



Hosea - married to an unfaithful wife (Hosea 1 & 3:1-5)

I'm sure like me you watch TV and also like going to the cinema or theatre. What drama does is to portray a version of the world. Sometimes real issues are shown through fictional characters. This is the basis of all parables; using stories to give a spiritual lesson and as we know Jesus was a master of this form.

In the prophetic books, God actually used the lives of prophets to act out His message. Thus, he made Jeremiah redeem a field to express the prophecy that fields would again be bought in the land - a promise of return from exile and a mark of redemption (Jer 32). Hosea on the other hand had a much more drastic task of being a living parable - he had to marry a wife who he knew would be adulterous.

It's a remarkable story in many ways. We always encourage young people not to marry somebody who does not share one's faith and for a believer, to marry such a woman would be disastrous.

Hosea's marriage to Gomer was disastrous. True she had a relationship with Hosea, but she also ran off with another man and as we read in chapter 3, Hosea had to go and actually buy her back off the man she was living with. Just think of the scandal there must have been. The holy man - the prophet - has married an adulteress! And later buying her back! Shouldn't an adulteress be stoned according to Leviticus 10 which says *If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.* A bit extreme perhaps, but even today marital infidelity raises eyebrows and they rise even higher when the guilty party is accepted back. "How can you do that? Can you ever trust them again?"

In the Israel of Hosea this was shocking stuff. Everybody must have known the scandal. This was a society where people knew one another and this sort of thing just wasn't done. And that was why Hosea was told to do it. Hosea's shock actions brought with them a shock message - God has done the same!

Why couldn't Hosea just have gone and spoken out about it? Because it was a society that was closed. The northern kingdom of Israel of this period was run by the house of Jehu who I mentioned last time I spoke. Jehu usurped the throne from Ahab. It was a violent affair. Jehu was a violent man. he had Ahab's 70 sons all beheaded and their heads put in baskets in Jezreel. He then slaughtered all the prophets of Baal. Perhaps not surprisingly Jehu didn't follow the law of God and continued to do the sins of Jeroboam the first king of the northern kingdom of not worshipping at Jerusalem. So God only promised Jehu four generations after him. Hosea functioned in the last and longest of Jehu's line, Jeroboam II. Under Jeroboam II Israel was prosperous and at the height of its post-Solomon power.

We know from the prophecy of Amos that despite their affluence, the society of that time was not just and God hated the worship that was offered in the temples of Bethel

and Dan. On the outside it was prosperous but on the inside it was corrupt and Hosea's message was aimed at both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah - God was going to judge them and He had every right to do it.

Israel and Judah are pictured here as the wives of the Lord. He has accepted them despite their origins. How gracious God is - His relationship with us is that of the bride of Christ - and we are people who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ.

But in Hosea the relationship of Israel and Judah to God was that of an adulterous wife. He had accepted them despite their adultery and now they both had run off after other gods and not followed the provisions of the law. The message of Hosea was one of judgement and the three children of his union with Gomer reflect that.

What happens to the adulterous wife? Under the law she should be stoned.

Jezeel

"Call him Jezeel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezeel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. 5 In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezeel."

This is a reference to the slaughter at Jezreel. The first son was a sigh of why they were being judged. The slaughter at Jezreel probably typified the house of Jehu. The reference to Jezreel in verse 5 *In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel* might refer to the meaning of Jezreel Yizrel: God will disperse, as seed is when sown. It could refer to the speedy dispersion of Israel by Shalmaneser king of Assyria.

Let's understand from this judgement on Israel was not a whim. It had been a long time coming. They had plenty of chances. God is long-suffering, wishing to give the adulteress plenty of opportunity to repent. But the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat continued and continued and the kings still did the most awful atrocities.

Remember, just because God doesn't act immediately on every sin you do, doesn't mean you can continue to do it. He is a long-suffering God who gives you every opportunity to repent. Each time we come to the table as we are doing tonight, we have that opportunity to repent as we remember again that we have a God who forgives all those who truly repent.

But don't think God is a soft touch - He hates sin and don't expect to get away with it. "Be sure your sin will find you out"

Lo-Ruhamah

"Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. 7 Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them--not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God."

Lo-ruhamah = "no mercy". Israel had gone past the point of no return. They were to be destroyed utterly. God's judgement is always a drastic one and it meant the destruction of 75% of the people of God. The judgement of God can be drastic. You'll notice how Judah is shown love. In the time of Hosea the kings weren't that bad, the sins were not as extensive and Hezekiah for example was a man who led the nation into repentance.

What do we learn here. First of all, a long-suffering God does judge those who do not repent. Let's be in no doubt. Judgement had already been meted out in the reign of

previous kings like Ahab. We can't cheat God. he sees us. Let's listen to His voice and deal with sin in our lives.

The role of the prophet was not to just say "You're doomed" or words to that effect but to call for repentance to take people back into relationship with God. That's what the living parable of Gomer and Hosea was. For us today the church has that prophetic role through the prophetic word and the written word. We have the opportunity to repent. My experience as I have grown in my faith is that God wants to lead us into deeper repentance, but all too often it is easy to slip into a pattern of sin. Let's be mindful then of this pattern from the OT.

But the second point of this is that we have a God who keeps promises. He didn't destroy Judah completely. In the end, as we shall see for Hosea's final child, God is a covenant God. He destroyed all but a remnant, but He was faithful to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. But the promise didn't extend to their system of government or their borders. All their real-estate was taken away from them for a season.

We wonder how far we have to go in the decline of the church before revival. God is stripping away the real estate, He's cutting out much of the sin of the denominations, He's getting rid of that which is not of Him in the church - and I guess He will do that until we get down to that remnant who will wait for Him and walk with Him. It's harsh but it's necessary.

Lo-Ammi

Lo-ammi = "not my people" but what God says of Lo-Ammi is encouraging

"Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God. 10 "Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.' 11 The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.

The people called Lo-Ammi are still the people of promise and one day they will be called sons of the living God. Verse 11 looks to me like a Messianic reference. Out of the judgement will come the promised blessings to Israel.

As we go down to chapter 3 we see a picture of redemption that's also Messianic *"Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." 2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer of barley and a measure of wine. 3 And I said to her, "You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you." 4 For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. 5 Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.*

With the promise of judgement came the promise of redemption. Through all the exile and the return the people had this promise of a coming king. We are at the other side. We are called the sons of the living God and we have a great King, Jesus who died and rose again.

With judgement comes restoration. In temporal terms that's why I believe the church in this land will come resurgent again. The question is, are we the remnant or the majority? The bottom line is that all the blessings came in Christ out of that remnant.

Let's come around the table tonight, strong in the knowledge that we have a God who has dealt with all our sins in Christ on Calvary and that He desires that we wait for Him, we seek His will and walk with Him to His glory.

*Preached by Mark Reid, Swaffham Baptist Church, 1/8/04.
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