

The Incomparable Love of God

Hosea 1:1-2:1

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How do you live in an age of great wealth and prosperity? If you do not have great wealth and prosperity, how do you live in a culture that is certainly preoccupied with the acquisition of wealth and prosperity? How do you live in an age where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? How do you live in an age where technology is advancing faster than you are able to gain wisdom to manage it? How do you live in an age where people are overly confident in what the future holds? How do you live in an age where it is okay to be spiritual and have faith, as long as it is kept private and never shared? The real question is, how do you live in a secular age where people pretend there is no God? How do you live in an age where politics is so tribal and so full of infighting because it's aim is to gain power and never relinquish it? How do you live in an age where the corruption of religious leaders hits the headlines almost every week?

Now you may be wondering why I am asking these contemporary questions as we begin to study the message of an 8th century BC prophet. The fact is, while I just described our cultural context it was also Hosea's.

Hosea ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel, aka: Samaria or Ephraim. These were the problems he dealt with as a prophet. However, the people were not wrestling with the questions about how to obey God, they had actually already walked away from their covenant relationship with God. So, it was in this cultural context that God called Hosea to preach repentance. Sounds like a typical calling for a prophet but it was anything but typical.

Hosea's life and ministry was a hard one. We might even say it was an R-rated one. Let me give a word of caution to parents of small children. There will be some words many young children will not understand. We will even encounter some vulgar words in this book. There is no way to sanitize the language. So, you will want to explain to your children what they are hearing and reading in Hosea and the significance of the message.

The fact is, the Bible doesn't soft peddle hard issues. It does not beat around the bush. It gets straight to the point. Gets right in our face and confronts us with the truth.

Hosea's life, ministry, and message is a classic example. Yahweh called Hosea to marry a prostitute, have children with her; allow her to leave him to go back into prostitution; then take her back. Actually, he had to buy her back. Yahweh then tells us we are Hosea's adulterous wife and will receive the judgment of the names given to Hosea's children.

So, let me introduce you to Hosea by digging into the text and context in which he lived. First of all, we do not really know much more about Hosea's background than is mentioned in Hosea 1:1. He was the son of *Beeri*.

Hosea's name means *salvation*. *Hosea* is actually the shortened version of *Joshua*. So, here is how this works, my name is *Michael* but some people call me *Mike*. But in Hebrew *Joshua* was shortened to *Hosea*. Today *Joshua* is shortened to *Josh*. *Joshua* is also the Hebrew version of *Jesus*. *Jesus* was probably called *Joshua* and perhaps even *Hosea*.

From the beginning of this book we learn that names have very important meanings. They always do in Hebrew culture but here it is particularly significant. The connection of *Hosea's name* to *Jesus* is no accident. *Hosea* is the prophet that is preaching about the *incomparable, saving love of God for His unfaithful bride*. Who does that remind you of—us! This was what Jesus did for us.

Hosea was a prophet primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel: aka: Samaria or Ephraim. While his message was for Israel, it applied to both kingdoms because both kingdoms represent all of God's covenant people. While there were some differences in the message, in all of the prophets the heart of all of their preaching was to call God's people back to covenant faithfulness. They all preached and applied the message of Deuteronomy given by God through Moses. For example, v. 1 says the *word of the LORD came to Hosea*. Verse 1 uses God's covenant name, Yahweh, and that sets the tone for the whole prophecy of Hosea.

Verse 1 also tells us that *the word of the LORD came to Hosea 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*. The ancients dated events according to who was king at that time. The four kings of Judah that are mentioned give us a span of about one hundred years. Most likely Hosea began his ministry late in Uzziah's reign, which ended in 740BC and his ministry ended at the beginning of Hezekiah's reign in 729BC. Verse 1 mentions his ministry was also during Jeroboam, son of Joash's reign. This is Jeroboam II, king of Israel. This puts Hosea's ministry at the end of the 8th century BC with it lasting somewhere between 25-30 years. Hosea's contemporaries would have been the prophets *Isaiah, Amos, and Micah*.

The structure of the book is complicated. It seems like no two scholars agree on a detailed breakdown of the book. However, most all agree there are two major sections to Hosea's prophecy: Chapters 1-3 deal with Hosea's marriage to his adulterous wife, Gomer, and chapters 4-14 transition to Yahweh and His adulterous wife, Israel.

What are we going to see in Hosea? God called Hosea to marry a prostitute and he married a woman named Gomer. Hosea's life and ministry are a picture of God's covenant marriage to the people of Israel (and Judah). Gomer bore Hosea children who represented God's judgment on the people. Then Gomer left Hosea and went back to prostitution but God called Hosea to buy back his wife and remain faithful to her.

When you read this book you may wonder how God could call Hosea to marry a prostitute? There is no doubt this is a hard calling even for a prophet but every calling was hard on the prophets. The prophets never just preached and were absent from daily life and culture. It is a pagan idea that spiritual leaders holed up in some secluded area separated from daily life.

God's prophets were unique and reflected Christ who is the Ultimate Prophet. Jesus got in the trenches with His people. Then He died on the cross for their sins and finally He was raised from the dead to purchase eternal life for His people who are spiritually adulterous. Jesus' life was the consummate involvement in everyday, ordinary life.

The book of Hosea teaches us that God disciplines His people for their sin but He does not break his covenant promise to save them even after they break their promise to Him. It teaches us that God keeps His covenant to His people even when it is at great cost to Himself. It teaches us that God loves us with an *incomparable love* and that is displayed through Jesus Christ death on the cross and by His resurrection. It teaches us that God's love for us is so much better than you can ever imagine.

I. God choses a painful means for the salvation for His people (v. 2)

“When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom¹ and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”

The beginning of v. 2 starts off pretty good. It sounds like a typical call of God on the life of a prophet. Yahweh speaks and the prophet is supposed to listen and obey and proclaim that message to His people.

However, things get strange very quickly. Yahweh calls Hosea to marry a prostitute and not just any prostitute but a woman who is steeped in prostitution. Three times in one sentence God uses the word *whoredom*. *Whoredom* is a word that means more than just prostitution. He was to marry a woman who was steeped in prostitution. It was her operating system. It was where she was most comfortable.

Why would Hosea obey this hard command? Yahweh gave His prophets His word and God’s word is supreme. It is no small thing that God’s word came to Hosea. Hosea loved and cherished God’s word. Hosea knew his obedience to God’s word was for His good, His people’s good, and for God’s glory.

So, Hosea’s marriage to a prostitute was in order to dramatize Yahweh’s dilemma with His people. Israel had played the whore and abandoned God for idols. And so, by their sin, Israel had become the harlot. Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was the drama of Yahweh’s marriage to Israel.

So, let’s just be clear, while Hosea marrying a prostitute was a hard calling the bottom line is, we do not get to determine how God will save us. Yahweh is the One who sets the parameters and means for our salvation. The fact is this is the way God set it up and this is the way God chose to save us.

We may not understand why God set up our salvation to work this way but He did and this is good news. Romans 5:8 says, “. . . *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”

The fact that we need saving and so, if there is good news, this must mean there is some bad news. Let’s examine the bad news in vv. 3-9.

II. Those who forsake the promise of God find only *bloodshed* (vv. 3-5)

“So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴And the LORD said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. ⁵And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

Hosea obeyed the word of the LORD and he took Gomer, who was most likely a temple prostitute, to be his wife. Then we get nine months of time in the second half of the verse. She bore him a son and just like Hosea’s name is no accident, the name of his first-born son is no accident. The LORD told him to name him *Jezreel*.

Now if you have done your homework this week you will recognize the name *Jezreel* from first and second Kings. *Jezreel* served as the winter capital for Israel’s kings. Jezreel is most identified with where Jehu killed King Ahab of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah. Jehu then had Ahab’s wife, Queen Jezebel² thrown out the widow of the tower where she was hiding. Then Jehu had Ahab’s 70 sons brought to him in Jezreel and

¹ **Whoredom:** a person who practices prostitution; unfaithful; spiritually unfaithful because they practice idolatry.

² The name Jezebel is synonymous with wickedness.

had them killed and their heads put on display. The name *Jezreel* became synonymous with *bloodshed*. So, when bloodshed and judgment occurred in Israel the Twitter post would have been: “#jezreel”.

Before you think Jehu was a good guy who became king, he was not. In the beginning, Jehu opposed worship of Baal and worked to remove the pagan religion but then he went back to worshipping Baal. He began to erect pagan temples and led the people into sin. His reign would meet the same bloody end because of his unfaithfulness to Yahweh.

So, in v. 5, Yahweh says Jehu and all of Israel will be judged for their idolatry and again it will happen in the *Valley of Jezreel*. The place that was known for *bloodshed* will once again be known for *bloodshed*. So, to drive Yahweh’s point home, He had Hosea name his firstborn *bloodshed*. This child’s name preached a sermon on judgment. Think about it, anytime anyone said or heard said Hosea’s son’s name—*Jezreel*—they were reminded of the coming judgment. And not only were they reminded of the coming judgment, they were reminded of *the place of the coming judgment*. Judgment had a name and a place and it was on their very lips and coming out of their own mouths.

Friends, this was not only the verdict for Israel’s sin but it is the judgment of all of our sin. Hebrews 9:22 says, “. . . *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*” Someone is going to have to pay for sin and it will be paid for by the shedding of blood.

III. Those who forsake the promise of God find *no mercy* (vv. 6-7) [still looking at the bad news]

“She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, “Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. ⁷ But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”

The names of Hosea’s children seem to go from bad to worse and we are only on the second one. Again, we have nine months in one verse. This time Gomer give birth to a daughter and Hosea names her *Lo-Ruhamah*. “Lo” is the Hebrew word for “no” or “not.” *Ruhamah* describes tender feelings of compassion for a child or brother/sister. It is often translated *love or mercy*. The ESV translates the daughter’s name *No-Mercy*.

I have heard of girls named Mercy but never No-Mercy. We have Mercy Hospital in Des Moines, which is a good hospital but I don’t think I would want to check in at No-Mercy hospital.

Essentially what we see in v. 6 is that Yahweh’s patience had run out. So, while Yahweh is slow to anger and long suffering, His patience will come to an end and it had come to an end with Israel.

Yet, v. 7, says He will show mercy to Judah. It may seem strange that Yahweh would show mercy to Judah when they had not been much better. However, the bottom line is that Judah is the nation through which the promise of salvation was going to come. Yahweh would preserve them because of David and the promise made to him. Make time this week to read 2 Kings 18-19. In these chapters you will learn about how Yahweh delivered Judah from Sennacherib and the Assyrian army by His word and not by the sword.

If there is no mercy for those who forsake God’s promise, how can we find any hope of salvation? The only way to understand why Yahweh would save anyone is to look to the cross. There is a time coming when Yahweh will execute judgment without mercy and mercy without judgment. Those who receive mercy without judgment are the ones who have trusted in the shed blood and resurrection of the True Hosea, Jesus Christ. Those who receive judgment without mercy are the ones who reject the shed blood of the True Hosea, Jesus Christ. Those who reject Christ will be in the ultimate Valley of Jezreel when Jesus returns.

IV. Those who forsake the promise of God are *disowned* (vv. 8-9)

“When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹And the LORD said, ‘Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.’”

The name of Hosea’s third and final child brings full circle the cycle of judgment. First is *bloodshed*, then there is *no mercy*, and the final result of judgment is that Israel is *not my people or Lo-ammi*. In other words, Israel is no longer the people of God. They are no longer in covenant with Him. It seems He has divorced them.

Judgment has now worked God’s promise to God’s people in reverse. This is what sin does. It destroys, it corrupts, it kills, and it has now severed Israel’s relationship with God. Instead of Yahweh making a promise of blessing He has promised judgment. Instead of Him setting His love on Israel, He has removed His love and now instead of Him saying, *“I am your God and you are My people.”* He now says I am not your God and you are not My people.

This is Hosea’s version of Romans 1 where the Apostle Paul basically says *if you will not say to God “Your will be done in my life”* then God will eventually say to you, *“Your will be done.”* He will turn you over to your own sin and its devastation.

Think of it this way. Imagine a father and child walking across a busy intersection and the child stopping in the middle of the road and saying. I will not go with you. The father pleads with the child to come and promises safety on the other side but the child is stubborn. Then the father says to the child. Okay, have it your way, I am not your father and you are not my child anyway. Then the child is flattened by a truck.

My illustration may sound harsh to you but that was what Israel did to God. They eventually stopped responding to His warnings so He left them to their own devices and their own pagan gods. Assyria came in a few years later and flattened Israel. They wiped the capital city of Samaria off the map. Then Assyria took some of the people off in bondage and they brought in their own people to intermarry with the Jews and that is where the Samaritans came from. They were half-breeds. Half-Jew and half of some other nationality like Assyrian.

Let’s apply vv. 2-9. Hosea’s life and ministry remind us that there is an ultimate judgment coming. Assyria was a drop in the bucket compared to eternity in Hell. Hosea reminds that there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. This means if we miss the Ultimate Hosea then we will be the ones to pay for our own sin and there will be no mercy for those who are not God’s people.

We will be taking the Lord’s Supper this morning and the Lord’s Supper reminds us that Jesus will return to take His people home with Him. For those who are hard hearted and stubbornly reject this great salvation in Christ, they will be left alone standing in the middle of the street, so to speak. Christ calls to you to come to Him so He can lead you to safety. He calls you to find satisfaction in Him alone. Do not wait. Let today be the day of salvation for you.

V. Good news! God keeps His promises even to those who can’t keep theirs (Hosea 1:10-2:1)

“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.” ¹¹And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. [Hosea 2:1] Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.”

When we get to these last three verses there is a shift. The narrative firmly shifts from Hosea, his marriage, and his children to Yahweh and the restoration of His covenant relationship with His people. Throughout our study of Hosea, we will regularly find this shift in the narrative.

We are made to see and understand Yahweh's dilemma with His people through Hosea's life and ministry. Yahweh is angry and grieved over the unfaithfulness of His people yet, He loves them. Even in their sin, Yahweh has tender compassion on His chosen people. Even though they have broken covenant with Him, He intends to keep His covenant with them. This is what we find in our last three verses.

In these last three verses, Yahweh completely reverses the curse on His people. It is not that everything He just said won't happen, it will and it did. Yet, God is going to bring His people through it and restore them to covenant relationship with Him. Yahweh reverses the curse in five ways in these last three verses.

First: A restoration of the people of God. Verse 10a says: "*Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered.*" This is the restoration of the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 13:16. This is a very old promise made by God and God always makes good on His promises.

Second: A renewal of the covenant. Verse 10b says: "*And in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'*" Covenant renewal is a very important part of our relationship with Christ. This morning we will be practicing covenant renewal by taking the Lord's Supper. We will remind ourselves that we belong to God through the breaking of the body of God's One and only Son on the cross and the shedding of His blood established the covenant and purchased the forgiveness of our sin. There is no better application to this sermon than the Lord's Supper. If you are a believer, then take hope, no matter what the world throws at you, you belong to the Sovereign King.

Third is the reconciliation of divisions. Verse 11a says, "*And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together.*" Again, the Lord's Supper that renews our covenant with God also renews our covenant with one another. It does not matter what your ethnicity is, your tribe, your political views, your background, your previous life, your economic status, your education or lack thereof, or anything about you. If you belong to Jesus then you have covenant with Christ and with this body to do life together. We are all one in Christ.

Fourth: The reinstatement of the King: The middle of v. 11 says, "*. . . they shall appoint for themselves one head.*" This verse looks forward to the coming of Christ. Christ is the King God promised to send. Again, the Lord's Supper reminds us who is our King and what He has done to save us, to reverse the curse of sin against us. We also look forward to the final and complete fulfillment of this verse in Christ's triumphant return.

Fifth: The return to the land: The last part of v. 11 says, "*And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.*" If you remember, *Jezreel* became synonymous with *bloodshed* but that was not its original meaning. The original meaning of *Jezreel* is *God plants*. When Yahweh says *great shall be the day of Jezreel* He is referring to the promise of God's people, being in the place with God and living under God's rule. The covenant is now fulfilled in Christ as we live under God's rule on this earth but it will be fully and finally fulfilled when Jesus returns.³

³ Tim Chester, *Hosea: The Passion of God*, 42-44.

These last three verses are tremendous news for us! God keeps His promises to those who cannot keep theirs. This is the best news of all because as we work through Hosea we will find ourselves in Gomer, Jezreel, No Mercy, and Not My People. Let me tell you why you are going to love the book of Hosea. If you came here this morning, *and you struggle to forget your failures in the past and you feel like you don't measure up in the present because of your sin and you fear what you are capable of in the future, then Hosea will feel like drinking from the deep well of cool water of God's love.*