



“Redeemed”

Hosea 3

So here's the story so far. Hosea the prophet is commanded to take a wife that would be unfaithful to him and have children who would be problematic. Everything about her was failure – even her name! And we saw how the prophet of God – a man of integrity – had to live with the shame of this woman in his life. It's clear as we read in the prophecy how he loved her and tonight we will see the lengths he went to to get her back.

It was plain that the relationship was going down the drain right from the start – particularly as the Lord said it was going to! By chapter 2 it would appear that Hosea and Gomer weren't speaking – he's left to send messages to Gomer via his children! By chapter 3 Gomer had left home and was living with another man but it is clear that she was into prostitution – probably with the man selling her sexual favours for money – she was in effect a slave.

I was reading some heavy stuff preparing for this - John Calvin's commentary on Hosea. Calvin just couldn't get his head round the idea that someone of such integrity as a prophet, could be asked to place himself in a position where he would be mocked and his integrity questioned. More importantly, how could God ask a man to marry such a woman. He thought that it was just a picture rather than a real event.

However there is no evidence from this passage that this was anything other than a true story – this really happened. But there is also no question of Hosea having sinned – quite the reverse as the passage tonight reveals his love and willingness to forgive Gomer. What comes out of this is that actually Hosea kept his integrity intact and showed Gomer considerable love and grace.

But the issue isn't whether or not God would ask a prophet to marry a sinful woman. The Lord uses the life of Hosea to illustrate how he intentionally entered into a relationship with Israel (and mankind in general), *knowing* they would fail, *knowing* that they would prostitute themselves to foreign gods and nations, and *knowing* that He would have to pay a massive price to redeem them.

Calvin thought it was just a parable, a story Hosea was supposed to tell the people. And it was a story, but it was a story that was alive. Through the lives of Hosea and Gomer the Lord is saying: “In the same way I have loved my adulterous people, I want you to love Gomer. When they look at your marriage and your household, they will see a little taste of the rejection I've endured and as they see you're forgiveness and love, they will know that they will find the same from me.”

Let's go to the passage and look at it a little closer. So Hosea is commanded to buy Gomer back. It isn't normal to have to buy an unfaithful wife back, but that's what Hosea did. Why? Because the man she lived with was using her to make money. He was the pimp she was the prostitute and in some way she had indebted herself into his control. She had indebted herself into slavery – and what a slavery! To get her back Hosea had to buy her out of it and recompense the man for his lost immoral income. Can you imagine how awful that must have been for Hosea to do. The unfairness and injustice of buying back a woman who was his by marriage. That's what he did: and the price he paid - fifteen pieces of silver and seven bushels of barley to buy her – was no mean sum of money!

He could have just left her there. After all, it was she who was unfaithful, it was she who had sold herself into prostitution. By Jewish law he could have written a bill of divorce and walked away with a clear conscience. But he loved her and paid the price and suffered the humiliation of buying his prostitute wife back. Think of what the neighbours must have said when he brought her home! Think of the gossip it created! What judgement did they make of Hosea I wonder? Did they commend him, or think him a fool to not just have her back, but to actually have paid for her?

But what a wonderful picture of God we have here. Because it just a perfect picture of exactly had happened to His people. In verse 1 we see the nature of the people's adultery (*The LORD said to me, "Go again and show your love for a woman who is committing adultery with a lover. You must love her just as I still love the people of Israel, even though they turn to other gods and like to take offerings of raisins to idols."*) – they had gone after other gods.

In Hosea's prophecy we see the true nature of adultery. People often see adultery purely in a physical sense; of placing one's sexual favours with someone who is not one's husband or wife. But we learn from this prophecy and others that it's deeper. It's basic unfaithfulness – it's putting our loyalty, trust and affections into someone even though we have pledged ourselves to someone else.

Adultery is just one form of infidelity – whenever we break oaths we have made before God, the nature of that infidelity is in the same league as adultery.

Jesus said that adultery is something of the heart and mind, not just an act because unfaithfulness starts with the notion that we'd really like to break our promise to the one we are married to for whatever reason. If you think that is a bit harsh then remember this verse from *James 1:13* *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

Here's a little illustration from nature: *In the Australian bush country grows a little plant called the "sundew." It has a slender stem and tiny round leaves fringed with hairs that glisten with bright drops of liquid as delicate as fine dew. Woe to the insect, however, that dares to dance around it in the sunny air. For while its attractive clusters of red, white, and pink blossoms are harmless, the leaves are deadly. The shiny moisture on each leaf is sticky, and will hold any bug prisoner that touches it. The struggle to get free is often futile, for the movement of the insect causes the leaves to close. This innocent-looking plant actually feeds upon its victims if they do not quickly wriggle out of the entanglement.*

Gomer found out, to her dismay, that the sin that looked so attractive was also very dangerous. Gomer found out that the man who she had ended up living with mistreated her and humiliated her and abused her. Desire had conceived, given birth to sin and sin had given birth to death – well not quite because Hosea rescued her.

Adultery is easy. Whether it is complete unfaithfulness or just in our heart, it can have horrible consequences. It doesn't take much for a sin we think is private to us to get out of control. A friend of mine used to counsel other pastors who had problems. One day he was approached by a pastor for help. He suggested that the pastor come to our church for counselling. He refused and suggested another venue. Why? Because he had been kerb crawling and used to pick up prostitutes near our church and didn't want to be recognised by them. If anyone ever found out what he had been up to, that would have been the end of his career. Desire gives birth to sin, and when it is full-grown, brings birth to death.

This isn't just about adultery – it's about any sin, because all sin is unfaithfulness to a God we are pledged to follow and obey. What about our private desires, our private sins. The message of Hosea I deal with them before they destroy you – because they will. Satan will get that foothold and yes, even though in Christ we are free, Satan will have that foothold in our lives. We will be caught, trapped and ultimately our reputation will be destroyed. Consider any lapsed believer and you will see desire that gave birth to sin and when it is full grown it gives birth to death. It may not be physical or spiritual death, but it will be death in some way or other because there's nothing more empty than the void in the heart and life of one who has walked away from the Lord.

Let's go to verse 2 and see a much more positive message. Hosea's purchase of Gomer is a picture of God buying back His people. He will rescue them at great expense, He will pay the unjust fee of the oppressor. He will have His loved one back at huge cost. And that picture isn't just of Israel, but of the whole human race. God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son. Here we are this evening, God's people, redeemed at massive cost. Give Him glory! I'm redeemed yes I am, by the blood of the Lamb!

Why am I redeemed. Because of God's love. Divine love is shocking. His grace is outrageous. Yet we have a Saviour who in perfection, allowed Himself to become part of a sinful world: to live, eat, touch, befriend and love sinful people. Remember how shocked Simon was that Jesus let a prostitute touch him, even kiss his feet? Simon couldn't understand how this man could be a prophet of God, and let a sinful woman like her kiss his feet and wipe his feet with her hair. It is an unbelievable kind of love and compassion. That's why Calvin struggled with it, but he missed something important – God Himself became a human being – He entered into this sinful world because He loves us and redeemed us.

And if we think hard about it it blows our minds! It's amazing that God still loves me. What about all those times when I haven't trusted? What about all those ill-placed thoughts about people? That unspoken criticism? I do nothing at all to deserve his love, yet the Father loves me as much as he loves his own Son. Because when he looks at me, he sees his Son and as He looks at me He sees the righteousness of Christ, not my sinful past.

Before I finish, there's one last point. And it's about the fidelity of human relationships. Adultery is one form

of infidelity but within families and our network of friends and work colleagues, there's none worse than someone you can't trust, particularly if it is you personally who have been let down by them. So when our family relationships are threatened because of sin – whether it is the relationship between husband and wife or between parents and children or between brothers and sisters – we need the love that God planted in Hosea's heart in our own heart.

Only this love allows us to keep on loving a person who has hurt us as deeply as Gomer wounded Hosea; only this love allows us to forgive horrible sins committed against us. How do we get this love? This love is ours only if we believe in Jesus. It is the love of Christ Himself which He showed on the cross and which He plants in our hearts through the operation of the Holy Spirit. We know we should forgive because God has forgiven us far greater, but how does that happen. The bottom line is that in our own strength we can't do it, but the power to forgive isn't just a human emotion, but it's something that is of the Holy Spirit – just claim it and ask Him to grow it in you.

Infidelity doesn't always mean that after reconciliation the relationship will be the same as it was before. When marriages break up, forgiveness may come to the estranged parties, but the relationship that was there before will never be like it was in the first place – particularly true if the people are divorced and remarried. Reconciliation recognises that that estrangement causes damage.

But it doesn't mean that the relationship in latter times is going to be worse than before. It will be different and where God is involved it may be in a positive way. The nation of Israel was destroyed – obliterated by the Assyrians. Yet we read in this passage: 4 (C) In just this way the people of Israel will have to live for a long time without kings or leaders, without sacrifices or sacred stone pillars, without idols or images to use for divination. 5 But the time will come when the people of Israel will once again turn to the LORD their God and to a descendant of David their king. Then they will fear the LORD and will receive his good gifts.

How? They will be restored, but not in the way any of them could have dreamed – God Himself has forged a people from the nations to Himself at great price. In Christ He has forged the church and the glory of the latter is greater than the former. The parties are reconciled, but the relationship is different, radically different.

Have we been wounded in our relationships? Maybe the damage to the relationship is too badly damaged to restore it as it was. But God calls us to love those people still and seek what is best for them. What's best is what in Christ is best for them. It may not be the same, but in things committed to our God, negatives become positives, disasters become blessings, failure is turned to success, certainty of death becomes the assurance of life

Let's pray this into our situation this evening.

Prayer

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