asked for their forgiveness for how she had been living. She publicly apologized to her parents again and to the youth group.

Friends, sometimes the best way God can bless us is to remove from us the things we were trusting in, the things we were in love with, and break our hearts open. We call this hitting bottom. Have you ever been there? I have?

Here is what happens in life. When we are rocking along with outward prosperity and God is calling us to repent and return to Him, we misunderstand what He is saying. We think because we are outwardly prosperous that God must be okay with us because He is blessing us. You might even secretly think, *“I don’t really need God to help me in life. I can do it on my own.”* We become confident in our own righteousness. Our own abilities.

Then God pulls the rug out from under our lives and we realize we have been asking the wrong question. Or as the old business analogy goes, we have had the ladder leaning against the wrong wall. Our outward prosperity simply masked our emptiness. Our attempts at morality gives way to our inner rottenness and the filthy wretchedness of worshipping false functional gods.

Perhaps the biggest blessing God can give you is to strip you of all your comforts and basic necessities. If God lays your life bare and you find Jesus and live in poverty for the years you have left on this earth that is better than gaining the whole world and spending eternity in Hell. Being laid bare by God should cause us to ask God what He is doing and what He wants.

However, don’t hear what I’m not saying. The fact is the righteous suffer just like the unrighteous. Sometimes suffering is just part of God’s plan. So, when God does strip your life bare and lays you flat, the question you need to ask is what God’s purposes are? Perhaps you need to repent of sin and return to Jesus or perhaps you need to learn perseverance and your suffering is for some other purpose.

Regardless of why God is doing what He is doing, your suffering is a grace and a blessing. It may not feel like it at the time. Trust me I know. I have been through it and I am sure I have much more to go through. However, anytime suffering comes into your life and for whatever purpose, the one purpose is always to turn to Jesus and holdfast to Him by faith.

III. Yahweh pursued us with an everlasting love to His own destruction (Hosea 2:14-15)

¹⁴ *“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵ And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.”*

Our final section also begins with the word, *“Therefore.”* Remember I said at the beginning of this message that sin is not simply breaking God’s laws but also breaking God’s heart. But, when we break God’s heart He does not go to His bedroom or over in the corner and cry. No! Because God loves His people He begins to

draw them back to Himself. Verse 14 says He will *allure* and He will *speak tenderly* to His sinful people. Verse 15 says He will open a door of hope in order to win back His bride.

So, think with me for a moment. Imagine a husband realizes his marriage is in trouble. He knows his marriage relationship is beyond strained and almost completely broken. He wants to rekindle the relationship so in a last ditch effort, he takes his wife back to where they first fell in love. He hopes that by doing this the old feelings will be reignited and the flame of love rekindled.⁴

This is what Yahweh is doing in vv. 14-15. God's goal is not to avenge His wife's adulteries but to win her love back to Himself. So, He strips His people of everything that they have fallen in love with and takes them back to the wilderness where it was just them and God.

In the wilderness, at Mt. Sinai, God through Moses established His covenant with His people. That was where it began. Then as He led them through the wilderness there was no doubt that God provided for them. The desert was a place of training and testing. I like what Tim Chester says, "*The wilderness was the place where God got Egypt out of His people's blood, as it were.*"⁵

In the desert, there were no fertility gods to distract the people. The desert, by definition, is an unfertile place but Yahweh provided for His people in remarkable ways. Exodus and Numbers tell us He provided bread from heaven, water from rocks, and quail from the wilderness. God was going to take them back to the place where it all began, get the idols out of their hearts, and remind them of their first love.

Verse 15 continues the imagery of covenant renewal when Yahweh says, "*And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.*" God will restore Israel's fruitfulness and open a door of hope in the place where there was trouble.

The names of the places in the Old Testament had meaning. The *Valley of Achor* was a reference to Joshua 6-7. In Joshua 6, Yahweh told Joshua that at the battle of Jericho, Israel was supposed to devote everything to destruction. The people were not supposed to take anything except the silver and gold that they collected and even that was to be placed in the Lord's treasury. No one was to take anything for themselves. Usually after a victory in battle the soldiers and the people would collect the spoils of war for themselves. When the people left Egypt, the Egyptians gave the Israelites all kinds of treasure. It was like they were giving them spoils of war.

However, Jericho was to be an offering of the first-fruits to God. The spoils of war were to be dedicated to Yahweh. However, a man named *Achan* secretly stole some silver and gold and buried it in his tent. Then when Israel went to battle with Ai, they were routed. Joshua asked Yahweh why this happened and He told him someone had stole from Him. Eventually, they discovered it was *Achan* and he and his whole family were executed and their bodies burned for their sin. Then the people piled rocks over their remains and Joshua told them that the place will be known as the *Valley of Achor* because of the trouble that *Achan* brought on the nation.

Like *Achan*, Israel had coveted the gifts of God. They loved the gifts and not the Giver of the gifts. They buried their love for them deep in their hearts. Also, like *Achan*, Israel was about to be defeated and judged for her sin.

Achor means *trouble* and so the *Valley of Achor* means the *Valley of Trouble*. Israel was going to pass through the *Valley of Trouble* again and be purged with the fires of judgment. Just as the nation passed through the *Valley of Achor* into the *Promised Land* so this time Israel at the end of the *Valley of Trouble* there would be a

⁴ Tim Chester, *Hosea: The Passion of God*, 68.

⁵ *Ibid*, 69.

door of hope. Sure, Assyria would destroy Israel but that would not be the end. Just as Hosea 1 ended with Israel being renewed to the people of God so also a remnant would return.

So, here is the door of hope. Jesus Christ is the True People of God. At the cross, Christ went through the *Valley of Trouble* for us when He was made sin for us. We had taken the gifts of God and used them for our own selfish, covetous purposes. We took trees and hewn them into a cross. We took iron and fashioned them into hammers and nails. Then by our own sin we nailed Jesus to the cross with the very gifts He gave us and on the cross, Jesus was the representative of the people of God. On the cross, Jesus was utterly defeated. He died our death on the cross but that was not the end. On the third day, the *Valley of Achor* became a *door of hope*. Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus' death was our death and His resurrection is our resurrection.⁶ Tim Keller, in his book *Reason for God*, says, "*Jesus is the only Lord who, if you receive him, will fulfill you completely, and, if you fail him, will forgive you eternally.*" Now that is good news.

I remember in the 70's and 80's (even into the 90's) evangelists and pastors used to call people to rededicate their lives to the Lord. They would call people to the front during the invitation. Then when people would keep rededicating their lives to the Lord, preachers would say some of you have rededicated until your "rededicator" is broken. The idea is that something is wrong with you if you need to keep rededicating your life to Christ. They thought Christians could get to this place where they never have to repent and renew their relationship with Christ.

This is such bad theology. It is a bad understanding of Scripture. We never get to the place where we do not need to rededicate our lives to the Lord. That is what we do every Sunday as a congregation. We call this living a life of repentance. The great Reformer, Martin Luther said *that the Christian life is a life of repentance*.

So, yes, you and I need to repent and believe every Sunday. But that is not enough. The question is: are you repenting and believing the gospel every moment of every day of your life? A daily, moment by moment, life of rededication is a beautiful life. It means you are listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit who speaks to you the alluring, tender, word of God. He reminds you that He has opened a door of Hope for you in Christ. I have good news for you as you wrestle with sin and sometimes you have victory and sometimes you don't, you will never break your rededicator.

⁶ Ibid, 70-71.