

A Story of Sin and Restoration

Hosea 2

INTRO

Rapport

I still remember several years ago sending an email to a girl in one of my ministries just to check on her. I hadn't seen her around in a while, and I didn't know if she had just been busy, or if something was wrong, or what was going on. I just knew that I hadn't seen her around in a while. What I found was a girl who was struggling in her relationship with God. And for whatever reason, she decided to open up to me via email about some of the struggles and doubts that she was having. She admitted that she had fallen into sin, in fact she had let herself do things she knew were wrong, and that she was currently struggling with even knowing if God was real.

I remember telling her several things over the course of back-and-forth emails, as I tried to be a listening ear and an encouraging voice. But one of the things that I told her was that at times I still had doubts, and didn't know what to do, and was caught in sin, and wondering what to do. But it was in those moments that I discovered that all I knew was God. I don't know how to completely abandon God. It's not that I haven't thought about it, caught in the middle of a hard situation, but rather that without God no part of my life makes sense. I can feel God in those moments pursuing me. I've quit pursuing Him, but He doesn't let go of me. And it's not that I'm this great Christian; I'm like Gomer the harlot; I'm like Israel; I'm part of God's unfaithful wife. I don't necessarily want God, but nothing in my life makes sense without Him. And it's in that moment, near the end of myself, caught in that familiar sin, and sick of it all, that I see that God is everything, and He begins to woo my heart back to His again.

Review

If you remember from last week, we are currently in a study of the book of Hosea. In chapter one, Hosea lays out essentially the premise of the whole book. God chooses a wife, a people whom He knows will cheat on Him, whom He knows will be unfaithful to Him. And He's going to pursue this people, this wife, and provide a way for her to be forgiven of her great sin, and love her with all His heart. God decides to demonstrate the unbelievable picture of his relationship with Israel through the life of one of His prophets, Hosea. So He tells Hosea to go and marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her. In this parallel story, Hosea represents God, Gomer represents the nation of Israel and probably its government, and the children of Hosea and Gomer represent the individual people of the nation of Israel.¹ Concerning these individuals God says...1) Jezreel - I will sow bloodshed upon the land for your sin, 2) Lo-Ruhamah - I will no longer show you mercy, and 3) Lo-Ammi - you are not my people. Ultimately,

¹ Ray Ortlund Jr., *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, page 55.

God is telling this story, and bringing harsh punishment upon the land, because He longs for the people to repent.

Chapter two of Hosea picks up right where chapter one left off. After proclaiming the Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi oracles upon the land, chapter one ends with hope. It ends with God proclaiming that despite the sin of His people, He will gather a remnant to be His true wife, He will provide a way to fulfill His promise to Abraham, He will remain faithful even if Israel is unfaithful.

Reading

Hosea 2

Say to your brothers, "Ammi," and to your sisters, "Ruhamah." "Contend with your mother, contend, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband; and let her put away her harlotry from her face and her adultery from between her breasts, or I will strip her naked and expose her as on the day when she was born I will also make her like a wilderness, make her like desert land and slay her with thirst. "Also, I will have no compassion on her children, because they are children of harlotry. "For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has acted shamefully for she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.' "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. "She will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find them then she will say, 'I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now!' "For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. "Therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time and My new wine in its season. I will also take away My wool and My flax given to cover her nakedness. "And then I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one will rescue her out of My hand. "I will also put an end to all her gaiety, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths and all her festal assemblies. "I will destroy her vines and fig trees, of which she said, 'These are my wages which my lovers have given me 'and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field will devour them. "I will punish her for the days of the Baals when she used to offer sacrifices to them and adorn herself with her earrings and jewelry, and follow her lovers, so that she forgot Me," declares the LORD. "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness and speak kindly to her. "Then I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope and she will sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. "It will come about in that day," declares the LORD, "That you will call Me Ishi and will no longer call Me Baali. "For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, so that they will be mentioned by their names no more. "In that day I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky and the creeping things of the ground and I will abolish the bow, the sword and war from the land, and will make them lie down in safety. "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the LORD. "It will come about in that day that I will respond," declares the LORD. "I will respond to the heavens, and they will respond to

the earth, And the earth will respond to the grain, to the new wine and to the oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. "I will sow her for Myself in the land I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, 'You are my God!'"

Relevance

The thing that I want to make absolutely clear today is that Gomer's story, Israel's story, is our story. The details of our life, and our sin, and our journey, may differ in slight details from Israel's, but essentially we are no different. And God wants to continually betroth us to Himself afresh and anew. He is a great God of great forgiveness and He wants to have all of our hearts. This Scripture passage is relevant to your lives and to mine because this is our story.

BODY

What does our sin look like? - sermonic question 1

What should our relationship with God look like? - sermonic question 2

1. Israel's unfaithfulness

v. 1-2 Ammi and Ruhamah contend with your mother. Continuing with the idea of hope at the end of chapter 1, God now makes an appeal to anyone in the land who will listen, who perhaps gets it. He reverses the names Lo-Ammi and Lo-Ruhamah, which mean "no mercy" and "not my people," and He now addresses the people of the land as "Ruhamah - merciful" and Ammi - my people." He tells them to preach a message of "repentance or else" to those all around them.

v. 3-4 Stripping Away God warns Israel that He will strip her naked, expose her, shame her, and take away all her blessings if she will not repent. God is threatening exile again. It was a common practice in these days to lead a defeated people naked into exile as a way of shaming them. It was also common in other cultures around this time to strip a wife naked when divorcing her as a way of shaming her. Most commentators don't think this was practiced in Israel, but God may still be alluding to the imagery none-the-less.²

v. 5 Lack of Understanding Israel assumes that worshipping Baal is what is meeting her needs. She wants to worship Baal because she wants "my bread, my water, my wool, my flax, my oil, and my drink." Remember that Baal worship in the land was essentially trusting in Baal for provision. Israel was worshipping Baal, adulterating herself with Baal, because she assumed that he could provide. Somehow, she forgot that God was the real provider, and she began to think that Baal was the one really providing her with all the things that she needed to survive or thought she needed to survive.

- *Matthew 6:31-34 "Do not worry then, saying What shall we eat? or What will we wear for clothing? For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your*

² Duane Garrett, *The New American Commentary: Hosea & Joel*, page 77-78.

heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

v. 6-7 God frustrates Israel's Sin Since Israel is convinced that it is her worship of Baal, her adultery, that is providing for her needs, God is going to cause her to doubt that false-truth. He is going to "hedge up her way with thorns" so that the blessings cease. Then Israel, rather than realizing the truth and repenting, will pursue Baal even harder. But it won't work. Sin won't bring the pleasure that it used to. Israel realizes what Solomon meant when he said:

- *Proverbs 5:1-5 "My son, give attention to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding; that you may observe discretion and your lips may reserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress drip honey and smoother than oil is her speech; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps take hold of Sheol."*

Sin is like a drug that brings pleasure, but never quite brings the pleasure that it used to. Sin requires that you dig deeper into the sin, take more of the drug, to experience the pleasure you used to. In this way it leads us further from God, further from the true joy found in Him, and deeper and deeper towards depression and false joy. Conversely God brings a joy to our lives that truly satisfies us and leaves us wanting more of that joy.

- possible quote from C.S. Lewis about joy in this regard

v. 7 False Repentance When Baal no longer produces, then Israel decides to go back to Jehovah. Suddenly when things are getting really bad, then Israel looks up and realizes maybe God will work.

v. 8-9 God is the True Provider. Israel thought she understood. She thought that "if I worship Baal, then he will bless me with these things that I want." But in reality all the blessings that she was enjoying, and even using to worship Baal, were in truth gifts from God. This is true for every one of us. All blessings come from God. Common Grace extends to everyone, sinner and righteous alike. Every good thing that we enjoy is ultimately from His hand.

- *James 1:16-17 "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."*

v. 10-13 A Further Stripping Away Israel has perhaps turned back to God, but rather than return the blessings that He previously took away, He takes away everything. God is going to show everyone that He is really the one in control, not Baal. He will strip away Israel's festivals, which by this time were really so paganized that they were really festivals to Baal. God removes everything, He strips away everything. But He seems to do this in hope. God is going to remove every obstacle between Himself and Israel. God is going to take away everything, so that only He is left. Has God ever done this in

your life, or something similar? He begins to take away things that you were worshipping, perhaps even things that you didn't realize you were worshipping. He removes idols so that you have nothing to do but to look to Him.

- Story about Camp Circle D and God taking away a fiance

2. Israel's Restoration

v. 14 - God allures God stripped everything away from Israel, and then he begins to reveal how amazing His love truly is. He is an amazing lover. In him is true joy. He allures Israel to the desert, to the place where He first loved her, and where she first loved Him. Israel was still sinful in their 40 years of wandering, but they were totally dependent on God, they knew He was real, and for the most part they were idol free. They had nothing, but they had God and that was all they truly needed.

v. 15 - God blesses As Israel begins to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, then God begins to bless her again. After taking away her vineyard, which she attributed to Baal, God now returns the vineyard to Israel, but now she remembers that it is a blessing from God's hand.

v. 15 - Past sins are forgiven, renewal comes Achor was the place where Achan the son of Zerah had disobeyed the Lord and brought defeat in battle to Israel. You can find the story in Joshua 6-7. Israel went into battle with Ai, but was defeated because Achan took some spoils from a previous battle. God had specifically instructed Israel to destroy everything in this case, but Achan disobeyed, and God allowed them to be defeated in the battle against Ai. This all occurred in the valley of Achor, which means "trouble." But now God says that the valley of Achor will become a "door of hope." In other words, God has not only forgiven Israel's past sins, but He is turning her past mistakes into a story of joy and hope. God is in the business of taking our mistakes and using them for His glory.

v. 15 - True Joy is Restored Israel will now be full of joy and sing as God renews her faith to the place where it once was.

v. 16 - Intimacy is obtained God longs for His people to know Him as Husband, not simply Lord. This is a confusing little verse, but amazing. One of the words in Hebrew for Lord or Husband is Ba'al, eerily similar to Baal. So similar in fact that there was probably an intentional confusion introduced into Israel who had been commanded not to worship Baal, but who when she called God "husband or Lord" sounded as if she was calling Him Baal.³ God now changes what He will be referred to as. Israel now is to call Him Ishi, a more intimate term for Husband. Piper also says, and I agree with him, that this verse alludes to a change in how Israel will relate to God as a husband. Ba'al has

³ Duane Garrett, *The New American Commentary: Hosea & Joel*, page 91.

the connotation of Husband as a Boss or Lord, while Ishi connotes relating to God as a loving husband, not a cruel task master.⁴

v. 17 - Purification from Sins God longs to purify your life. He wants to remove the Baals from your mouth as He did for Israel.

- *Eph 4:17-24* “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

v. 18, 21-23 - The Future is Bright God is going to renew the whole world.

- *Romans 8:18-22* “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.”

v. 19 - A Fresh Start Ensues (back to the beginning) God will know Israel as He did back at the beginning. He will betroth her to himself. The love will be strong and pure as it was during the engagement period.

v. 20 - Knowing the Lord God will know His people as a man knows His wife. Intimately. One of the ways that sex exists for the glory of God is that the intimacy that is present in good sex between a man and his wife is a picture of the intimacy that God desires with His people. Listen to John Piper expound on this point:

“knowing someone in the fullest biblical sense is defined by sexual imagery. Genesis 4:1, “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.” Knowing here refers to sexual intercourse. Or again in Matthew 1:24-25 we read, “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” He “knew her not” means he did not have sexual relations with her. Now I don’t mean that every time the word know is used in the Bible there are sexual connotations. That’s not true. But what I do mean is that

⁴ John Piper, “Call Me Husband not Baal,” <http://desiringgod.org>

*sexual language in the Bible for our covenant relationship to God does lead us to think of knowing God on the analogy of sexual intimacy and ecstasy. I don't mean that we somehow have sexual relations with God or he with man. That's a pagan thought. It's not Christian. But I do mean that the intimacy and ecstasy of sexual relations points to what knowing God is meant to be.*⁵

CONCLUSION

We all find ourselves somewhere within this story. We are all like Israel who through its history loved other gods, worshipped other idols, and assumed that the blessings of God came from someone other than God. Our stories may differ from Israel's, but in many ways they are the same.

Every part of Israel's restoration, God longs to bring about in our lives. He wants to strip away all the things that don't matter, woo us, bless us with the understanding that all gifts come from Him, turn our sinful pasts into pictures of hope, return joy to our lives, have us know and pursue Him intimately, purify us, use us to bring about His kingdom, and return our love to the purity of a newly engaged couple.

All of this is possible because of Christ, who bore the ultimate shame and humiliation so that we don't have to. He suffered so that we can be forgiven and know God in such an intimate way.

⁵ John Piper, *Sex and Supremacy of God*, page 31.