

## *Yahweh Goes to War with His Unrepentant Bride*

Hosea 10:1-15

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Our sermon series is called *The Incomparable Love of God*. The struggle you may be having right now, as we plow through some difficult sections of Hosea, is that the last few chapters don't feel like the incomparable love of God. They seem more like Billy Murray's movie, *Groundhog Day*. You know, where Bill Murray was a TV reporter who wakes up every morning and he is stuck in an endless cycle of pain and despair. Every day is a little different but there seems to never be an end to the foolish mistakes he keeps repeating. The last few sermons on the last few chapters might feel like that movie.

However, believe it or not, the aim of Hosea's prophecy is to display the glory of God through the incomparable love of God for sinners.

When we study a book like Hosea, we are tempted to fall into one of two ditches. First, we will be tempted to fall into the ditch of judgment and that will leave us in a dark, depressing ditch. The other ditch is the Rob Bell ditch that he calls *Love Wins*. Preachers and theologians are tempted to fall into the ditch of apologizing for God and minimizing judgment and saying God is not angry about our sin. We are tempted to walk back the fact that judgment did not come in Hosea's day and will not come in ours.<sup>1</sup> The temptation is to say that God is only love. These are the two theological ditches in which we are tempted to fall.

Yet, what we must do, is be good theologians, and hold the love of God and the holiness of God together. The fact is the holiness of God and the love of God are not in tension with one another except in our own minds. It is hard for us to square judgment of God and the love of God and yet, God does this without any difficulty.

So, to help us understand how He does it, Yahweh tells us a story and gives us the life of Hosea and Gomer to watch. So, when we read about Yahweh's disgust with Israel and how He plans to discipline and judge the nation and yet how He also loves Israel we struggle to hold the love of God and the judgment of God together. To help us understand God's love and God's judgment, we must look back to Hosea chapters 1-3 and see how Hosea loved Gomer and their children through her unfaithfulness to him. In Hosea and Gomer, we have a living parable of how Yahweh loves Israel and us even when we sin against Him. In Hosea and Gomer's marriage we see the horribleness of our sin toward God and yet we experience, in Christ, the faithfulness of God to His covenant with us, His people, and we experience tenderness of love when we look to the cross and see Jesus reconciling us to God.

The title of this morning's sermon is: *Yahweh Goes to War with His Unrepentant Bride*. Hosea's sermon in Hosea 10 flows quite seamlessly out of Hosea 9.

If you were here last Sunday, you will remember I gave you four words that helped us follow the flow of Hosea 9 as Yahweh called His people to account for their sin and how they should respond. Those words were: *Mourn, Outrage, Ashamed, and Listen*. These words and the points of that sermon were not to get us to wallow in our sin but to help us think about a Godly response to sin. We should be broken over our sin against God. We should be angry that we have sinned and then go to war with that sin. We should feel is an

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appropriate measure of shame we should feel over our sin. Now, I do not mean, sitting around and beating ourselves up but a Godly guilt that drives us back to the cross of Christ where we listen to the word and God, to be reminded of who we are in Christ, and then taking steps to see the Holy Spirit empower us to kill sin in us. This morning I want to give you three words to help us follow the flow of Hosea 10: *worship, righteousness, and victory*.

I. The guilt of our sinful worship must be given to King Jesus (vv. 1-10)

The main issue in vv. 1-10 is how Israel had been sinning in its worship. Look in vv. 1-2:

<sup>1</sup> *Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit.*

*The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built;  
as his country improved, he improved his pillars.*

<sup>2</sup> *Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt.*

*The Lord will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.*

Verse 1 tells us that Israel was in a time of prosperity but as they increased in prosperity they did not worship Yahweh. They did not give thanks and praise to God. Instead, they increased their worship of Baal. Instead, of giving their tithe to the temple to see it refreshed and taken care of, they gave their money to the work of the false gods they were worshipping. Instead, growing in their love of God and in their relationship with God they increased in their sin and false worship.

Verse 2 tells us that their hearts were false toward God and they must bear the guilt of their sin of not loving God with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Instead, they were loving their wealth and their false gods with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

They were doing what Jesus talked about in Matthew 6:19-21 in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

In other words, how we handle our money reveals what our god really is. For Israel, it was Baal. *They were tithing to their false god—Baal.*

If you were to look at your bank account and see where your money goes, what would it reveal about what or who you worship? Would it be Wal-Mart or Amazon Prime? Is that where the first fruits of our money goes?

The fact is we will put our money toward what our God is. If we really believe in the work of the church and the spread of the gospel then we will tithe and give a percentage of our money to the church so those ministries will thrive. Giving helps us let go of wealth and money, which can very easily become a false god for us. This becomes especially true when we believe that the money we make is our money and not God's money.

So, as we make more application, I think some good questions are: What altar are you building up with your money? Are you growing your little kingdom or giving in order that the kingdom of God will grow? Why don't you proclaim Hosea's words over your false altars and the idols of your heart right now by saying: *Lord to break down the altars of my heart and destroy their pillars that reside in my heart?* Ask Jesus to show you what rotting, rusting, treasures you are investing in that needs to be converted into priceless treasure in Heaven? Why don't you convert all your worldly stock into heavenly stock today?

Next in vv. 3-6, we see that their hearts were not only false but they had rejected Yahweh, their rightful King because they did not fear Yahweh. Fear of God is a very important aspect of our worship of God. When we do not fear God we will quite naturally reject any claim of Yahweh on our lives.

<sup>3</sup> *For now they will say: "We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord; and a king—what could he do for us?"*

<sup>4</sup> *They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.*

<sup>5</sup> *The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests— those who rejoiced over it and over its glory— for it has departed from them.*

<sup>6</sup> *The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king. Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.*

These four verses are continuing to narrow the focus by zeroing in on their corrupt worship. First, they reject Yahweh as their King and then we see they have no fear of Him. They have no respect, give Him no credit for the good things that come to them, and they give Him no thanks.

Notice what they say, *"We do not fear Yahweh; and a king—what could he do for us?"* They look to God for nothing. Yet, v. 4, indicates they still went through the motions of worship of Yahweh. These people honored God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him. They were posers, hypocrites, and fake.

Verse 5 uncovers the true love of their hearts. The people feared the calf idol in Beth-aven. Instead of mourning over their sin and their loss of Yahweh, they mourned to see the calf in Samaria and when they did see it they rejoiced and give it glory.

Verse 6 echoes v. 2. Yahweh will make sure the idol is destroyed and carried off with them to Assyria when they go back into slavery.

Friends, as you evaluate your hearts and search for idols, what is that thing or person in your life that you rejoice over and fear losing? What is that thing that you glory in and it gives you meaning and identity? This thing or these things could be your *401K, your job, your spouse, your kids, or your house*. None of these things are bad things but when good things become ultimate things that give meaning, significance, and security to our lives they become idols. They become things we must repent of in our lives and that is why proper, biblical worship is so important.

True, biblical worship has Christ and His gospel at the center. Genuine Christ-centered worship leads us to focus on glorifying God through the person and work of Christ. Biblical worship does not make us the center but makes the person and work of Christ its aim because the gospel is what is most glorifying to God. It helps us keep Jesus as our King. We want to be a church that leads us to worship in this way and also teaches us how to worship in this way. This is the reason we walk through the gospel each week because the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross is what we most need to hear. Then, in light of the gospel, we need to hear how the gospel relates to all of life so that we will glorify God as we learn how the gospel changes everything.

Pastor Eric and I were talking this week about what to do if we have to stop meeting for our worship services on Sunday because the coronavirus continues to spread. Let me just take a moment to show you what we do and how this can easily be used in your family or in a small gathering so that you may worship at home, if it comes to that.

We walk through the gospel every week. Our liturgy is posted on our blog every week with the readings and the songs so that you may take them and read them as a family or small group. Our liturgy *calls us to worship* the King, calls us to *confess* our sin, *reminds* us of the gospel, what Jesus did for us on the cross, and then it leads us to a time of *thanksgiving and praise* of our King. Then we read the Scripture text that will be preached. After that we hear the sermon and the word of God explained, what it means, and where Jesus is in that text and how He changes our lives by calling us to believe and repent.

Listen, if we have to move to meeting in our homes for a short time, then what you can do is study that passage as a family or small group. If you are not comfortable with studying the text as a group then take prayer requests. We will post the sermon on Monday or, if we have time, Pastor Eric or I will preach the sermon ahead of time and post it in the liturgy. Lastly, you can send you group out with the Scriptural blessing that will be in the liturgy.

Our worship services are designed to walk through the gospel each week and are not complicated. We read Scripture, sing Scripture, pray Scripture, and preach God's word. We strive to make the person and work of Christ the center of everything we do.

We do not do this in order to be novel or to be simple but because the cross of Christ is what is most glorifying to God. The person and work of Christ is what changes us into the image of Christ for the glory of God.

The gospel is our joy and strength. The gospel is what is most satisfying to the soul of sinners and glorying to God. The most important thing in the world is for sinners to know how to be made right with God and that is only done through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We want that to be clear, simple, and central in everything we do. This is true biblical worship.

What happens when we miss making King Jesus the center of everything? Look in vv. 7-8:

*<sup>7</sup> Samaria's king shall perish like a twig on the face of the waters. <sup>8</sup> The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, "Cover us," and to the hills, "Fall on us."*

These verses tell us that if we do not worship Yahweh as King then it will be to our own destruction. Look in the last part of v. 8. Notice what it says, *"they shall say to the mountains, "Cover us," and to the hills, "Fall on us."*

Jesus quoted the last part of v. 8 in Luke 23:30. When He was carrying His cross to Golgotha, the women were crying and wailing about how He had been beaten and now was going to be crucified. He turned to them as said, *"Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'"*

What He was warning them and us about is the danger of missing the King. I have sat through many worship services (not here) that say lots of stuff but never explained the gospel. It missed King Jesus and what He came to do on the cross for sinners.

If we miss that Jesus is King in our worship, then our worship will not be centered on the gospel and if our worship is not gospel-centered then it will be centered on something else. If our worship does not focus on Christ, then we will be guilty of corrupt worship. Just as ancient Israel was.

Verses 9-10, conclude this section by reminding us that corrupt worship is a dangerous sin:

*<sup>9</sup> From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah?*

*<sup>10</sup> When I please, I will discipline them, and nations shall be gathered against them when they are bound up for their double iniquity.*

Hosea reminds us of Gibeah again. Remember Gibeah was where the tribe of Benjamin defended the men of Gibeah who committed a heinous crime against a woman. The rest of the tribes of Israel went to war with Benjamin and thousands on both sides died because Benjamin was protecting the sin of the men of Gibeah instead of holding them accountable by calling them to repentance.

The beginning of v. 10 says that Yahweh will discipline the nation of Israel for their sin. What God was doing was practicing what we call church discipline today. He was handing Israel over to their sin for the destruction of their flesh so they would repent and return to Him. He was calling them to mourn their sin, go to war against it, be ashamed of it and bear the fruit of repentance by obeying the word of God. If they did not repent, then they would prove themselves to not truly be children of God and really unbelievers.

Likewise, church discipline is for the same purpose. The Apostle Paul tells us that to practice church discipline is a loving thing because it calls believers to fight their sin by repenting and returning to Christ. Those that do not repent are eventually removed from membership. If a person repents, he or she is restored into the fellowship. If they continue in their sin then we pray for them as we would an unbeliever. We pray that God to use adversity to discipline them for their good. If they continue in their sin for the rest of their lives and never repent, then we know that they never really were true believers.

Bottom line: God has given us church discipline to bring unrepentant sinners back to true, biblical worship. This is a loving thing that He does for us.

## II. The yoke of King Jesus must be our righteousness (vv. 11-13a)

The second word that helps us work through this passage is *righteousness*.

*<sup>11</sup> Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh,  
and I spared her fair neck;  
but I will put Ephraim to the yoke;  
Judah must plow; Jacob must harrow for himself.  
<sup>12</sup> Sow for yourselves righteousness;  
reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground,  
for it is the time to seek the Lord,  
that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.  
<sup>13</sup> You have plowed iniquity;  
you have reaped injustice;  
you have eaten the fruit of lies.*

The metaphors of Israel as a trained calf and wearing a yoke is unfamiliar to our ears. Here is what this metaphor means. A trained calf is a calf that freely served his master. He did not have to wear the yoke to plow the field to tread out the grain.

As a spiritual metaphor it meant that it was Israel's desire to break up the fallow ground of his heart and live life of repentance and true worship. Israel's desire was to obey God by doing justice to their neighbors, loving kindness with their neighbors, and walking humbly with God.<sup>2</sup>

Walking with God in this way meant to walk with God in righteousness. This is what Hosea meant when he called them to sow for themselves seeds of righteousness. Righteousness in this case meant right living by

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<sup>2</sup> Micah 6:8

obeying God. It meant living a life of repentance and true, biblical worship of God. It meant they were trusting in the steadfast love of God as seen in the covenant Yahweh had made with them.

Yet, Israel did not sow seeds of righteousness. Instead they sowed seeds of injustice and iniquity. They listened to the lies of the idolatrous priests of Baal who promised that Baal was the true God.

Verse 12 is the key verse that helps us understand these three verses. So, the question is how do we sow seeds of righteousness instead of continuing to plow fields of iniquity and injustice?

The only way to do that is to take the yoke of the King—King Jesus. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says, *“<sup>28</sup> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

Jesus wore the yoke of the Law so that we can wear His yoke of righteousness and grace. Jesus as the true Israel put on the yoke of the Law and did what Judah and Israel could never do, keep God’s law perfectly. By doing this, Jesus does not call us to obey Law in order to be saved to but to trust in the One who obeyed in our place.

The Apostle Paul teaches us in Romans 8:3-4 that, *“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”*

When we repent of our sin and trust Christ we not only sow seeds of righteousness but we reap a bountiful harvest of righteousness and riches of grace. This is true for all who are in Christ. Are you in Christ today?

### III. The victory of King Jesus must be our confidence (vv. 13b-15)

Hosea 10 closes with our third word: *victory*. Now you may be asking yourself, *“How in the world does he get victory from these verses?”* Victory applies to the application of the text, so with that in mind, let’s work through our last set of verses.

*Because you have trusted in your own way  
and in the multitude of your warriors,  
<sup>14</sup> therefore the tumult of war shall arise among your people,  
and all your fortresses shall be destroyed,  
as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle;  
mothers were dashed in pieces with their children.  
<sup>15</sup> Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel,  
because of your great evil.  
At dawn the king of Israel  
shall be utterly cut off.*

In these verses Yahweh is going to war with His people because they would not go to war with the sin of their corrupt worship practices, their idolatry, their love of money, their hypocritical, pretending hearts, their trust in themselves, their own righteousness, their own wealth, their own strength, and their own military power. In essence they rejected Yahweh’s steadfast love and therefore Him as their Covenant Husband.

Because they did not trust of Him, He was going to war with them. His goal was to destroy their high places of Baal worship that had been erected on the tops of their mountains.

Verse 14 paints a graphic image of what went on in war in those days. Their cities, their strong holds, and their fortresses would be destroyed. Then Hosea named *Shalman who destroyed Beth-arbel*. Scholars tell us they cannot identify exactly who this king was and the name of the city he destroyed but it would have been like saying Hitler. It struck fear in their hearts because of the massive destruction and horror of war.

Think of Sauron and his hordes of orcs attacking Minas Tirith in *The Return of the King*. The massive forces of a wicked army camped outside the gate and then breaching the walls and razing the city to the ground. This verse should have struck terror in their hearts especially when he reminded them that in war soldiers had no problem killing pregnant women and children by throwing them off of cliffs.

Verse 15 closes out the chapter by reminding them that it all began with their great evil of wicked, sinful, worship of other gods and also empty, false-hearted worship of Yahweh.

Finally, v. 15 closes with the king being utterly cut off. The monarchy of Israel has ended. They will have no king ever again. They have been completely given over to their sin. They wanted no king and so Yahweh removed the king and their nation. He gave them what they asked.

As I have said before, we will not say to God: "*Your will be done in our lives and trust Him,*" He will eventually say to us: "*Your will be done.*" Believe me, you do not want God to say that to you.

Friends, right worship of Jesus begins with trusting Him as our Savior and King. Right worship of the King begins with our right worship of the King in our corporate gathering.

The purpose of corporate worship is not to get up emotions as a response to worship but to remind us of what we believe and who we trust. We need truth to inform our emotions. Truth focuses our hearts on who our King is and reminds us of how He gave His life for us to save us from our sin.

We trust King Jesus not based on "*genned*" up emotions but based on truth. Therefore, a corporate worship liturgy should be designed to remind us of how Christ saved us. It reminds us that He is the Hero. Truth informs our emotions and as our emotions are recalibrated to Truth and away from our constant focus on ourselves, our needs, and how we "*feel*" our faith is strengthened and our trust of King Jesus is renewed. When this happens, our emotions follow Truth.

The aim of biblical corporate worship is to help us go to war with the sin in our hearts. The aim of biblical corporate worship is to destroy the high places of idolatry in our hearts. The aim of biblical corporate worship is to set the captives free by destroying the strong holds of sin in our hearts.

The aim of biblical corporate worship is to present King Jesus as being the Ultimate King that was cutoff for us in order that we may be brought near is worship that sets our hearts free. He was destroyed so that we may have victory over sin. Corporate worship that does not make that clear or makes you the center of the corporate gathering falls short of worshipping in Spirit and in Truth.

The aim of biblical corporate worship is to make this abundantly clear over and over and over so that it shapes our private worship and our family worship.

Let me close by asking you to examine your heart in this regard: what are some deceptive worship beliefs and practices that you might hold to today?

I have addressed the liturgy earlier in the sermon but as I close I want to address other kinds of deceptions or misunderstandings which are present in churches today. I am not talking about cults but orthodox, evangelical churches. Where well-meaning religious people have twisted the truth of God's word and perverted worship.

The truth is some deceptive ideas have crept into our worship services and worship practices today. Some people believe that being baptized will automatically get you into heaven. Some people believe that

attending church somehow earns them credit with God or we might say righteousness. Some people believe that giving an offering will somehow magically bring blessings from God. Some people may believe that by taking the Lord's Supper that their sins will be forgiven.

Hosea's concern and Jesus' concern were not simply with the outward presentation of our worship but with the internal aspect of worship. The internal aspect of our hearts has to do with how we view God. Is God seen as King, our Hero, our Redeemer, our Savior, and our Heavenly Father who came in Christ to reconcile us to Himself by being the Ultimate King that was cut off by His death on the cross and then united to the Father by His resurrection from the dead? Is God seen as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords or have we reinvented Him into something else. The fact is God's glory is diminished when He is no longer our chief end. The question is: Are you sowing seeds of righteousness in your worship of King Jesus or are you robbing Him of His glory by seeking a worship experience that makes you the center of attention?

Let me close with a quote from Dr. Gary Smith, an Old Testament scholar who used to teach at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri:

*If participation in a worship service does not honor God as sovereign King, what worship has taken place? If one does not believe God is all-powerful and can really help, then dependence, trust, and faith in him will be the missing key ingredients. If the fruit of worship does not result in righteousness, then the source of people's actions comes from something other than true worship of God. God is just as [serious] today about whom people honor and glorify when they worship in the church as he was in Israel's day.*

*The results are undeniable. A failure to worship God will result in our shame and death. God maintains that people "must bear their guilt" (Hosea 10:2) when they accept false beliefs . . . Eventually he will show the bankruptcy of these false religious systems, and people will receive their punishment.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Gary V. Smith, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 158.