

## Scandalous Love

Hosea 1:1-14:9

### Introduction

**Hook:** Whether *Little Women*, *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Great Expectations*, or maybe *Pretty in Pink*, *Harry Potter*, or *Forrest Gump*, **unrequited love** is a powerful theme in literature and cinema.

- Have you ever loved someone or something that hasn't loved you back? I've seen this in romantic terms but also seen this in sin terms. Some people who describe their addiction as a one way. They love the drugs but the drugs don't love them back.

**Book of the Twelve:** Tonight we'll be in the first of twelve prophets that we'll look at over the next twelve weeks (one a week). Often called the **minor prophets** they are not minor in **message**, merely in **size** (they're like the article compared to the book; Isaiah 66 chapters, Hosea, the longest is 14). In fact, I'd encourage you to **read the whole book (at least once) each week before you show up** (Hosea = 30 mins; Joel = 12 mins; avg. 14.5 mins). Plus, when you get to heaven and meet Nahum or Habbakuk, it's gonna be awkward when they ask you what you thought of their book if you haven't read it.

- Collected and read as a **single unit** for as long as Jews and Christians have been reading the Hebrew Bible.
- After the great Davidic Monarchy; tribes of Israel split into two kingdoms (north and south); both constantly tempted toward idolatry; facing God's judgment (defeat and exile).
  - **Prophets writing as things fall apart.**
  - Clear vision of what it looks like for God to put our lives back together according to his promise and plan after we've messed it all up.

**Hosea:** Helpful to start with Hosea, a prophet in the Northern Kingdom (retelling of Hosea's life and prophecies during his decades-long prophetic career). Basic story (chs 1-3) and poetic reflection (chs 4-14). Hosea is a particularly graphic depiction of our sin and God's love told through the **words and life** of the prophet himself.

\*Trigger warning. <sup>2</sup> When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." <sup>3</sup> So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. (Hos 1:1-3)

- Well, things just got graphic, didn't they? We just jumped into the deep end.
- God command Hosea to marry a prostitute and have children with her.
  - **How would you like to get that assignment from God? What was Jonah complaining about?**
- Kids are named (1) Jezreel (city where the king's family was killed ushering in a wicked dynasty, (2) Lo-Ruhamah ("No Mercy"), because Israel doesn't deserve God's mercy or pity, and (3) Lo-Ammi ("Not My People").
  - There names a description of the judgment they deserve for their sin.

- Think **Lot's** kids by his daughters: Moab ("From My Father") and Ben-Ammi ("Son of My People"). **Puritan**: The Barebone Family ("Fear-God" and "Praise God" whose sons were "Jesus Christ Came Into the World to Save" and "If Christ Had Not Died for Thee Thou Has Been Damned" who inexplicably chose to go by the name "Nicolas").

The love of Hosea and the sin of Gomer are meant to paint in vivid detail the truth about our sin and God's love.

## 1. Spiritual Adultery

**Adultery:** We know just how important marriage is by God's inclusion of adultery in the Ten Commandments. "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14). There are few things more damaging to a person than infidelity (pastoral counseling: money and infidelity).

- And we know (Eph 5) that Christian marriage is a mysterious picture of God's love for his people, of Christ the groom and the church the bride. **God desires us to love each other and to love with a pure and faithful heart.**
  - Adultery is betrayal of love, a rejection of your promise, the opposite of faithful. It is the breaking apart what God has joined together. Along with the fracturing of a relationship comes the breaking of hearts, families, and trust.
- Adultery is when you try to find in someone else what you should find in your spouse. **Spiritual adultery** is trying to find in something else what can only be found in God.

**Israel's Adultery:** The primary sin God identifies in Hosea is that Israel looked to other nations for security, identity, and belonging. <sup>13</sup> When Ephraim (shorthand: northern tribes) saw his sickness, and Judah (shorthand: southern tribes) his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound (Hos 5:13).

- They banked their prosperity on alliances with other nations.
  - Their heart followed their allegiance (worshipped other gods, relied on political power, hoped in economic prosperity, cozied up to the values of these other nations).
- When Israel felt afraid or faced financial worries, rather than turning to God, they ran down to Egypt and Assyria and said, "You've got to help us!" Same song, different verse: rebellion in the wilderness, King Saul to be like the nations.
  - And they're quite proud of themselves. Things are going quite well *economically* (money in the bank ≠ faithfulness to God, e.g., NRBC).
  - But God knows the end. Israel will end up *enslaved* by the Assyrians and later Judah to the Babylonians.
- The heart of the issue is that Israel has replaced God with something lesser. They have trusted in something other. They have loved something else.

**Sin as Adultery:** Sin is adultery. Sin is cheating on God. "What is sin? It is the glory of God not honored. The holiness of God not revered. The greatness of God not admired. The power of God not praised. The truth of God not sought. The wisdom of God not esteemed. The beauty of

God not treasured. The goodness of God not savored. The faithfulness of God not trusted. The commandments of God not obeyed. The justice of God not respected. The wrath of God not feared. The grace of God not cherished. The presence of God not prized. The person of God not loved” (Piper).

- The sinful actions we commit are merely the symptoms, the surface manifestations, of hearts that do not love God.
- “You and I won’t grow in holiness until you see your sin as a personal offense against God. Sin isn’t just breaking a rule, it personally grieves God. When we sin, we look at God and say, ‘I won’t obey you. I don’t want to be like you. I want my own way.’”

**The Heart of the Matter:** If you read through Hosea, you’ll notice something else. Sin is first and foremost a **heart posture, not a behavior**. The Israelites were still sacrificing to God, keeping up with festivals and rituals. They claimed the name of YHWH but their hearts lusted after the fortunes and acceptance of other nations.

- For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings (Hos 6:6).
- As for my sacrificial offerings, they sacrifice meat and eat it, but the LORD does not accept them. Now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins; they shall return to Egypt (Hos 8:13).

Think about adultery, the heart goes ahead of the behavior. That’s why Jesus says that everyone who **looks** at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt 5:28).

- \*Update: going to church, reading the Bible, serving in kids ministry, retweeting inspirational quotes, listening to gospel music but your **heart trusts in the world**.
- Your behavior is a clear sign of your heart, but I’m asking you to **examine what I can’t see** (you can’t fool God). The easiest place to be spiritual is at church, what about at home, or in your own mind in heart?

What in your life have you let take the place that only God should occupy? Are you cheating on God? Relationship? Job? Money? If I just had **it**, then things would work out and I’d be happy, respected, secure, etc.

What do you daydream about? What do you fantasize about? What do you turn to when you’re stressed? Retail therapy? Drugs? Alcohol? Significant Other? Only God can bear the weight of your hopes and dreams, *everything else will disappoint*.

**It’s Dumb:** Idolatry, sin, spiritual adultery is exceedingly dumb. Stop blaming God for *all* the bad things in your life. Some bad things happen because the world is broken, some bad things happen because God is allowing them to refine you, some suffering is a part of following Jesus, but some things are just a result of your sin. “Everything happens for a reason, sometimes the reason is you made a stupid choice.”

- God’s goodness has hurt no one. We bring death upon ourselves when we sin.
- Sin always takes you farther than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs more than you want to pay.

The Israelites’ sin is not going to bring the peace and prosperity they hope for.

- Assyria is going to turn on them and bring them into captivity. For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind (Hos 8:7)

**Your sin will not free you, it will enslave you.** Sin destroys. Its promises are lies.

- You have plowed iniquity; you have reaped injustice; you have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your own way and in the multitude of your warriors (Hos 10:13) Where now is your king, to save you in all your cities? Where are all your rulers—those of whom you said, “Give me a king and princes”? (Hos 13:10)

When it all comes crashing down, who are you going to turn to?

- Your sin doesn't love you. It can't rescue you. It can't help you.
- When you're on your deathbed, your bank account can't save you. Your addiction can't comfort you.

Do you know what can set you free? The love of God.

## 2. Scandalous Love

**Hosea's Shoes:** If you or I were in Hosea's place, we would be justified in walking away. After his marriage, after his three kids, Gomer walks away again. The scandal of the story is that Hosea goes after her again! Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn (Hos 4:16). She keeps returning to her sin, like Israel keeps returning to her sin, like we keep returning to our sin.

- This is God. He doesn't love us in our goodness but in our wickedness. He doesn't wait until we get our act together and clean ourselves up, but he *finds us* in our brokenness and rescues us.

He loves us back to life. **God's love is a gift that brings us life.** There is nothing we can do to earn and nothing we can do to lose it, we simply receive it.

- 7th-century hermit, Vitalis moved to Alexandria at the age of 60. He worked as a laborer earning only enough money to hire a prostitute each night. The Christians of Alexandria were (not unreasonably) appalled and denounced him to the bishop. Unable to stop Vitalis themselves they treated him with disgust. One day Vitalis was killed in the street (whether by a sanctimonious Christian or a disgruntled patron of the prostitutes, we're not sure). At his funeral, dozens of *former* prostitutes wept. Each testified that she owed her soul to Vitalis who had come to her room, handed her all the money he had, and said, “Here's your money. I want to buy you one night without sin.” Then he would pray with her and for her, read Scripture to her, and offer to help her find another place to stay and another line of work.
- God's love shows us how much he values us so we don't have to settle for the false love of the world. It reorients us to him and away from sin.

**God's Love:** How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender (Hos 11:8).

- Using anthropomorphic terminology, God's love is described in highly emotive terms. He loves them deeply, unstopably. He grieves their sin. “What is grief if not love persevering?” (*Wandavision*). You don't grieve the loss of someone you don't love.
  - God, the loving father of Israel, is torn apart by the rebellion of his children.

- Despite our sin and rebellion God continues to love us. What is the worst thing you have done or are doing? God loves you!
  - Something is only worth what someone else will pay for it. What was God willing to pay? His own life on the cross.
  - *God sees you. God loves you. God wants you.*
- God has remained faithful to his people despite their unfaithfulness. God's love is long-suffering.
  - **Gospel love is different, it's real love.** It's not love for personal fulfillment. It's not love to be loved in return. It's the only love that exists completely and unreservedly for the other person without regard for reciprocation.

**Cost of Love:** <sup>1</sup> And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." <sup>2</sup> So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. <sup>3</sup> And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you" (Hos 3:1-3).

- There is a deep cost to the forgiveness and reconciliation of Hosea. There is the emotional burden of Gomer's infidelity that he must bear to forgive her. But, in this case, there is a financial burden too. She has been sold into slavery, likely of a sexual nature.
  - Hosea pays half in money and half in barley. He apparently doesn't have enough money to buy her back, so he has to barter with other items. He is going broke buying back his unfaithful wife. But he would gladly pay the price.
- Jesus pays the price in life, righteousness, justice, steadfast love and mercy, faithfulness (2:19-20)
  - God's love for us costs him deeply, even deeper than Hosea's love cost him.
    - Hosea shouldn't have to pay for Gomer's sin, but he does. Jesus shouldn't have to pay for our sin, but he does.

**Transforming Love:** The gift of Jesus' love not only **saves** us, but it also **transforms us**. In a very real way, God loves us into new life.

- We are driven more directly by our loves than our minds. **You do what you love to do. You and I need a heart change more than a behavior change.**
  - I've been changed by the love of my parents, wife, by friends, and, most importantly by Jesus. It's amazing how being loved changes and frees you.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. <sup>15</sup> And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt (Hos 2:14-15).

- God's love draws us to him. It changes our basis of value. It reorients our pursuit of acceptance. **You sin because you think you're missing something, and you are, the perfect love of God.** The love of God frees us to see, feel, and believe that the love of the world does not fulfill us.
- God's love doesn't come to us once we've cleaned ourselves up but to free us from the mess of our sin.

- We don't escape the bondage of sin through our own hard work but by the liberating power of Christ. God's love is the power that liberates us from captivity, not the reward for having liberated ourselves.

Through faith in Jesus, you receive a new spirit. He gives you forgiveness and his righteousness, a new heart, and a new identity. His love is the means and motivation to fighting your sin and living in righteousness.

- He **counts** us righteous *and* **makes** us righteous. He frees us **from** sin *and* frees us **to** live holy.
- Hosea points us to the future. For Israel that future was judgment for their sin but there was also hope on the horizon, a hope that became clear in Jesus.

### 3. Future Hope

Where is our hope of salvation? Hosea gives us some clues:

- <sup>7</sup> But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen" (Hos 1:7). *Not a military victory, per se, but a spiritual victory.*
- <sup>10</sup> Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." <sup>11</sup> And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel (Hos 1:10-11). *A leader, a chief shepherd, a single, perfect, permanent king.*
- <sup>16</sup> "And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' <sup>17</sup> For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. <sup>18</sup> And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. <sup>19</sup> And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD (Hos 2:16-20). *This is another prophetic of our future hope of a new heavens and new earth, where swords will be turned into plows, the lion will lay down with the lamb, tears will be no more.*
- <sup>5</sup> Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days (Hos 3:5) *This is long after King David is gone, this is pointing to the eternal king, the son of David, Jesus Christ.*

Jesus is the perfect King who has come to love us back to God. His love persists to the end.

This is why Matthew 2 quotes Hosea 11 to explain that this prophecy is about Jesus!<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion:

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<sup>1</sup> Hos 11:1; Matt 2:15

**Judgment:** There is the spectre of judgment hanging over the book. This is a book that is pleading for repentance. **See** your sin, **fear** the judgment of God, and **turn** to him with hope for restoration. God will judge sin: <sup>7</sup> The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred. <sup>8</sup> The prophet is the watchman of Ephraim with my God; yet a fowler's snare is on all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God. <sup>9</sup> They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins (Hos 9:7-9).

**Plea:** But God's love is even more scandalous than Hosea's. He pursues you. He rescues you. He gives himself for you. **The cross proves it.** The question is, will you trust it?

- <sup>1</sup> Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. <sup>2</sup> Take with you words and return to the LORD... <sup>9</sup> Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them (Hos 14:1-2, 9).

This knowledge is a personal knowledge, it is not just knowing about but knowing and trusting the character of God.

- If this is ever going to happen, if you are going to turn from your sin, it's going to take God healing the sinful selfishness of your heart so that you can receive him and love him in return. And he can do that! If you'll only trust him.
  - You have to stop trusting yourself to figure it out. You have to stop trusting the promises of sin. You have to turn from your sin and trust Jesus.
- <sup>1</sup> "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. <sup>2</sup> After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him (Hos 6:1-2).
  - As Jesus died to pay for your sin, in Christ, you die to your sin and raised in newness of life.
  - Like surgery, hearing the gospel wounds us to heal us. **Trust the surgeon.** It will hurt, but it will heal.
  - Do you need spiritual surgery? Come to Jesus. Do you need a spiritual heart transplant? Come to Jesus.