



“I married a loser!”

Hosea 1

A defence attorney was cross-examining a police officer during a felony trial. It went like this:

Q: Officer, did you see my client fleeing the scene?

A: No sir, but I subsequently observed a person matching the description of the offender running several blocks away.

Q: Officer, who provided this description?

A: The officer who responded to the scene.

Q: A fellow officer provided the description of this so-called offender. Do you trust your fellow officers?

A: Yes sir, with my life.

Q: WITH YOUR LIFE? Let me ask you this, then, officer -- do you have a locker room in the police station -- a room where you change your clothes in preparation for your daily duties?

A: Yes sir, we do.

Q: And do you have a locker in that room?

A: Yes sir, I do.

Q: And do you have a lock on your locker?

A: Yes sir.

Q: Now why is it, officer, IF YOU TRUST YOUR FELLOW OFFICERS WITH OUR LIFE, that you find it necessary to lock your locker in a room you share with those officers?

A: You see, sir, we share the building with a court complex, and sometimes defence attorneys have been known to walk through that room.

We've all come across them – people who you can't trust as far as you can throw them. People who always get themselves in a mess in whatever situation they get into. Trust is an important part of the relationships we have and when we can't trust people, often our relationships start to break down.

A church minister told his deacon that someone had stolen his bicycle and he suspected that the thief was a member of his congregation.

The next Sunday he decided to preach a sermon about the Ten Commandments because he felt that when he got to the commandment that says, "Thou shalt not steal," the thief would be shamed into returning the bicycle.

The next Sunday, his topic was the Ten Commandments, but about halfway through his sermon, he abruptly switched his sermon to another subject.

Later the deacon asked him why he had changed his sermon. "Well," the minister said, "when I got to the commandment that says, 'Thou shall not commit adultery,' I remembered where I left my bicycle."

Infidelity can produce some really incisive humour, but when it happens in people's lives it can be devastating. We have a fascination of it. There are loads of TV programs like Jeremy Kyle or Jerry Springer which trade on our fascination with infidelity in the lives of real people. And then of course there are the naughty vicar stories. Everyone likes a naughty vicar story don't they – except the family that his behaviour has devastated.

Whether it's infidelity within marriage, or just being let down by someone you thought you could trust with your life, when the infidelity is discovered it's a shattering experience that can have huge consequences. I've had it in my mind to take a look at the prophecy of Hosea for some time, knowing as we all do that it has what seems in the first instance a bizarre command by God for the prophet to marry someone who was going to be unfaithful to him and their children would be just as bad!

Gomer was clearly someone who was unstable, shallow and prone to infidelity – and of course Hosea knew this when he married her, either by reputation or the fact God had prophesied it to him.

What was the idea of God asking Hosea to do this bizarre act? The whole thing as we shall see has a touch of the Jeremy Kyles about it and everybody who would have heard about it in what was quite a closed society where people really did know people. Hosea would have been a laughing stock – he was the daft old prophet who married a dodgy wife and then went on to call the children he had by her stupid names. Think of the gossip it would have generated. People got to talk about it for years. Why all this?

To understand that we need to look at the history of Israel at that time. Hosea was from the northern kingdom of Israel. He prophesied from the reign of Israel's Jeroboam II which ended in 751BC until after Israel fell, into the reign of Hezekiah king of Judah which started in 715BC. Most of Hosea's prophecy in the Bible was written before the fall of Israel at a time when people were clearly not expecting it, which dates it somewhere in the 750s and 740s BC.

What's interesting in the first couple of verses is that even though he was a northerner, he dates himself according to all the kings of Judah that were alive when he was, but does not list all the corresponding kings of Israel, just one, Jeroboam. It illustrates just where his prophecy was going – forewarning of the destruction of Israel, but the continuation of Judah.

It's likely he would have found himself in Judah for one of two reasons – that his prophecies in Israel were opposed and Judah was a safe place of refuge. It could just be that because he supported the Judah version of Judaism not the Israelite one that he opted to live in Judah where he could safely oppose the Israelite system.

What was the Israelite system. Let's go back to II who reigned for 41 years in Israel. They were good years and Israel prospered. But Jeroboam tolerated the worship of foreign gods and the continuation of Israel's own version of the Torah which did not include worship at the temple in Jerusalem. That was started by his namesake Jeroboam son of Nebat when the nation of Israel split after Solomon.

The great threat to Israel, Assyria was in turmoil at that time and left them alone. Jeroboam was able to prosper so it was a time of peace, security and prosperity. This was Israel post-Solomon at its greatest. To the annoyance of Israel's political leaders, prophets started to warn of impending destruction.

Amos a prophet from Judah made himself unpopular by warning that God was going to destroy them because of the continuing sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat and their toleration of idolatry. Now Hosea, was doing the same. But how do you hammer your message home in a nation that self-righteously does not want to listen. You use people's natural disposition towards dramatic life stories – the love of tattle.

Cometh the hour, cometh the soap opera – Hosea. He gets to be the guy who is talk of the time because he's a prophet who marries someone who was unfaithful and a prostitute. Can you imagine the scandal? How could the prophet of God marry such a woman? Just look at those children!

What would we say if some fine upright Christian person we know married a prostitute because "God had commanded him" We would be concerned for him, think he has gone mad, gone off the rails or something like that. We'd be saying to him "you know what the Bible says about prostitution. You know what it says about immorality. Flee from it!" it can't possibly be a command of God to make such an idiot of ourself."

I don't think it was a charade for Hosea at all. He loved her, cared about her, had children with her. Perhaps he thought he would be a good influence on her. Save her from herself. He didn't, she ran off and when back to the gutter. There's no question of Hosea doing anything immoral in that situation – it's clear from this prophecy, that he was willing to follow God in whichever way he was being commanded.

And that's where the message of Hosea was designed to hit home. The scandal that was Gomer brought to light feelings and emotions in people that any number of sermons, speeches and diatribes never could. It fuelled the human disposition for scandal and gossip! As they scorned Hosea for his stupidity in trying to cope with this sad woman, God turns around and says to the nation of Israel: Hosea and Gomer – that's me and you!

God never asks us to do anything He hasn't done Himself. Never.

Just a minute I hear you say, God never married a prostitute. He did. Her name was Israel. He knew she was bad to start with. He knew she would fall and fail again and again. Yet He loved her. And because of

His live, He persevered and persevered with her.

Sadly we know the story because this was the message of Hosea – despite the opportunities, the nation never heeded and fell into disaster, anarchy and finally conquest.

What message does this have for us? We have a God who has proved His love for us by sending His won dear Son to die for us. He calls on us to follow Him, obey Him, walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and all the rest of it. In our last series we saw the people God wants us to be and all the blessings that God has poured out on us. But so often we don't live the life that God has called us to do.

How can we who died to sin still live in it? Quite easily actually. Yet our Father pleads with us time and time again not to follow our way but honour Him. God is persevering, but there is a difference between persevering and turning a blind eye. There are consequences when we do it our way and eventually we will succumb to them – we ignore our Father at our peril. Not because He's vengeful and out to get us, but that going our way will shipwreck us. I've been taking Bethan out driving. It's nerve racking being a driving instructor. I don't know how people do it! I may tell her that if she doesn't look where she is going she will crash. If she does, it isn't a consequence of me being a vengeful or bad father, but because she isn't looking where she's going. Se is warned but – eventually she will crash!

That's our father and us. He doesn't want our faith to be shipwrecked, but if we don't obey Him, we will land up steering ourselves into rocks! What does it take for God to make us wake up and listen?

The challenge we are brought tonight is that we all have things about us and our lives that are not according to God's will. Things that we need to deal with. Whatever the sin is, it has to be dealt with, however big or small it is because the consequences could destroy our witness, reputation, friendships, even our lives.

*Preached by Mark Reid
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