

# Hosea 3 – Incomprehensible Love

Good morning everyone its great to be with you this morning. For those of you who don't know me my name is Tom and I hang out with the youth and young adults here at Church. I have the joy today of doing the second sermon in our series on Jesus in the Old Testament on what is one of my favourite passages in the Bible. Today we are looking at this passage from Hosea who is one of the twelve minor prophets. They are a section of our Old Testament full of essentially prophetic poetry that is addressed to God's people and is often in response to their behaviour and brings with it a promise of judgment or restoration. This is a part of the Bible that seems confusing and hard to understand, sometimes it seems irrelevant to us. What I want to do is push back on that because the Minor Prophets are written to people who need answers. They are struggling, their world is collapsing around them, their leaders are evil, enemies are at the gates and they turn to scripture for answers. In these texts, we find a God who wants to connect with his people, who is relational in his approach, who is fierce in his judgement but faithful in his promises, who provides hope for the hopeless. A key feature of prophecy, such as we find in our passage today, is that often God through the prophet is driving at a particular image, he's not trying to explain the detailed mechanics of a theological concept, he's using an image to connect with his listeners to explain the relational reality of situation. For a lot of us in this room, myself included, our faith in God can be this intellectual concept we keep in our head but it doesn't always move down and penetrate our hearts. With that in mind...

Let me pray.

One of the unexpected jobs as a youth pastor is pre-teen relationship councillor...  
... the pain is real, even at a young age.

## Hosea til now

In Hosea we find ourselves in a super strange situation. Hosea is writing to Israel when their leaders are failing them. Israel has split into the north and south kingdom and in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC the Assyrians are at the gates. They will eventually take over bringing with them pain, terror and destruction. The people were looking to God for answers. Why God? Why the pain why the suffering? Are you even there? Are you even listening? Do you even care about us. These are the people God is speaking to in the book of Hosea. How does God start, well in Hosea 1 he does something really weird.

<sup>2</sup>When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD."

God tells his prophet to go and marry someone, Gomer, who God knew, and Hosea knew was going to cheat on him. God in chapters 1 and 2 uses this image to explain the way that he feels his people are treating him. He talks about the horrific acts that they have carried out against one another but most of all he talks about the way that he feels his people, who he saved from Egypt, who he loves deeply, have turned away from him. They have sought out

other God's in the world, idolizing, giving their affections to created things instead of to their creator. And so he gives us this image of the adulterous wife. He makes Hosea experience the pain that he has experienced, so that we can see with our eyes in this book what it is like for God, the pain that he feels as we take his love for granted and do what is right in our own eyes, taking for ourselves what we want and ignoring the creator.

It feels similar as to when you are cheated on in a relationship. The despair, helplessness, the humiliation, God is giving us an image to show his relationship with us is about so much more than just following him as a commander, he is relational, he actually cares about you in a meaningful way and that means a vulnerability, you have a capacity to treat him poorly and for him to see that.

That brings us to Hosea 3 one of my favourite sections of the Bible.

### Abandoned again

Hosea finds himself in a horrible situation. Gomer has not only left him, she has run away, back to her old life, engaged in prostitution again and now seems to be caught in debt in what is most likely a sex slavery type situation. Hosea has given his all in this relationship, to follow God and where has it gotten him. He is alone with his children, without his wife. I'm sure he felt some complex emotions. Anger at what she had done to him, despair at the betrayal. Confusion and resentment at what he has been tasked with doing. What's the point, why the pain, why the fear, why the agony of emotional tearing as the woman he loves sells herself. She is now trapped in the ancient world of slavery, being bought and sold, degraded. And he is torn apart. Betrayed. Confused. Broken.

And then God says to Hosea, Go! Go to her. Go find her. Your wife who is loved by another man and is committing adultery, seek her out and love her. Uh, What? What do you mean God? Go find her, go love her, as I the Lord have loved Israel. As the Lord has loved his people. How can God ask this of this man, surely, Hosea would turn and abandon God this is too much? You ask too much of me God. To face that pain, to humiliate myself. But he doesn't complain, what does it say?

<sup>a</sup>So I bought her for fifteen shekels<sup>a</sup> of silver and about a homer and a lethek<sup>b</sup> of barley.

### He Redeemed her.

Hosea went. He went to the parts of the city that a prophet should never be seen, where men of God should not wander, to the establishments that with them bring shame. He walked into those parts of the city looking for his wife, pulling with him the cart that holds the payment. Imagine the pain this man felt as he did that. The gut wrenching humiliation as he took on the shame of someone who ventures there. And then he finds her. But he can't just take her. He couldn't just take her by the hand and lead her home. She had a price, she was in debt, being sold like an item, a commodity to the highest bidder.

In Genesis 1:27 it says God created man and woman in his own image, in the image of God he created them. This means that they have an inherent value. That a human life is of worth to God that he has imprinted an image of himself onto each person giving them intentional worth that transcends that of all other creation. You have value because you were designed,

formed, created by God. Here we have Gomer. For sale to the highest bidder. Her humanity gone, degraded by herself and by evil men. Imagine the moment that Hosea had to ask, how much? How much for my wife? Hosea she is already your wife, she is already yours to love and hold and call beautiful. You rightly shouldn't even be having a conversation like this? But she had a debt, that she couldn't pay. And so he would pay, he would ask, how much? How much for my wife? For the woman who is one with me. And he paid for her, he redeemed her from slavery, when the Bible uses the word redeem it means to pay off a debt for someone to free them, Hosea did that for her, and he took her home. And then in verse 4 and 5 we have a promise. That for a while God's people will suffer and they do under the Assyrians and under the Babylonians, but they are promised that one day, someone from the line of David will come, and just as Gomer was returned to Hosea, God's people will return to him.

### Love like the Lord Loves the Israelites.

If you ask a random member of our church family why they are saved its likely they would say, that Jesus died for them. Autopilot turns on for all of us sometimes and we can have the right answers to these questions. But relationally what does that actually mean to you. Back in verse one God said to Hosea Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites. Like the Lord loves his people. The Love that the Lord has. That he would be Hosea, and that makes you, that make me, Gomer. That we have fled from him, that we have abandoned his love and chased after stuff, other relationships, financial security. Things in the world, thinking they would bring us joy and fulfilment, that we chased the satisfaction of the desires of our bodies, that we abandon all goodness and righteousness. In the search of our hearts in our selfishness. We chose for ourselves what will make us happy and fulfilled and then when God sought us out when he came looking, when Jesus humiliated himself by taking on the flesh of a human and entering the world what did he find, he found Gomer. He found you and he found me, enslaved, indebted, trapped. He couldn't just take us back. Love her how I have loved them. What do you mean God? That when he found us, to him looking disgusting, despicable, not worthy, shameful. Prostituting ourselves to the things of this world, worshiping things created by human hands. And he asks, how much? How much to take back that which I rightly already own, my people who I created in my image, giving them dignity and value in the universe above all other creation but have thrown it all away for stuff? What's the price for these people who have hated me. Who are unkind to my followers, who think they don't need me, who say they follow me but live their lives in a completely different way, what about those who think that I don't even exist. How much to save them, to redeem them, to take them home? But for us he couldn't just pay money, he had to pay a debt and that debt was a life, an eternal life. Okay. You can take my son.

Can you see how incomprehensible the love that God has had for you and me is? The way his actions have demonstrated a character so far above not only what we would admire but what we could imagine is possible in another person. The story of Hosea sounds outrageous and out of our reach as people because it is. Only God can bring about such reconciliation, such salvation. Is this the God you are ignoring? Is this the God you cast aside and choose to do things however you want, in the way that feels best and right to you? This life, the life you hold onto is so fragile, it's so brief. Is it worth rejecting not just love but this love, from this God who would accept ultimate humiliation, who would give the ultimate sacrifice for you.

He did it, because he wants you. He wants you to be his. He wants you to be safe for eternity. He knows your struggle as Hosea looked on his trapped wife he saw her shame, he saw how he had been degraded, and God sees you. He sees the tiredness, the anxiety, the struggles that you feel as you search for meaning and happiness and try and jam the things of the world into that hole. And what did he say to Hosea, Love her as I have loved. I cannot comprehend the fact that the all-powerful creator of the universe would love someone as pathetic as me. But he does. In all my brokenness, in all my weakness.

And all he asks is for me to turn and follow him. Verse 3 Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.” Hosea’s relationship with Gomer after he saves her isn’t built on a new form of slavery, but on a mutual assurance to be in relationship with one another, its not about what she’s done its about what she does now. God calls us in response to our freedom in Jesus to follow, forget who you used to be, the wrong you’ve done that’s been dealt with, follow me now.

Do you see the magnitude of the trade? This isn’t God asking you to give up the things you love it is him asking you to let him redeem you from the sin you are enslaved to.

Paul captures this in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 when talking about sexual sin he says <sup>19</sup>Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup>you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

You have value greater than you might understand. More value than you treat yourself with. That to God you were worth the price that he had to pay, to sacrifice Jesus for you. When you give yourself to stuff, to people, you degrade the identity that God has given you in creation. That the only way is to follow him. Nothing in this world, that you might run to for security for satisfaction, no matter how it may make you feel in a moment can give you the ultimate value of true life. Only God decides your worth, and he decided that in spite of all you do against him he would pay for you and claim you. Will you go to him? Gomer, will you turn to the one who loves you. To the one who has saved you, will you jump into his arms and accept his offer of salvation, of worth. Yes that means turning away from the things that degrade you, that you think matter, but is that really a bad thing.

Hosea paid to redeem his wife from her degradation, from her shame. He saved her. He took her home and cared for her, he stood by her. God wants to do that for you, to give you eternal life, to redeem you from the sin that tears you down. You were bought at a price. A price that humiliated God but that he paid, a price that caused him gut wrenching pain, but that he paid, even though he knew lots of us would wear the badge Christian but not live it out, a price that he knew many of you would reject anyway because you think you are too smart for him, but he paid it anyway.

Do you understand what this whole Christian thing means? This isn’t a joke, this matters. Do you come to church because its convenient for you and your family, maybe its just what you have always done, maybe someone dragged you here today. We need this, I need this, you need this. Don’t view God as this big guy in the sky giving orders. Hosea 3 presents him as a husband reaching out to save his wife. He is relational, personal, real, he understands you

and your struggles and your apathy and your boredom and he loves you anyway. Don't disregard him. It isn't worth it. Turn to him now, take his hand and go home. I want you to take a moment now, just a moment, as I pray, to consider where you sit with this. Maybe you have been a Christian for a long time but you just want to take a moment to recommit to God, maybe you are completely new to this and want to consider it further, maybe you want to become a Christian, consider this while I pray and if it is something you want to talk through further please come and find myself, Stu, or John. We would love to talk more with you about this.

Let me pray.