

Lecture 16 Hosea 1:1 -6:11

We have been working through the books of Kings and Chronicles watching a divided nation indulge itself with greed, wars and idolatry. The countdown of evil kings in the Northern Kingdom was to number 13 of 19 – Jeroboam II, son of Joash. The kingdom was less than 40 years away from Assyrian conquest and the execution of God's judgment for Israel's sins.

Amos 3:7 really sums up the study in the Minor Prophets: "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets." They'd had Elijah and Elisha; Amos came from Judah with the truth from God; now Hosea, along with his contemporaries Isaiah and Micah preaching in Judah, was making this last ditch effort to convey God's heart to a rebellious people.

In many ways the book of Hosea is one of the most beautiful books in the Old Testament. It's a love story – the story of a broken marriage and of the heartache that unfaithfulness brings into a life. Yet it's also the story of the persistence of God in fulfilling His promise of redemptive action. It pictures the New Testament promise of Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

I read about a preacher who gave a short 3-point sermon:

1. Two-thirds of the people in the world are suffering from starvation and malnutrition.
2. Most of you don't give a damn.
3. Most of you are more concerned that I said "damn" in church than you are about the fact that people are starving to death.

And he sat down.

Shock therapy . . . sometimes we need that. We can apply that same approach to the lesson today.

1. The nation of Israel was facing the wrath of Almighty God.
2. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute.
3. We're more concerned about why God would have a holy man do such a thing than we are with the message God was trying to convey.

We get this picture in our minds that the prophets were eccentric old men that no one listened to. Except for Jonah who had total success with his preaching, the rest seem totally ineffective – there's no evidence of any change. So through Hosea God was going to try another approach . . . the same one that drew you and me to Him . . . a message of undeserved and overwhelming redemptive love. Hosea was to be the prophet that pictured grace and the loyal love of God.

Of the 14 chapters in Hosea, only the first three are about his personal life, the rest are a series of sermons declaring the sin of the people and the character of God.

Grace has always been God's "style." For years I've been teaching you that even in the Old Testament salvation is by grace and not by works. The Law was not given as a means of salvation, but to teach a sinful people how to know and worship a Holy God. But the faithful record of man's disobedience in the Old Testament usually gets us focused on the warnings of judgment and we discount the promise of restoration and the plea for repentance.

We took some liberties with the lesson this week and had you think about shocking headlines like you might see in the tabloids at the grocery checkout line. I remember reading someplace that General Douglas MacArthur once said he always read the Sports page first because it records man's achievements, while the Front page is a record of man's failures. That's an interesting observation, isn't it? Perhaps we're drawn to failure because we can so easily identify with it.

Certainly this whole idea of a marriage between a holy prophet and a prostitute is difficult to understand. Some commentators say it's so shocking that it must be an allegory or a parable. Some say, Gomer was pure when Hosea married her

and later turned to prostitution. Both the New American Standard & the New King James say, take a wife of harlotry. One commentator made this statement:

“Religion had become debased worship of Baal. In that worship both men and women engaged in sexual relationships as a part of the ritual worship. A “wife of harlotry” probably designated an ordinary Hebrew woman of that time who had offered her body to men in that ritualistic Baal worship.”

For sure, Gomer was not a virgin. We can only speculate how painful this obedience to the Lord must have been for Hosea. He no doubt wondered why he should have to marry such a woman who so precisely represented the sorry state of life and faith in Israel at that time.

People generally marry because we believe we will be happier and more content sharing our lives with someone to whom we can impart our dreams, desires, goals and objectives. The horizontal relationship of marriage was designed by God to reflect our vertical relationship with Him.

What is obvious is that Gomer didn't share the same concerns and values as her husband. It reminds us again of the value in God's warning not to be “unequally yoked,” doesn't it? How frustrating is the relationship where spiritual values don't blend.

Did the neighbors laugh behind Hosea's back? Did they use Gomer's defection as an excuse to reject his words? "He can't even control his wife, why should he tell us how to live?"

Often the kinds of problems that impair our relationship with God are mirrored in the difficulties that arise in our marriages . . . pride – submission – admission of wrongdoing. Broken and estranged relationships cause excruciating loneliness . . . the ache of separateness when dreams aren't shared, intimacy not experienced, deepest feelings not exchanged.

When we see a person we love mess up his/her life, we yearn to know how to reach out and help without negating that person's freedom or robbing him of the character fiber that grows through difficulty. Our temptation as spouses, parents, brothers/sisters, friends, is to step in and take charge.

I want to show you a something I got somewhere years ago.

WHEN I FEEL RESPONSIBLE

FOR OTHERS

I . . .fix
 protect
 rescue
 control
 carry their feelings
 don't listen

I feel . . .
 tired
 anxious
 fearful
 liable

I am concerned with . . .
 the solution
 answers
 circumstances
 being right
 details
 performance

I am a manipulator

I expect the person to live
 up to my expectations.

TO OTHERS

I . . .show empathy
 encourage
 share
 confront
 level
 am sensitive
 listen

I feel . . .
 relaxed
 free
 aware
 high self-worth

I am concerned with . . .
 relating person to person
 feelings
 the person
 sharing myself
 guiding
 helping

I am a helper/guide

I expect the person to be
 responsible for himself and his
 own actions.

I can trust and let go!

This was a really good reminder for me as I prepared this lesson, because I struggled frequently with the issue of being “responsible for vs. responsible to” when it came to the care of my sister-in-law, Beverly; my friend, Dick, and my cousin, Sharon. All have passed on.

When a person we love deeply holds us at arm’s length because of their resistant hostility to our desire to become involved, we have a sacred opportunity of insight to know how God feels about us. It hurts . . . it’s so painful.

The more Hosea penetrated God’s heart, the more he realized that God fully understood the struggle of reconciliation with an unrepentant wife. In the Old Testament the illustration of the husband/wife relationship is that of God/Israel – in the New Testament it’s Jesus and the Church.

Well, we can imagine that life for Hosea was about as comfortable as a toothache. There were three children, 2 sons and a daughter.

Jezreel – This was the place where Jehu had massacred Israel’s forces . . . a place of loss and destruction. It might be like we’d name a son Vietnam or Twin Towers. Instant identification.

Lo-ru-ha-mah – This means “not loved or not pitied.” Can you imagine what life must have like for this little girl? Talk about a problem with self-esteem.

Lo-ammi – This son bore the name meaning “not my people.” With Gomer’s reputation, there were no doubt snickers as to whether it should be “Hosea is not my father.”

The life of Hosea and his family were now set before Israel as a permanent and living message of judgment. It was Israel who was God’s unclean wife and her children were named by God to symbolize the judgment and separation from God, the husband. Yet in the face of this clear revelation of coming judgment, the prophet was sent also to tell the people that there would come a day when Israel would be restored and their names of reproach taken away and “they would be called by all sons of the living God” (v. 10).

What we see in Hosea is the last few swirls of the kingdom of Israel before it goes down the drain. But this love story, true and tragic, is God’s attempt to plug the drain . . . to convey the fact that it doesn’t have to be this way.

In chapter 2, although no direct mention is made of Gomer's unfaithfulness (she apparently left her home and family to seek her lovers), it’s clear from the prophet's words that he is feeling great personal anguish over her harlotry. God’s anguish is

equally apparent as He denounces the fact that He gave Israel everything and (vs. 13) "she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the Lord.

The Bible never shuns realism when it exposes the degradation of sin. To our age which treats infidelity either as a matter of comedy or a problem of despair, the story of Hosea still sows the seeds of grace to give us hope.

Look at 2:14 . . .

"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope."

God was promising first to bring the people to the wilderness where there would be no distractions so He could clearly communicate with them. Sometimes our difficulties are designed to do just that . . . take us away from the arena of self-reliance and get refocused on God. Those of you who have camped in the desert know it can be cold and bleak, but without the distraction of city lights, we can again focus on the stars and behold the wonders of God.

Second, He was promising to change what was a place of punishment and despair into a door of hope. The Valley of Achor was where Achan confessed to taking plunder from Jericho and

he and his whole family were put to death. To change it to a door of hope? That phrase in itself is comforting, isn't it? Jesus – our gate . . . our door . . . our hope.

Gomer's door of hope was Hosea. He was willing to suffer whatever humiliation was necessary to buy back Gomer. It reminds us of the humiliation Jesus was willing to endure as He paid the price for our salvation. To face the slave masters must have taken a great deal of courage for Hosea. It's been said, courage is fear that has said its prayers. Again, we're reminded of Jesus in Gethsemane . . . fear that has said its prayers. No matter how bad our situation, God has provided a door of hope for us.

The purchase price of a slave was 30 shekels. As Gomer stood there naked and ashamed, Hosea paid 15 shekels and no doubt the grain made up the rest of the price. As he put her clothes on her and led her away, he spoke to her: "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute, or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you (3:3). That this painful but beautiful action was symbolic as a message to the people is made clear in the next two verses: "For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king. They will come in

trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days."
(3:4,5).

This prophecy seems to encompass both the return from exile in Babylon and the later dispersion among the nations of the world following the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., with a view of ultimate return in repentance and faith at the end of the age.

God's wedding gift to His people, both in Hosea's day and in our own, is mercy. Through no merit of our own, He forgives and makes us righteous in His eyes. Repentance restores that personal and intimate relationship with Him.

Chapters 4 – 6 in today's lesson again bring the focus to Israel's failed relationships both with God and with fellow human beings. They failed in love and they failed in worship.

There are several verses I want to pick out and comment on in these three chapters.

1. Hosea 4:2 – no concern for the Ten Commandments. They violated #9 lying; #6 murder, #8 stealing, #7 adultery.

Amos had watched the ease-loving people loll in idleness and luxury . . . Hosea saw them hardened and made criminal in their condition.

2. Hosea 4:6 "my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge." The priests weren't even trying to stem the tide.

They rejoiced in the people's sins. Every time a sin offering was made, the priests received a portion of it. The more the sins, the more they got. Pure greed.

3. Look at 4:15 – "though you commit adultery, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty." The message is – Learn something from this bad example! Don't think it can't or isn't going to happen to you. Maybe we should paraphrase this for ourselves – "Though you commit spiritual adultery, unbelieving world, let not the Church become guilty." We have to guard against becoming like the world we live in.

In the closing verse of chapter 5 and the opening verses of chapter 6 a clear note of hope is struck, for the Lord says: "I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me. Come, let us return to the Lord; He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us; he has injured us, and he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge him; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth" (5:15 – 6:3).

It's remarkable that here restoration is promised the people "on the third day." Certainly this can look forward to the

resurrection of Jesus on the third day and the symbolic representation of a new beginning and a new kind of life, but these verses also play another part in current end-time prophecy when considered with 2 Peter 3:7-8, which says:

“By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends, with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”

Some equate the two days in Hosea 6:2 as being two thousand years . . . or obviously in the very near future . . . that God will revive us and we may live in His presence. We’re not studying end-time prophecy this year, so I’ll just leave it at that. But we shouldn’t pass over the study of Hosea without pointing that out this prophetic passage of Scripture.

Lastly, a word about Hosea 6:6. “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.” Religious rituals can be a help to people in understanding God and to nourish them in their relationship to Him. That’s why He gave the rite of circumcision and the system of animal sacrifice in the Old Testament. It was the gospel in living picture form as we see when we study Exodus. Today we have the Lord’s Supper and baptism.

But godliness or “Christ-likeness” is what pleases God . . . who we ARE inside and our relationship to Him, not what we outwardly DO thinking that buys His favor.

This beautiful story of a committed love relationship is amazing to study, but what can we learn from the lesson this week?

From Gomer: Sin will separate us

Sin cuts the optic nerve of the soul and renders it incapable of making moral distinctions. Lust is interpreted love; and fidelity as a shackle making us a slave. In truth, it’s the “greener grass” of adulterous pleasure that leads to slavery. There is no freedom without a price. It’s costly in terms of anguish, humiliation and forgiveness for everyone involved. Full restoration of a broken relationship only comes with God’s love and His divine healing.

From Hosea: Sin can be redeemed

Courage is fear that has said its prayers. We’re often called upon to live in tough places, to do the embarrassing thing, to be steadfast in relationships even when we’re hurt deeply. The difficulties of life are intended to make us better, not bitter.

Hosea knew repentance is difficult for those long immersed in sin. Pride, shame, embarrassment hinder the sinner. But love shows the door of hope.

From Israel: Sin will be punished

Satan's grip is like a fist of steel on a hard heart. . . no concern for consequences, today only is the priority. Down the drain? So what . . . as long as we enjoy the ride!

If leadership, such as the priests in Israel, make no high demands on people for integrity, no demands for accountability, no demands for personal responsibility, it becomes impossible to keep the human heart from sin. There is a standard of righteousness and, falling short of the mark, our only hope is the grace and mercy of God for restoration after judgment. Praise God we have already received that restoration through our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ!

From God: Sin will find grace

God is faithful and merciful. He will continue to seek out His people even to the point of putting obstacles in their wayward path to turn them back to Him. No matter how far you have strayed, God is willing to take you back fully restored.

Well, if you've ever had the desire to take a miserable situation and somehow "make it right," . . . to breach the chasm of misunderstanding with someone you love . . . to turn frustrations and disappointments to joy . . . then you will know, in part, how God feels. His message through Hosea was one of grace, acceptance and restoration. It still is.

The penitent will find him merciful; the self-condemned will find Him generous and kind. To the frightened He is friendly; to the poor in spirit He is forgiving; to the ignorant, considerate; to the weak, gentle; to the stranger, hospitable. The awesome power of God to bring sinners to judgment can arouse fear within us, but His compassion encourages us not to be afraid of Him.

There is no need for a sinner to fall into the hands of an Angry God when the God of grace has pierced hands reaching out to save us. Lord, truly we thank you for that gift!