

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 34  
The Prophet of God's Love. The Book of Hosea  
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church – December 9, 2007

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Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, and do you promise before God and these witnesses that you will be to him a true and devoted wife; true to him in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and in adversity; and that forsaking all others you will keep yourself to him, and to him only, until death do you part?

Many of you I'm sure can remember those familiar words; one half of the vow of the marriage ceremony. The uniting of two individuals is a very special moment dating all the way back to the Garden of Eden and God's uniting of Adam and Eve. So special is the institution of marriage it is often used in Scripture to illustrate the relationship that exists between God and His people. Ephesians 5 is an often quoted passage which compares the love of Christ for His Church to the love of a husband for his wife. And throughout the New Testament, the Church is often called the Bride of Christ.

But when we look at the condition of marriage in our society today we wonder what kind of picture actually exists. Approximately one half of all marriages end in divorce. Large numbers of marriage partners are reported to have been unfaithful to their mate. And numerous studies have shown that many who remain married are unhappy and wish they were single. But even this sad condition of marriage is used by God to illustrate what sometimes happens in our relationship with Him. His love for us is unending, but we are often unfaithful in return.

In the Old Testament book of Hosea, the unfaithfulness of Israel in their relationship with God is illustrated by the unfaithful wife of the prophet. The message of the book is still applicable to the behavior of the Church in her relationship with God today. There are three parts to the book I want to bring to your attention that we might understand and apply its message today.

## **I. The Picture of God's Love**

For the first part, chapters 1-3 provide the picture of God's love.

Hosea was a prophet of God in a time we would not describe as the best of times. The glory days of David and Solomon were past. The nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of ten tribes, and the southern kingdom of two tribes. The northern kingdom was on the verge of being taken away into captivity by Assyria. It was Hosea's task to get their attention and cause them to consider their sins which had separated them from God, and warn them of the consequences. But of course, just like today, they were more interested in other things than hearing God's Word. To help them visualize what was happening God gave Hosea an unusual command. Look at 1:2...

People have responded to this verse in many ways trying to get it to say something they are comfortable with. But I would much prefer we just take God's Word for what it says. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute to teach Israel a lesson. It is a lesson about the unfaithfulness of God's people in contrast with the faithfulness of God. The whole book reminds me of 2 Timothy 2:13, which says, *"If we are faithless, He remains faithful."*

Can you imagine Hosea's situation as a man of God, desiring to please God in all his ways, married to a prostitute? It was not going to be an easy life. This was not just a quick one week illustration. It was carried throughout Hosea's adult life. He served as a prophet for approximately 70 years.

As you read the book there is no question that once Hosea married Gomer he committed himself to her. He loved her deeply and never did his commitment or love for her diminish. Some have tried to say that because he was a prophet he was too hard or inflexible, and drove Gomer to a lifestyle of prostitution. But nothing could be further from the truth. Everything Gomer received from Hosea was good, but she desired something different, the pleasures of this world, and pursued them intensely, going from one lover to another.

In the meantime, Hosea remained faithful. He continued to go after her, asking her to return, as the whole nation watched on. I can imagine what they were saying. But Hosea's response was intended to illustrate God's response, because, despite our unfaithfulness, our abandonment of Him, our pursuit of this world's pleasures, and our running from one lover to another spiritually, God continues to love us and seek after us.

Gomer's response to Hosea was much the same as our response to God "*Just leave me alone, let me do what I want to do!*" But God knows we need Him much more than we realize. He knows the end of our actions. And in our moment of destitution, when no one else will have us, I'm so grateful He is available to us.

Toward the end of this first part of the book that's the picture illustrated for us of God's love. In 3:2, Hosea buys Gomer back out of slavery for 15 shekels of silver. By that point she was worthless to anyone else. The usual price of a slave was 30 shekels, but now her beauty was gone, her vibrancy was gone, used up by the world, and she was cast aside as yesterday's garbage.

There is something here you and I must not neglect to see. The sinful pleasures of this world hold out many promises, and all of us have sought after them to some extent, but we will all be left empty by them. Sin mocks us, sin uses us, and sin makes fools of us, and then abandons us. God does not. And when we need Him the very most, He will be there to take us back, to love and nurture us.

Where are you in your relationship with God? Are you being enticed by another? Are you being tempted to step out on Him, seeking to enjoy the lifestyle He says is not good for us? Instead of waiting until sin ruins you, turn back to Him now, and you will find in Him a loving reception.

## **II. The Petition of God's Love**

Chapters 4-13 expand on this idea with the petition of God's love.

Verses 4:1-3 give us a good idea of what follows...

God does not shield us from the consequences of our actions just because He loves us. Notice, He brings a charge against them, this is what you are doing wrong; He states their condition, this is what you have become; and He warns them of the consequences, this is what will happen.

This is the tough type of love Dr. James Dobson talks about when dealing with an unfaithful mate in marriage. You can't pander to your partner by condoning their sin, and shielding them from the consequences of their

actions. Whether they want to hear it or not, whether they want to see it or not, they must!

God was not saying to the people of Israel, *“Please come back under any circumstances.”* He never does that with us either. Instead, He says, *“I love you. I want you back. I’ll take you back, but not under these circumstances. There must be a genuine change of heart.”* Too often we treat God just like unfaithful marriage partners do their mates. I’m sure you’ve heard the routine, *“Please take me back, I promise it won’t happen again!”* That’s what the people of Israel were doing with God. Look at 6:4-6...

They were giving God tokens of faithfulness that were merely surface, and would quickly dissolve as the dew of the morning. God wants us to come to Him with sincerity of heart, and not the insincerity of broken promises and surface sacrifices.

Throughout these chapters God uses a number of metaphors to describe the situation Israel was in. I will mention just one. Look at 7:8...

Have you ever whipped up a batch of pancakes but only cooked one side and tried to serve them that way? Of course not! We wouldn’t think of it. It wouldn’t matter how nice the one side was cooked if the other side was left undone.

The Israelites were going through the motions, adhering to some of the rituals without applying the principles and thinking that was good enough. But just as pancakes cooked only on one side, obedience that only goes part way is good for nothing.

It reminds me of the man in James 1 who looked at himself in the mirror and noticing his condition, turned and walked away without doing anything.

God wants more from us than that and He has a right to expect it. He has bought us from the slave market of sin for much more than 15 shekels, He has purchased us with the blood of His Son. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:15-20...

When we turn from the Lord to commit spiritual adultery, and continue to do so, God has every right to give up on us. But He doesn’t. Look at Hosea 11:7-9...

God is not like you and me; He does not give up. God does not turn from us when we've been unfaithful, but instead gives us what we do not deserve, grace; an open door by which we might return.

### III. The Promise of God's Love

This brings us to the promise of God's love in chapter 14. Follow as I read the chapter...

As it is so often with us, Israel continued to go her own way. She failed to respond to God's love and experienced the consequences of her sins. In 722 B.C. they were carried away into captivity by the Assyrians, but not without hope. Because God's love is steadfast and unfailing there remains hope. It doesn't matter how far we fall or how bad we sin, God is still willing to forgive and restore.

In verse 2, God tells them what to say, "*Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.*" And then promises in verse 4, "*I will heal.*"

That is exactly what He says to us in 1 John 1:9...

As far as I'm concerned, there can be no greater words of comfort spoken to an unfaithful partner than the offer of restoration. God is willing; all that is left is for us to take Him up on His offer. Hosea 14:9 says...

We don't have to stumble through life. Because of God's unfailing love we can experience the security that comes in a relationship with Him.

Would you like that kind of security? You can.

A. B. C.

If you have already done so, but have been unfaithful in some way...