

Hosea 1:1-2:1

Hosea's story is a drama that reflects the spiritual tragedy of Hosea's day. God calls him to play the lead in a play that is truer to life than it is to make believe. The relationship between Hosea, the faithful husband, and Gomer, the unfaithful wife, was a physical, human relationship that reflected, represented, and revealed the relationship between God, ever faithful, and humanity, too often faithless.

This part of the story is not a pleasant one. It is difficult. Hosea forces us to face the immense gravity of our unfaithfulness to God as we observe the tragedy and the devastation of the Husband who is faithful to his adulteress wife.

Hosea 1:1-2

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel [the people of Israel were split into two kingdoms at this time, the kingdom of Judah, and the kingdom of Israel].

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

- God commands Hosea to take a prostitute as a wife for two reasons:
 - So that Hosea may know more deeply the intense grief that God feels at the unfaithfulness of his people,
 - And so that God's people will see more clearly the immense gravity of their unfaithfulness.
 - The Israelites were committing adultery by worshiping Baal, a false God introduced by the Canaanites. Many Israelites were so steeped in Canaanite culture that they even mistook the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as one and the same as Baal.
- "For the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord."
 - He's not talking about the literal land; he's talking about the Israelites.
 - Our relationship with God is likened to marriage over and over again in the Bible. Really, the human institute of marriage is a reflection of the intimacy, love, and commitment that characterizes God's intention for his relationship with humanity. That "marriage" between us and God is what the human institution of marriage represents.
 - Now, especially for you men, it might feel weird and uncomfortable to say that you are "married to God" or that you are "the bride of Christ," but the point here is not the gender of God or ourselves or the church, but that intimate relationship with him.

- A marriage between two people is the deepest and most personal of all relationships. It is, in its truest and idealist form, the knowing of each other completely—the best and the worst, every single flaw—and accepting the other, knowing full well who they are.
- Unfaithfulness then, in a marriage, is the deepest betrayal, the most intimately crushing wound.
- When we, those who have committed ourselves to a relationship with God, forsake him for pride, for satisfaction of unhealthy desires, for ease, comfort, shame... we betray our God, our husband, in the deepest and most intimate of ways.

There is another story in the Old Testament that reflects this story, found in Exodus 19-32.

- When Moses and the Israelites leave Egypt, God brings them to Mt. Sinai. Here he calls Moses up to the mountain and gives him the Ten Commandments and the book of the covenant. God accepts the Israelites as his own people, fulfilling his promise to Abraham.
 - This moment on Mt. Sinai between Moses (who represents the Israelites) and God is like a wedding. God said “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples” – Exodus 19:5.
 - The Ten Commandments might seem like just a list of rules, but they are so much more than that. God was showing his people how to enter a deep and beautiful relationship with Him. We were made to be in relationship with God. We were always meant to be married to Him. But our relationship with Him was distorted when sin entered the heart of humanity. God, in giving the Ten Commandments and the book of the covenant, was redeeming and restoring his people so that they might be in a deeper, more intimate relationship with him.
 - In essence, God vows “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, even beyond “till death do us part.”
 - Instead of “I take you as my wife,” God says “you will be my people.”
- This, the most beautiful wedding in history, laid the foundation for a thriving, intimate marriage. But the wedding night was a disaster.

Exodus 32:1-8

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the

rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'"

- On the very day that God vowed his undying and unconditional love for his people, he "comes home" to find them in bed with another man. On the very wedding night, the Israelites committed an act of adultery and betrayal.
- And this happened again, and again, and again. The Israelites lived into promiscuity, and still the Lord was faithful.
- Likewise, Gomer continuously slept with other men and even sold her body in prostitution, and still Hosea was faithful.

*****VIDEO*****

Hosea 1:3-9

So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And 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. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

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. 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."

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

- Gomer bears three children. The first, Jezreel, is undoubtedly Hosea's child, but it is possible the second and third child were born from other men.
- Each child's name was significant.
 - The name of the first child, Jezreel, prophesied the fall of the nation of Israel to the Assyrians.
 - The second child, Lo-Ruhamah, means "no mercy, or not loved."

- This can be difficult to understand. Doesn't God always love us and have mercy on us?
- God's love has one condition – it must be positively responded to.
- When the Israelites rejected a relationship with God and instead chose to worship false gods, God responded with judgement.
- The third child, Lo-Ammi, means “not my people.”
 - The important phrase here is “I am not your God.”
 - God continually adopted the Israelite people as his own, yet they continually turned, spat in his face, and declared, “You are not my God.” God finally, in his longsuffering, turns to the Israelites and says with great sorrow, “So be it.”

Even when this story is at its bleakest, God's faithfulness to the faithless remains steadfast.

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.” And 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. Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.”

- God did not abandon his people. Those who received his judgement were redeemed.
 - God promises yet again that Israel shall be prosperous, that he will take care of them and bless them.
 - Those that rejected God and their position as his people were once again welcomed and redeemed as his children.
 - The division between the Israelites was promised to be reunited and restored.
 - Those who rejected God's love and mercy were once again offered his love and mercy.
- God responded with judgement to those who rejected and betrayed him, but he never left them or loved them any less. At his time of judgement, God promises restoration and redemption.

How are we supposed to respond to this story?

- First of all, I want to make one thing clear: we are supposed to identify with the Israelites, not with Hosea.
 - Though I am sure many of you have experienced betrayal, God did not create you to. I do not want you to hear about God's faithfulness and believe that it is your job to remain in unhealthy relationships. God can be faithful to the faithless

because he is GOD. No matter how we might abuse or betray him, it cannot destroy him. But being in unhealthy relationships can destroy us.

- Even if you have experienced betrayal, you have also been on the other side. All of us have. We have all placed other things at the center, or accepted ungodly things as godly, or substituted what we knew to be the truth for a lie. We have all prioritized our happiness, our dignity, our wealth, our families, our self-preservation, our opinions, our addictions, our vices, even our offenses over God.
- Second, we see that God desires intimacy with us, not just obedience.
 - God has taken us as his bride. He is faithful to us in every way that a husband should be: with his time, his devotion, his intimacy, and his love.
 - God does not desire that you simply obey him. No—the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the universe wants to know you, and he wants you to know him. He loves you unconditionally and is inviting you into a marriage covenant with him.
 - God did not have to make us and love us. God does not need us to be complete. He *chose* to create, *chose* to love us, knowing full well what we were capable of and the choices we would make.
 - In one sense, it is not *easy* for God to love us. He is more than capable of loving us, but it is painful for him. Betrayal hurts him to the very core. He grieves. He feels pain. Sacrificing himself on the cross was not a walk in the park.
 - And *yet*, he LOVES US. Not because he has to, but because he wants to. He wants intimacy with us.
- Third, even if you carry pain or shame from your past, and you feel like your name, your identity is “not loved,” God can and will redeem you and claim you as his beloved. There is no act of betrayal, adultery, crime, or unfaithfulness you can commit that will make you any less loved by God.
- Our understanding of our sin and shame can actually deepen our wonder of God’s love for us. Paul says in Romans 5:8 that “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God’s love is so **imminent** and so gracious and so perseverant that he reached out to us in the midst of our deepest shame and took us as his bride.
- **Indeed, there is nothing God can give you that he has not already given you. God is holding nothing back. God does not give his heart piece by piece, only when we are worthy. He doesn’t hide his face to tease us or guilt us. He is faithful to the faithless.**

Romans 8:38-39

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord

God's love is unmeasurable. Even in the depths of humanity's betrayal, God pursues an intimate relationship with us.

I want us to take a moment before we respond in worship to meditate. In the past week, God has been pressing on me the infinite measure of his love and goodness. And as I dwell on his goodness and his love, I find that I am awakened, comforted, and completely awed by him. As I fix my gaze on God, the shame and unfaithfulness of my humanity washes away in the depth of his affection for me.

We're going to listen to a song about the nature of God's love. As we listen, I encourage you to meditate on the words. Listen to them. Believe them. Let them penetrate your darkened soul with its truth and light. You can get down on your knees, you can come to the altar, you can stand and sing, you can cry, you can even lie face down before the Lord. But whatever you do, let the Holy Spirit overcome you with his loving faithfulness.