

Advent: Long Foretold, The Bridegroom, Hosea 1:1, 3:1-5, 12/1/24

In Christianity, Advent describes the four weeks of anticipation leading up to Christmas, it's a sacred time when we look back through the corridor of time with the eyes of our heart to the anticipation that the Jewish people experienced awaiting the Messiah, who would become the Savior not only for the Jewish people but for the whole world. The advent of the Messiah was long foretold by God through the prophets of the Old Testament, leaving a **trail of bread crumbs** telling us where, when, and how he would be born. But also these prophets gave us **vivid and powerful images** depicting the kind of Messiah he would be. As Christians, we believe of course the Messiah is Jesus born that first Christmas. By the way, so did Jesus! Contrary to modern criticism, Jesus himself claimed to be the Messiah, and he was even so bold to say to the religious leaders- this trail of bread crumbs leads to me, these vivid portraits that the prophets painted, they were describing me (John 5:38-39). And so this Advent season we want to look at four portraits of the Messiah long foretold by the OT prophets: **The Bridegroom, The Shepherd, The King, The Counselor** and see how they each depict different aspects of the Christ of Christmas.

Today we are going to get a portrait of the Messiah as **the Bridegroom** (Husband) through the writings and the personal life of Hosea the Prophet, who lived 700 years before Jesus came. He was a prophet primarily to the Northern Kingdom of Israel over a 50 year period of both economic prosperity and spiritual and moral decay. Hosea tells of the Messiah through a personal account of his trainwreck of a marriage. Today we are going to learn three truths about our relationship with God and then we will look at how it points to Jesus born that first Christmas day.¹

Truth 1- God's relationship with His People is like a Marriage.

In verse 2, God tells Hosea **"Go get married."** In chapter 3:1 he says, **"Love her like the Lord loves Israel."** We see that God does something surprising. He doesn't just call Hosea to preach like most of the prophets, he calls him to live out the prophetic message through marriage. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and that's exactly what is happening here. Hosea's life is to be watched by the community like an unfolding drama to understand something critical about God's marriage relationship with His People. This image is all throughout the prophets- Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah... God portrays his relationship with Israel, and by extension as Christians through the new Covenant in Christ, as a husband and wife.

You can not understand the relationship between God and his people only through a King with his subjects, or a shepherd with his flock...these are certainly biblical and we will look at them through this advent season...but they don't get to the depth of what God's relational love is like, this theme is so intensely intimate and enduring, that God is saying through Hosea and the prophets, **"You can't understand me unless you understand me as your bridegroom, your husband."**

¹ Thanks to Tim Keller for the structural outline here. <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-true-bridegroom/>

This image of **marriage explodes with personal relevance** when it comes to our relationship with God. But let me just share the obvious one. If God wants us to know our relationship with him is like a marriage, **Our relationship with God must be our #1 Priority.** If you are married, or you want to be married one day- your relationship must be your number one earthly priority. Outside of your relationship with God, there is nothing else that can come before it, not even good things like your own parents (Gen 2- leave and cleave), job, church, kids, serving, money, hobbies. Nothing! And this only happens through unhurried time together, up close and personal, mutual self-disclosure and authenticity, intimacy and sacrifice...there is no short-cut.

Now, virtually every husband and wife **will SAY their spouse is #1, even if it's not true.** Can you imagine? "Honey, I just want you to know, you are in my top 5 most important things in my life...you are just below climbing the corporate ladder and living vicariously through my kids' sports careers." Never say that...but functionally, and we all could sense it if it's true, whenever something else functions as number one it inevitably erodes a marriage, and if you do that long enough without course correction, without making real, tangible changes in your mind's attention and your heart's affection, you will destroy your marriage. Some of you have learned that lesson the hard way, or been on the receiving end of that, or narrowly avoided that yourself. Re|Engage shout out...

Friends, don't you see the same is true with God? He's our cosmic spouse. He is the true lover of our souls we were meant to be with forever and ever. He wants to be the number one priority in our lives, not a supplement to your life that we sprinkle on Sunday, not just another spoke but the very wheel itself. And we can not merely pay lip service, he must have our mind's attention and our heart's affection. God is saying, **"You can't know me from afar.** I have to be in every nook and cranny of your life, you must let me into everything!" It's experiential up close, union with God that we were designed for.

For some of us we have **really never thought** about a relationship with God in these terms. We think King sure, Judge- Maybe...but Spouse? Marriage? But this is the kind of relationship God desires us to have with us. Until we understand this, we won't really experience the kind of relationship God wants to have with us.

So that's the first thing we learn about our relationship with God- it's like a marriage, the second thing we learn is hard to take in, **Truth #2 God's relationship with His People is like an adulterous marriage.**

God does not tell Hosea to go find the most faithful, godly, trustworthy Proverbs 31 woman he can find. No, look what it says, v.2 **"Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD."** So he married Gomer. Now there isn't consensus among scholars whether God is saying this prophetically as, "Go marry her and one day she will become adulterous." Or if God is saying, "Go marry a woman who already has this reputation." We don't know for sure- but one thing we do know either way, Hosea is told to marry and commit to and **love a woman who is going to break his heart.**

As we read through Hosea we learn that this is exactly what happens. She strays and pursues the embrace of other lovers, she moves in with other men, and eventually she becomes a prostitute. It gets so bad, we find out in Chapter 3 she's for sale. The implication is that she's become unprofitable as a prostitute and her owner decided he's cutting his losses.

Why in the world would God have asked Hosea to do such a thing? This is bizarre isn't it? Well, there is a principle in the Bible and if you live the Christian life long enough, you will experience this- **God is committed to using our circumstances**, even the most difficult ones, to teach us and teach others through us. God will use our lives like a movie for others to see, in order to convey his messages and purposes and for his glory...even through the most challenging and painful experiences. Well as a prophet of God, Hosea experiences this in a visceral way, in a very specific situation, because God is trying to **teach Israel and all humanity something crucial** if we are to understand our deepest soul problem as the human race and the only solution.

God is saying through Hosea, **"This is what it is like for me to love an adulterous people, a world that does not love me back.** Who stray and pursue the embrace of other lovers to their own destruction." This is exactly what Israel was doing. At this time, Israel became just like their pagan neighbors, worshipping Baal, and had become so captured by the morally decadent worldview and practices of the culture around them. They had abandoned their first love, their covenant commitment to their husband, the Lord God, and it became so bad they were just like Gomer: **spiritually shattered and enslaved by their idols.**

This **imagery of adultery that leads to slavery** is one of the most common images of the nature of sin and its results in the Bible. This is exactly what is at the root of sin- **it's wanting other things, making other things, pursuing other things (like adulterous lovers) above God.** Turning even good things into ultimate things we must have in order to have a good life. And when we do, these other loves capture us and begin to hollow us out spiritually. The Bible says we become slaves to sin. Sin is not just a heavenly traffic ticket we pay off and go on our merry way, it is **cosmic adultery** against the divine lover of our soul, it's **soul slavery** to masters who do not love us. And until we understand this imagery we will not take seriously our desperate condition.

Truth #3 God redeems adulterous people.

James Boice, a former pastor of 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia once called Hosea 3 the greatest chapter in the Bible because it succinctly shares the story of the gospel 700 years before Jesus was born. **3 The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress.**

Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." (This was what they would eat at the pagan idol feasts). Hosea would have 1000 reasons why he should divorce her and move on, but God says don't. Now, this isn't saying that there are never reasons for divorce by the way, the Bible gives us reasons. This is about God. **God wants to show the world what he's like.** So he says, "Go pursue her again." And so Hosea goes to where she is being auctioned off...imagine the scene- scholars tell us she would have

been stripped naked so bidders would know what they are getting. Her dignity is gone, her life has been hollowed out like a husk. And at the lowest point of her life, she hears the voice of her husband bidding for her. How could it be? And yet it was so. **2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley.** This was the average price of a slave. He removes her shackles, clothes her nakedness and brings her close and whispers these words.

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" (by the way, the Hebrew emphasis makes it clear that included Hosea),

And then so will I also be to you." ...Hosea just redeemed her, paying the price to free her from slavery. Now Hosea is saying I'm not just freeing you, I want to restore our relationship. Ref. v.4-5- all of this is exactly what God will do in his relationship with His people. He doesn't tell us here what that restoration will look like, but he does in Hosea 2:14-16 **"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.**

15 There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

16 "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.' Notice Hosea is the initiator of love and restoration. Hosea says, "I forgive you. I want to restore you and our relationship. We are going back to the beginning like when we first met and fell in love. I'm going to pursue you again and there we will rekindle our relationship. We are starting fresh and I'm bringing you back home to be my beloved wife." And Gomer's heart responds to his loyal love. And God is saying, this is exactly what I'm going to do for humanity.

Now this is a beautiful redemption story, but this would have come at an enormous cost to Hosea. He's paying a price to redeem her and restore the relationship, the financial cost to himself, the social cost of what people would have thought in the society, but more than all of that, the emotional cost...If you have ever worked to restore a broken marriage, especially where there has been adultery, you know that there is an enormous cost to the one who was betrayed. To allow yourself to love and trust again? For most it is too much to bear.

Now remember, while this actually happened with Hosea and Gomer, this whole story is a walking billboard about God and his relationship with His people. Hosea loves a woman, God loves his people. Hosea is married, God is married. Hosea is betrayed, God is betrayed. Hosea pays an enormous price to redeem and restore her...But we are left with a dilemma that the book of Hosea does not answer. **How and where will God pay the enormous price to redeem and restore his people?** The book is crying out for the answer, in fact the entire OT is crying out for an answer to the question- "Where does God enter into the marketplace of slavery and pay the price to redeem her? Where does God demonstrate his unconditional love to restore and win back the heart of his wayward people?"

Matthew 9- John the Baptist's disciples ask Jesus why his disciples don't fast like the rest of the Jewish people. **15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will**

fast. Jesus says, I'm the bridegroom but I've come to pay the price for my wayward bride, and restore her through my love, by giving my life for her.

This is the answer to the riddle. **In Jesus' birth that first Christmas, God entered a fallen, broken wayward world.** And throughout his ministry, he wooed his bride, he called the world unto himself to see God in the flesh- his love, truth, purity, beauty and strength and righteousness. And still they rejected him and chased other lovers that enslaved them. Jesus willingly went to the cross, to the slave market, and he didn't just purchase us, he became our sin, he took our nakedness and shame on the cross. And he clothed us, covering our nakedness with his righteousness. Jesus redeems and restores us at the cost of his very life. Now you see why Hosea 3 is the story of the gospel 700 years before Christmas.

Now once you understand how much God loves us and was willing to do for us, then and only then can you understand what Christmas is about, and that baby who would become a bridegroom.

Donald Grey Barnhouse: **"The pursuing love of God is the greatest wonder in the universe.** When we see this love at work through the heart of Hosea we may wonder if God is really like that. But he is. Think about it: Many years later he would give man the ability to form the iron in the ground into nails, and to fashion the trees in the field he had created into a cross... Then he stretched out his hands upon that tree and allowed us to nail him there, and in so doing he took our sins upon himself. **This is our God, and there is no one else like him."**²

Do you know this God? Or are you still running to other lovers- things you think will give you what you long for, only coming up and more dissatisfied. Are you rejecting him? Jesus is a gentleman, he will not force himself on you. He will woo you and show himself worthy. But we can harden our hearts to him and reject him. **Even at the end of your life,** the last voice you'll hear as you step into darkness is Jesus saying, "I'm right here, I stand at the door, knocking, at the aisle awaiting your return. And I've proved it." This is what Communion is all about.

Works Consulted:

Tim Keller- <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-true-bridegroom/>

J.D. Greear

<https://summitchurch.com/GetFile.ashx?Guid=aa61b6f1-3473-4ac1-953f-f27d848e40c5>

Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets: Hosea*

² Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Epistle to the Romans," Part 37 (Philadelphia: The Bible Study Hour, 1952), 1841.