

A Love Story

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[0:00] Well, it is Valentine's Day, and I have a love story for you, taken right out of the Bible. So, turn to Hosea, right after Ezekiel and Daniel.

750 years before Christ's birth, there lived a young man who was a prophet of God in Israel. His name was Hosea. And he loved and married an Israelite young lady named Gomer. And oh, the joy when she conceived and gave birth to a son. But these early happy days were soon interrupted because it wasn't long before Hosea began to notice her roaming eyes and her wondering heart.

There were those unaccounted for periods of time away from the home that raised suspicion and tension in the relationship.

And then the day came when the gossip confirmed his fearful suspicions about her unfaithfulness. And it broke his heart.

[1:18] And there followed a birth of a daughter with questions swirling as to the identity of her father. Her real father.

And after two to three more years, she gave birth to a son fathered by another man. These children of infidelity, conceived in disgrace, were continual painful reminders around the house of his wife's unfaithfulness and adulterous lifestyle.

And yet still, Hosea loved her. Through all the rejection and betrayal, the shame and loss of his place in her heart being taken by another man.

And though he pleaded with her, she only became more promiscuous and unfaithful to Hosea. Until finally, she left him saying, I will go after my lovers.

And so the tragic marriage relationship was broken as she walked out on her covenant marriage. Well, it all turned sour for Gomer.

[2:32] These lovers were nothing like what they appeared to be. They were losers like her who knew nothing of true love. Sexual immorality has always been glamorized.

As if it leads to unending bliss. But Gomer found that reality is far different. It wasn't long before all the glitter was worn off. Leaving her with misery and ruin.

Her heartless lovers abused her. They mistreated her. Her life was falling apart. Proving again that the way of the transgressor is hard.

She sank even lower into prostitution. Offering herself to men for favors in return. And at last we find her in an adulterous relationship that looks a whole lot like slavery.

It was not at all like Hollywood's version of sexual immorality with no negative consequences. She lived to see the misery of her way as much as the prodigal son did.

[3:43] Now, in most cases, that's where the love story would end. Another hopelessly lost marriage. Too many lies.

Too many years. Too many rejections. Too many lovers. It's too far gone to save this marriage. All this left are regrets and thoughts about what might have been.

If only. If only. But this is where this love story really just starts to heat up. And rises to another level.

Because Hosea, who had been so hurt and humiliated by her. His love scorned. He didn't owe her anything. The least of which is love. And yet, he loved her.

And even though at the time, Gomer was still living in adultery with another lover. He didn't wait for her to change first. But took the initiative in reconciliation and forgave her.

[4:45] And set out to win her back. And so we see him in our mind's eye. Meeting up with her. And speaking tenderly to her.

And wooing her. And alluring her with the cords of love. Calling her to return. To him.

To make a new start in the relationship. That would never end. And she agrees to return. Seeing that she was better off with her husband at the first.

And so he bought her. He bought her for some silver and barley. What a humiliation. To buy your own wife. From her lover.

The price was about the price of a female slave. Showing. What she meant to that man. Just some silver and barley.

[5:51] And also showing how deeply she had fallen into slavery. The slavery of her sin. And so he bought her. And then he brought her home.

But he set a probationary period of many days. When she must live with him. Without playing the harlot. And not be a prostitute.

Or intimate with any man. So he requires a clean break. From all her adulteries. And if so. Then he would live with her.

As husband and wife. With the whole marriage relationship. Fully reconstituted. And restored. Now that's what Hosea is yearning for.

That's what Hosea is pursuing. With her. And just there. The love story of Hosea and Gomer.

Comes to an end. As abruptly as it began.

[6:50] We're not given the final chapter. And our minds are screaming for answers. Did she return to him? With all her heart.

Did she abandon all other lovers? Was the relationship fully and finally restored? Did they live happily ever after? We want to know those questions.

And we're just left hanging. With no answers given. For you see. As fascinating as this love story is. It is not the main love story of the book.

The real love story of the book of Hosea. Is that between God. And his sinning people. And that's why.

The end of chapter 3. Hosea and Gomer walk off the stage. And we have 11 more chapters. About God's relationship to Israel.

[7:48] And so we begin today. A new study on this book of Hosea. And if the Holy Spirit of truth. Is pleased to meet with us. And open our eyes.

You and I will see a lot of ourselves. in Gomer. And we will see a lot of Jesus in Hosea. And God's love in Christ will appear more glorious and beautiful and our sin will appear more ugly and hateful. Now the first section of the book is chapters 1 to 3. I'd encourage you to read it through several times just to prepare you for this series. And we come to verse 1 that says, The word of the Lord came to Hosea son of Beri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

And during the reign of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel. And we see that Hosea is a prophet of God.

He received messages from God and passed them on to his people. That's what a prophet is. The mouthpiece for God. And he prophesies to the divided kingdom, both to the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

[9:11] And the length of his ministry, as you look at the reigns of those kings mentioned, is somewhere between 30 and 40 years. And these 14 chapters that we have are selections of his prophesying over the span of that 30 to 40 years.

Now, what was going on during this time? Well, the 8th century B.C. had been a period of great economic boon and prosperity for the divided kingdom.

Something of a golden age. And yet sin, like a cancer, was sapping the vitals of the nation's health. And many of these sins will be addressed in this book, but none more particularly and passionately than idolatry.

They had turned away from the living God to other gods and idols, especially Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility. And they were beginning to reap the consequences of their sin.

There was social injustice. Lawlessness prevailed. Immorality. The whole moral collapse and decay from within. And outwardly, Assyria had grown into a mighty and militant nation.

[10:29] And Israel, rather than trusting in God for her protection, turned to foolish alliances with other nations. Making idols of the nations. Trusting them instead of God.

They were on the brink of destruction. And it's into these troublesome times that God speaks through His prophet, Hosea, calling his people, Come back to Me.

Return. Repent. Or be judged. Now the first words of the book then put us on notice that this is the Word of the Lord.

We're not listening to Hosea spouting off. We're listening to God speaking to men. Listen up and receive it as such.

Now verses 2 and 3, this is as far as we'll get this morning. When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, Go take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.

[11:44] So he married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. Now here is another form of revelation.

Some have called it enacted prophecy because the very acts of Hosea are symbolic. They carry symbolic meaning. Hosea's actions are loaded with meaning.

So he's not only to speak for God, he is to act in God's place. God is speaking through what Hosea does as well as through what Hosea says.

It's show and tell. And so the tragic marriage of the prophet becomes a sermon to the people exposing their unfaithfulness to God.

So when Gomer's adulteries became known to the nation and people started whispering and pointing the finger and gossiping about her, God would say to them, I told Hosea to go and marry a harlot because that's what I have done in marrying you.

[13:01] You are no better than she for you are guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from me. The Jerusalem Bible puts it bluntly as does the Hebrew in verse 2.

Go marry a whore and get children with a whore for the country itself has become nothing but a whore by abandoning Yahweh.

The very repetition of that word emphasizes this was no one nightstand. This was the character of this woman.

She's promiscuous, a woman of loose morals. And so Hosea's tragic marriage becomes the stage on which God portrays his relationship to Israel.

And by experiencing the pain of being rejected for other lovers, Hosea is put in touch with the feelings of the living God. And the pain he feels when his people are unfaithful to him.

[14:16] And in this way, Hosea becomes the prophet of the broken heart. And he's qualified to speak about wayward Israel in a way that no other prophet would do.

He speaks with the passion of a man who has felt the infidelity within his own marriage. And it puts God-like fire in his belly and emotion in every word of the 14 chapters.

Now, if Hosea's marriage is the stage, then God is the playwright. He writes the script, not Hosea. He commands Hosea, go take to yourself an adulterous wife.

Now, just when Gomer's unfaithfulness began, we can't know for sure. Some believe that Gomer was already an adulteress when he married her. Others say God was referring to what this woman would become as he knew the future, telling Hosea, you take a wife who will later become an adulteress and prostitute, just as she would later bear children of unfaithfulness.

But either way, there was no question about the fact that in marrying this young lady, Hosea was embracing the assignment to be married to an adulterous whoring wife.

[15:44] That much is clear. And the very next thing we read is so he married Gomer. He married Gomer.

Now we've got to stop here for a moment. He married Gomer. Doesn't he have a right to happy marriage, a happy family life, to not have kids who were fathered by some other man?

Does he not have a right to such? How could God ask him to give it all up and to embrace tension and pain and rejection and betrayal and humiliation and shame for years and years and years?

And then I think about Abraham who's enjoying happy family life with his wife and that son born to him in old age who made him laugh every day of his life until that day when God said, now you take that son, your only son Isaac, and you go sacrifice him as a burnt offering.

And he's up the next morning early to obey the command. Or I think of that young Israelite woman of marriageable age betrothed to the man of her dreams and she's given an assignment that threatened to spoil her plan for a happy marriage to the man she loved.

[17:07] She's told that she's been chosen by God to bear his own son who would be conceived in her by the power of the Holy Spirit. What an honor and yet at what a cost to jeopardize her marriage to Joseph who would never understand how I could be pregnant and would divorce me for sure.

I am the Lord's servant, she said. May it be to me according to your word. And here's Hosea, young man, some say 18, 19, 20, dreams of a happy marriage and family and God says go marry a whore. And so he married Gomer. It is so refreshing to find a man who is faithful to God in days of unfaithfulness.

These were days of unfaithfulness. Hardly no one, anyone was obeying God God in. So he married Gomer. My heart is being searched.

What are some of the hard commands that I've been given, that you've been given? Now we haven't been called upon to glorify God in exactly the same way that Hosea was called.

[18:35] But maybe some of you have been called to glorify God in a difficult marriage. marriage. And God wants to show the power of his grace by keeping you in that difficult marriage.

Maybe he has called you to years of singleness that you had not planned on. To raising a prodigal son perhaps. Children who are unfaithful.

Brethren, he has called all of us who are married. Just as much as he called Hosea, he calls all of us who are married to have our marriages be a mirror of his relationship to his bride, the church. Ephesians 5, husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. And I trust you'll learn something new in Hosea about what it means to love your wife just as Christ loved the church.

And wives, you're called not to respond to Christ, your husband, as Gomer did to Hosea, but you're called upon to respond to your husband with respect and submission, even as the church to Christ.

[19:56] And it will only happen in any of our lives at great cost to ourselves, but there's grace in God to enable us to be faithful to hard assignments.

Now here in Hosea, Israel's relationship with God is portrayed not as creator to creature or master to servant or shepherd to sheep, but Hosea goes to the most intimate of all human relationships and likens God's relationship to Israel as that between a husband and a wife.

The deepest intimacy. God had become Israel's husband as they entered into covenant vows together in the desert. And that enables Hosea to see God's side of our idolatries.

You see, we're so used to viewing things from our side, our perspective, that we often miss God's side of the issue. We can evaluate everything by how it affects us.

How does my sin affect me? Well, let's see. Okay, I can live with that. I can't live with that. So we think how it affects me. And in doing so, we forget how it affects God.

[21:14] And Hosea pulls us right out of our skin, right out of ourselves, and takes us topside to see how our idolatries and sins and waywardness affects God.

And when he shows us this perspective, we see at least four things in this book of Hosea. And this is just by way of summary and we'll dig in in weeks to come. But we see first of all that our idolatry is spiritual adultery.

The land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord. Verse 2. You see, we don't live before some impersonal lifeless code of ethics.

There it is. will. No, we relate to a husband who here has made his will and mine known to us in his commandments.

So when we break a command, it's not just that we're missing the mark of some code of ethics. We are departing from our husband's will.

[22:22] In some way, we are saying no to him and yes to another, perhaps even ourselves. It's turning away from, it's departing from our husband's love.

Do you think of your sins and departures from God's word in that way? Hosea says you must, you must. And in how many ways, once we see this, do we realize that we are stepping out on our faithful husband?

If not all together, walking out as Gomer did, oh, but flirting with the world and stepping out for a brief liaison with the world and other loves in our lives.

And it's never because of anything lacking in him. He's the perfect husband. There's enough in him to satisfy his bride for all eternity, to satisfy and thrill her with it never growing old.

No, the problem is here, isn't it? Our own waywardness within, that we have a proneness to wonder in this marriage. We have feet to roam because we've got a heart that is roaming.

[23:40] Our idolatry is spiritual adultery. We'll see more of that. But secondly, Hosea, he takes us deeper into God himself. And he shows us secondly, God's pain over our idols and backslidings.

It's the people you love the most who can hurt you the most, isn't it? I mean, that stranger that makes a symbol at you of road rage out on the road you had never met him before, that's perhaps hard to take.

It's a little harder when it's one of your friends that insults you. A little harder when it's maybe a son or a daughter.

But it's hardest of all when it's a spouse. Folks, that's the relationship Christ has taken us into. We're married to him. And what Hosea is showing us is that that most intimate of relationships can cause the greatest of pain to him just as it does to you.

So what do our choices of sin and idols that we put in God's place, what does that feel like to God?

[25:01] Well, it feels like you, man, coming home early from work one day, only to find your wife in the arms of another man. That's how it feels to God.

Hosea is teaching us that our covenant husband is not untouched by our waywardness. It's not like it's above and beyond him to feel these things.

He feels it deeply. In fact, more perfectly than anybody else feels that rejection because he has the most sensitive heart. And so God is here presented as a loving husband yearning over his wayward wife and calling her to return.

If you've never thought of your God that way, Hosea is calling you to think again, to think higher thoughts about God.

perhaps we simply haven't thought through the book of Hosea seriously enough. That we'll have our thoughts of God's love for us lifted beyond what we've yet seen.

[26:14] And when this God took on human flesh, the New Testament shows him weeping over his wayward wife.

You see, God did more than send his word through the prophets to his straying wife. He came himself to recall her. And when he did, he found, he came to his own and his own received him not. And she did not open to his knockings and respond to his wooings. And that did not just pass off of him like water off a duck's back. That went to the heart like it would go to your heart, man, if your wife was found in adultery.

And so as he approaches Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it. If you even knew had even known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it's hidden from your eyes.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stoned those sent to you. How often I've longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

[27:30] You wouldn't come back to me. and you hear the pain of yearning desire for them to return just like Hosea's hurting heart calling Gomer to return.

He felt the betrayal of Judas' kiss. Don't tell me he knew it so it didn't hurt. Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? He felt Peter's denial of him when he counts his own reputation in life as more important than himself.

and denies him three times. It hurt the Savior. The Bible says he just turned and looked at Peter with the look of wounded love that sent him out weeping bitterly in repentance.

And the agony of pain love reached its zenith at Calvary where the jilted husband comes to redeem his adulterous bride not with silver and barley like Hosea but with his own precious blood.

And as he's dying his father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. Oh to see the pain written on your face bearing the awesome weight of sin what a love the pain of love Hosea will show us that if we have eyes to see and then he'll show us God's jealousy in the third place God's jealousy and judgments to read read Hosea is to realize there are frightful judgments for those who will not return to the Lord to those who will hear his wooings to return and refuse and will see it in what this husband does to Israel you see the Lord refuses to remain a third wheel he'll have no part of a love triangle you and him and some other he's a jealous

[30:02] God and he'll not share your heart with any other lover you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart he demands the undivided devotion and unrivaled love of your heart that's the nature of Christ's love it is to not be satisfied until he alone reigns within the only crowned lover of your heart and so it's it's in the second command it's in Exodus 20 where we learn that the jealousy of his love is aroused by idolatry idolatry so you shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything and not bow down to them or worship them for I the Lord am a jealous God punishing the children and so on this demand for no rivals is not something

Old Testament alone it's repeated throughout the New Testament Jesus says no one can serve two masters Matthew 6 24 either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other you cannot serve both God and money you're not wired that way man is incapable of loving two wives at the same time you cannot do it!

love love love love anyone else because marital love is exclusive it's given to one alone and that's what God is saying to us in Hosea my son give me your heart my dear my wife give me your heart and if we don't we'll find it's a jealous love that will severely discipline us until we do give him our hearts do not love the world or anything in the world John says if anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him do you love the world I can tell you something John says you don't love God and those who claim to love God in the world James says we're a bunch of adulterers and adulteresses James 4 you adulterers don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God you can't love both that's how God sees this business whether we've ever looked at it that way or not and so Hosea is teaching us just how serious God is about the unrivaled love of our hearts how the jealous God disciplines and weans us from our idolatrous affairs with sin back to himself until we can say from the heart the dearest idol I have known whatever that idol be help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee but in all of this you know what Hosea is showing us he's showing us the depths of God's love for us in Christ number four we see God's love for the unlovely I mean that's that's why he's jealous because it's a jealous love and that's why he's pain because it's a love that is pained when it does not receive love in return we're looking at

God's love in this letter what wondrous love is this oh my soul that loved me even when I where have you heard of that kind of love that would keep on loving us even while we were rejecting him and giving ourselves over to other lovers for God demonstrates his love for us in this in that while we were yet sinners that's with our backs to God departing from God going after our lovers while we were sinners Christ died for us demonstrating God's love for us bride of Christ we learn in Hosea that Christ love is persistent love in spite of all our waywardness it's a love that comes after us when we're back sliding and going astray it's a love that seeks us out right into the twisting places of our love affairs with the world and money and fame and self he follows us right into the arms of our other loves and there he woos us there he chastens us and there he calls us to return to himself! [35 : 31] And it's a love that forgives all of our sins and receives us graciously it's a love that heals our inner waywardness and loves us freely undeservedly love it's in Hosea that we sense that God's love is longer and wider and higher and deeper than we ever have yet known that it surpasses finding out that there is nothing absolutely nothing that can separate us from this love of God in Christ there's no tempting idol no alluring lover no forgetfulness or unfaithfulness on my part his love once set upon us will chase us down and draw us back home causing the hymn writer to say oh love that will not let me go that's the love of

God demonstrated in Hosea no wonder that a moral Samaritan woman at the well was converted when she met Jesus Christ and heard the gospel invitation for the first time she was a woman who was married five times and now living with one not her husband seeking for love in all the places except for where it could be found in just one conversation with the Son of God and she saw that she had never been known and loved like that before he knows me he knows everything I've ever done yet he loves me she not only left her water pot she left her idolatrous and adulterous relationships she left it all and followed after

Jesus and so have many of us here and our sins never look uglier than when we've seen them against this unfailing love of Jesus you know spouse of Christ that our sins are far more grievous than the world's you sit here and point fingers out there at the world and what they're doing with their bodies and their minds and their money their sins do not hold a candle to the sins of Christ bride we sin against greater love than they yes he loves them as master creator loves the creation but folks if you're part of the bride of Christ he loves you with an intimate love that they haven't yet tasted so where are you in this greatest of all love stories how will the last chapter be written in your life are you part of the bride of this wonderful loving faithful husband

Jesus Christ there's none like him come to him today you say but I'm remember how far Gomer sunk remember how far Israel sank he's waiting to receive you into his arms of love you say I am a part of the bride of Christ then what what kind of bride are you do some here this morning need to come home to him maybe for the first time maybe for the hundredth time let us confess our spiritual adultery let us confess to him freely what we've put in his place the loves of our heart let us lay them at his feet and own them and say forgive my sins and receive me graciously I don't plead I don't

plead merit I plead grace have have grace have mercy
I've heard of your love for the adulterous bride here I am take me and so manifest your love to me
that there will be an expulsive power to your love that will make my sins look uglier than I've ever
seen them and that will make your love appear more beautiful than what I've yet seen may God use
this study of Hosea to call us to our husband the Lord Jesus have dealings with him even as we
sing our closing hymn oh the deep deep love of Jesus