

May 1, 2016

The Preacher and the Prostitute

Hosea 1:2-3a

When the LORD first began speaking to Israel through Hosea, he said to him, "Go and marry a prostitute (promiscuous woman / a woman of adultery), so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution. This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute (acted in adultery) by turning against the LORD and worshiping other gods." So Hosea married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim (dib LAY im).

If this happened today it would cause a huge scandal in the church. Not only in the church, it would very well hit the front page of the Post. I can see the headline: "Local Preacher Marries Prostitute." News shows would want to interview the couple. They may even be asked to appear on the Jerry Springer Show – is Jerry Springer still on the air? It's outrageous, to say the least. But this is the story of a prophet/preacher named Hosea who married a woman named Gomer.

The name Hosea means deliver, or salvation and he was the first prophet in the Old Testament to preach a Gospel of grace.

During the time of Hosea the nation of Israel was split into two kingdoms: a northern kingdom – Israel and a southern kingdom – Judea. Hosea was a young preacher and the only prophet from the north kingdom. He lived, as we are told in the first verse, during the reign of Jeroboam, king of the Northern Kingdom.

Jeroboam was one of the wicked kings of Israel and the nation was going through a difficult time when Hosea was preaching. People were "living it up," as we might say, and didn't have much time for God. They wouldn't have said that, of course, because nobody ever says that when it's true! Instead they may have said something like we do: that they were so busy with so many other important things that just don't have time for God things. The spirit was willing but the flesh had other plans for the weekend.

So people didn't pay much attention to Hosea. He spoke of judgment and of chastisement. He said that God was going to raise up a fierce and ruthless army that would sweep across the land. But the people paid little attention to him, and they said that Hosea's God must be a pretty vengeful sort to talk like that.

Hosea tried to tell them that wasn't so. He said that God was a God of love and that God's doing of this was the very activity of love; that God wanted them to see what they were doing to themselves and that the only way he could get them to listen was to make things rough for them.

You know God works like that sometimes. Sometimes God will make things rough for you, just to get your attention! Did you ever hear the story of a young man who told his father he wanted his inheritance now, rather than wait till dear old dad died. The father agreed and the young man took his inheritance and left his father's home. Afterward the young man blew all his money, lost all his friends, got a job feeding pigs, and was so

hungry he wanted to eat the slop he was feeding those pigs. It was then that he came to his senses and came home.

You see, God is relentless in His love for you, and will do whatever He has to, and whatever it may cost Him and whatever it may cost you, to bring you back into fellowship with Him again.

So when God first spoke to and through Hosea He told him to do a strange thing. God said, "I want you to get married." I think Hosea was happy about that, because he was a bachelor. Hosea thought of a girl named Gomer because to him she was the most beautiful girl in Israel. But here is what's strange, God said go marry a prostitute.

It is possible that she was not a prostitute but became one, committing adultery against her husband after she was married to him for awhile. Or if she was a prostitute I wonder if Hosea thought that if God was telling him to marry her it meant she would change her ways once they were married. Either way God said to him, "I want you to know the whole story about this girl. I want you to marry her, but she is going to be unfaithful to you; But I want you to marry her anyway."

Now undoubtedly Hosea was very puzzled by God's strange command. God does strange things at times, things we don't always understand, things that don't fit into what we think we know of Him. And this is one of those strange things.

He told Hosea, "I want you to marry this girl and she is going to be a prostitute, and you are going to have three children by her, two boys and a girl. And when they are born I want to name them for you."

Hosea then began to understand a little bit of what God was doing. He knew it was customary in Israel to teach by symbols and God often used this method of instructing his people. He also knew that names were very important - for God often used the meanings of names to teach Israel certain truths. And now God was planning to use this prophet and his family as a lesson for his people.

I read an illustration using five different kinds of breakfast cereals. I'm going modify the illustration using just two kinds of cereals. The first is a box of Rice Crispies:

Rice Crispies are very fresh and crunchy when you first open the box. They snap, crackle and pop. Which is typical of new love. When you first meet, there are fireworks! There's a lot of snap, crackle and popping going on. And it's the same when you first come to know Christ, you have a lot of snap, crackle, and pop going on. But when the milk gets on Rice Crispies and stays there for a while, the snap loses it's snap! The crackle loses it's crackle! And the pop loses it's pop! This is what can happen in marriage, or in our union with Christ.

But now let me tell you about Shredded Wheat:

I think that's the best kind of cereal and the best kind of marriage. Shredded Wheat holds up no matter what you put on it! If it's dry, it holds up! If it's wet, it holds up! Crush it if you want, it still holds up! Grind it if you want, it still holds up!

And God was about to use Hosea's marriage as a kind of shredded wheat - to show Israel that no matter how unfaithful she had been, that God still loved her! And I wanted to tell you today that God still has a shredded wheat love for His children. You may have been unfaithful, you may be running around, you may be sneaking off to serve other gods, you may find yourself going back to old ways you know you should not be doing, but God still loves you and is willing to forgive you and take you back!

Hosea loved this girl. You can't read this prophecy without seeing that. They must have been wonderfully happy together, and then they had their first child. It was a boy, as God had said. Hosea's heart had to be bursting with pride and joy, and he went to God for the name of this boy. To his surprise, God picked the name Jezreel. Now Jezreel means "God will sow" or "God scatters" – when you sow seed you scatter or cast the seed out. The idea here is that Jezreel meant "cast-away" or "cast – out" and was a name of shame in Israel.

There is a story in the Bible of a Queen Jezebel and Ahab? Ahab cheated his neighbor out of his property and stole his neighbor's vineyard, and Jezebel was the wicked queen who put him up to it. At last God's judgment fell upon her. She was looking out her upper story window one day when a general, Jehu, was down in the courtyard, and he ordered the servants to throw Jezebel out the window. They threw her out and she fell on the pavement and was killed, and the dogs ate her up, and the courtyard has been called Jezreel ever since.

Nevertheless, that was the name that God picked for Hosea's oldest boy, his first son. And that was the name Hosea gave to his baby, for he understood that God was thus warning his people: they too would be cast out of their land/nation if they didn't recognize the foolishness of their actions, if they didn't turn from going after idols and giving way to immoral practices and trying to be like everybody else around them. God was warning them with this baby's name.

In the course of time, another child, a daughter, was born to Hosea. This one was named Loruhamah [low roo HAY muh], which means "not pitied." Imagine naming your little baby girl "not pitied." It meant that God would no longer have pity on his people if they continued their stubborn rebellion. His patience was wearing thin.

When this little girl was weaned, Gomer conceived again and bore a third child, another little boy. And this one God named Loammi [loe AM eye], "not my people," for God was saying, "you are not my people and I will not be your God." God had said that he would name these children as a sign to his people, because like Gomer they had committed adultery – unfaithful to God. One way the Bible refers to believers in Christ is "bride" and at times the bride is unfaithful to Christ just as in the time of Hosea... but there

would come a day of restoration.

Hosea 2:1-4

"In that day you will call your brothers Ammi—'My people.' And you will call your sisters Ruhamah [roo HAY muh]—'The ones I love.'

"But now bring charges against Israel—your mother—
for she is no longer my wife,
and I am no longer her husband.

Tell her to remove the prostitute's makeup from her face
and the clothing that exposes her breasts.

Otherwise, I will strip her as naked
as she was on the day she was born.

I will leave her to die of thirst,
as in a dry and barren wilderness.

And I will not love her children,
for they were conceived in prostitution.

& 23, God says:

I will show love (pity/mercy) to those I called 'Not loved.' (not pitied)

And to those I called 'Not my people,'

I will say, 'Now you are my people.'

And they will reply, 'You are our God!'"

I can't speak for you but I thank God that He has pity on me. I thank God that He sent His only Son to pay for my sins! I thank God for His mercy and everything He uses to draw me back to His love. Frank shared the song we played during the offering when he lead the devotion after the softball game Monday night. The chorus of the song says

Lord restore the joy I had
I have wandered bring me back
In this darkness lead me through
Until all I see is you

And though God was upset with Israel, through Hosea's bad marriage He was announcing that His grace was also being shown. After the last child was born Gomer began to fulfill the sad prediction that God had made when He had told Hosea to marry her.

What a heartbreak it must have been to this preacher, Hosea, as he heard the whispers going around about his wife and about what she was doing when he was away on preaching trips. One day, after numerous times of warning her to change her ways fell on deaf ears, Hosea divorced himself from Gomer for she had decided to find the happiness she felt she deserved, and she was leaving him and the children to follow after it.

Gomer passed from man to man to get the things she wanted and needed. They wined and dined her, gave her perfume, food and fine clothing. But in time it all ended as it usually does as the satisfaction she craved escaped her. And the difficulties that she began to experience had her thinking of turning back.

Hosea 2:7-8

When she runs after her lovers,
she won't be able to catch them.

She will search for them
but not find them.

Then she will think,
'I might as well return to my husband,
for I was better off with him than I am now.'

She doesn't realize it was I who gave her everything she has—
the grain, the new wine, the olive oil;
I even gave her silver and gold.
But she gave all my gifts to Baal.

When you realize that the idols you seek can't help you or satisfy you, but are all meaningless, and in humility and repentance you return to God He will be there for you.

Hosea 2:19-20

I will make you my wife forever,
showing you righteousness and justice,
unfailing love and compassion.

I will be faithful to you and make you mine,
and you will finally know me as the LORD.

News of Gomer's miserable state came to the prophet and at last word came that the woman Hosea loved was to be sold in the slave market. The man she was living with got tired of her and she was to be sold as a slave. The brokenhearted prophet didn't know what to do. He went weeping to God. And God said. "Hosea, do you love this woman in spite of all that she has done to you?" Hosea nodded through his tears, and God said. "Then go show your love for her in the same way that I love the nation Israel."

Hosea 3:1

Then the LORD said to me, "Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover. This will illustrate that the LORD still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods and love to worship them."

So Hosea went to the marketplace and he watched Gomer brought up for auction. There she was stripped of all her clothing and stood naked before the crowd and then the bidding began. Somebody bid three pieces of silver and Hosea raised it to five. Somebody else upped it to eight and Hosea bid ten. Somebody went to eleven; he went to twelve. Then Hosea offered fifteen pieces of silver and 5 bushels of barley. The

auctioneer's gavel fell and Hosea had his wife back. He went to her and put her clothes on her and he led her away by the hand and took her to his home.

This is a picture of God's unconditional love. To some degree we are all unfaithful to God sometimes. We drift, we get preoccupied, and pursue other affections to replace Him. It's spiritual adultery.

And when I think of God's love for us, that Jesus died for low-down, run-around folk like me and you! Many times we try to run from God and drown our miseries in empty pleasures. But as surely as we think we have escaped, as surely as we think we have run far enough, God touches our sleeve with his love and says: "My child, my name and my nature are love and I act according to what I am. When you tire of all your running and your wandering and your heartbreak, I'll be there to draw you to myself again!"

A few weeks ago an old friend came to mind. Someone I worked for over 40 years ago. I thought that was strange. So, I took a chance and searched for him on facebook, and there he was. So I sent a friend request and he answered. I didn't know if he'd remember me, but he did and wanted to get together to catch up on the last 40+ years of our lives.

I noticed that he had remarried and since I would be meeting his wife I clicked on her page. When I did I noticed that we had a mutual friend. I thought how can that be; who does she know that I know. Well, she was friends with Linda who is the regional director of Alpha, I have known and worked with Linda and L.I. Alpha for almost 15 years. So I contacted Linda and asked if she knew this woman. She said, yes she accepted Christ at an Alpha course and is now volunteering on the Alpha team and attends the church that hosted that Alpha course. I thought okay I guess this is a God thing. I asked Linda if she knew my friend, but she had not met him.

So I get together with my friend. Now understand that when I worked for him I wanted to be like him, he was rich, successful, popular, famous. He had it all, everything a young man could ever want. But during the time I was working for him I accepted Jesus; after that I would talk to him about Jesus – a lot.

In the course of our conversation now so many years later he said to me, "I want what you got." And I'm thinking, "What? At one time I wanted what he had." Then he said, "I don't know, maybe I'll find peace until I die." I told him he was wrong, he could have peace now.

Then I reminded him that one day, 40 years ago while witnessing to him he said to me, "I know you tell me about Jesus because you care about me, but if I was to accept Jesus I would have to change my life style and I'm having too good of a time and I'm not ready to do that.

But that life style resulted in divorce, his child felt abandoned by him and still feels the effects 40 years later. He got addicted to drugs and spent months in rehab, was

betrayed by friends, lost a ton of money and what was once a good time, has become meaningless and never resulted in finding peace.

But, God was giving him a second chance. He has been reading the daily bread and praying, sometimes he goes to church with his wife. I told him he should go to the next Alpha course. Pray for my friend, he's close to coming home and finding that God has never given up on him and that the difficulties God is allowing in his life right now is to help him come to Christ and find the peace he desires.

And how about you? I'll close with this admonition from the prophet/preacher Hosea:

Hosea 10:12

Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD, that He may come and shower righteousness upon you.