

3 | HOSEA 3

THE SLAVE MARKET OF SIN

Jesus lavishes his rich mercy on unworthy sinners

Outline

1. **THE PLACE OF REDEMPTION: THE SLAVE MARKET (3:1)**
 - A Place of Slavery
 - Slavery in the Ancient World*
 - All are Slaves of Sin*
 - a Place of Sin
 - A Place of Salvation
 - God's Broken Heart*
2. **THE PRICE OF REDEMPTION: 30 PIECES (3:2)**
 - The Price of a Slave
 - The Purchase of Gomer
 - The Price of Your Redemption
 - Jesus Paid it All!*
3. **THE POWER OF REDEMPTION: TRANSFORMATION (3:3)**
 - The Power of Love
 - No Revenge, just Love*
 - Not My Slave but My Wife*
 - The Unrelenting Love of Christ*
 - The Power of Renewal
 - Thomas Brooks Quote*
 - Monergism and Synergism*
4. **THE PERSON OF REDEMPTION: JESUS (3:4-5)**
 - Messiah's Preparation
 - Messiah's Incarnation

Call to Worship: Psalm 63:3-4, "Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. 4 So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands."

Introduction

Our message today is from Hosea 3 on page 752 of your pew Bible. The title of our message is "The Slave Market of Sin."

Do you understand how great God's love is? Do you know where you came from? Do you remember that all of us is "a brand plucked from the burning" (Zech 3:2)? The only thing that separates us from an eternity in hell is the love of God so beautifully displayed in Hosea 3.

James Montgomery Boice, the onetime pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia said this about Hosea chapter 3:

The third chapter of Hosea is, in my judgment, the greatest chapter in the Bible, because it portrays the greatest story in the Bible—the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for his people—in the most concise and poignant form to be found anywhere.¹

Hosea 3 shows us God's work of redemption—the work by which the Lord Jesus Christ delivered us from sin's bondage at the cost of his own life—portrayed in Hosea's purchase of his fallen wife from slavery.

1. THE PLACE OF REDEMPTION: THE SLAVE MARKET (3:1)

In Hosea 3 we read of how our relationship with God is compared to a marriage. We see how God illustrates how he feels about our sin by the story of the Prophet Hosea and his adulterous wife Gomer. When God's people sin, he equates his feelings to that of a husband broken by his precious wife's adultery. God's heart is, in a sense, torn to pieces when we sin. Oh, how our Father in heaven loves us.

Hosea's wife Gomer has left her prophet husband to live with one lover after another. Finally, however, they all rejected her, and she found herself alone, possessing nothing and in so much debt that she is being sold into slavery. Here we can see her standing in the marketplace to be sold as a slave.

A PLACE OF SLAVERY

3:1a | And the LORD said to me, 'Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress...

"Go again," God says.

"Go where?" replies the prophet Hosea.

"Go again to the slave market. Your wife is up for sale. Her lovers have rejected her. No one will have her. **Go again** and love her even though she has been a prostitute. Go Hosea. Love that girl like I love my people Israel."

¹James Montgomery Boice. *The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002), 31-40.

Gomer had left Hosea, as we have already seen, and she had sunk lower and lower in the social scale of the day. Now, at the last, she became a slave and was sold in the capital city of Samaria.

Gomer's for sale. How'd that happen? It's very possible the other lover has put her up for sale. Perhaps she has fallen into debt. That's one of the reasons you get sold into slavery. Or it could be the new lover was a pimp, and she had lost her marketability, and he was cutting his losses. It's bad. It's as far down as a person could fall. It's as bad as it can be. It's as broken as it can be. It's as miserable as it can be.

God describes his relationship with Israel in Hosea, like a bad marriage. So here is Hosea's really bad marriage. God says, "That is an image of what my relationship with human beings is like." He commands Hosea to go and search for his wife, looking everywhere, even in the arms of another man.

Hosea arrives the marketplace where the slaves were being sold. In those days, slaves were brought, stripped naked, and put on display so the buyers could evaluate their bodies. They needed to see whether they were strong or weak, emaciated or fat, because they were spending money on these slaves. Hosea's wife Gomer stood naked, on display with the rest of the slaves. Hosea was going to have to buy back his wife. He bought her, clothed her, fed her, and brought her home. Oh, what love that will not let us go!² God loves his people though they turned to idols. Hosea pursues his adulterous wife no matter what. It's what God does for us. He pursues us.

Slavery in the Ancient World

There were different ways in which a person could become a slave in antiquity. ³ Usually through war, slave, debt, or voluntarily.

A person could become a slave **voluntarily**. A person might want to work for the security of room, board and being under a person's protection. A person could become a slave through **war** – if another country invaded, it was possible you would be separated from your family and sold into slavery in the conquering country. Slavery occurred through **birth** – if your parents were slaves, and you were born to them, you automatically became a slave. Also, one could become a slave most often through poverty and **debt**. If you couldn't pay your bills, you would be sold into slavery. This is likely where Gomer was. God commands Hosea: **Go again, love a woman**, your wife, who is a prostitute (3:1a). Go back. Go to the slave market. Buy her back. What a devastating command.

All are Slaves of Sin

We are all slaves of sin. We are all born and raised in the slave market of sin. Paul tells us this in Ephesians 2.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our

² PG Matthew. "Love That Will Not Let Me Go". Online Sermon and commentary Hosea 3.

³ Boice, 34.

flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Eph 2:1-3).

A PLACE OF SIN

The slave market was a place to illustrate the ugliness of our sin. Sin strips us of everything valuable: our dignity, our purity, and most important, our standing with God. Sin is the “transgression of God’s law.” It breaks his covenant. Jesus said, “everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (Jn 8:34). Someone said,

*Sin will take you farther than you wanna go
Slowly but wholly taking control
Sin will leave you longer than you wanna stay
Sin will cost you far more than you wanna pay*

When a Christian sins, they lose their peace. In place of the sweet peace of the Holy Spirit, there is a gnawing conviction of sin and emptiness. Joy is lost and unrest and depression settle in. Saint of God, you can never live comfortably in sin.

A PLACE OF SALVATION

In the midst of all this mess, Hosea humbles himself and goes after Gomer. He loves her like God loves Israel. We have to go to the slave market to see how much Hosea loves Gomer. And God says, that’s a picture of my love for you, my people.

3:1b | even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins...

Raisin cakes are ancient aphrodisiacs. God loves his people though they turn to spiritual aphrodisiacs. He would rescue them though they are deep into idolatry.

The pagan religions that Israel was involved in had to do very much with fertility and immorality. The **cakes of raisins** were referring to what they thought was an aphrodisiac (cf Song 2:5; Gen 30:14; Song 7:13). It was used in the Canaanite love rituals in which they committed gross immorality in their “worship” of the Canaanite deities. All idolatry is like an aphrodisiac. *Idols promise so much but deliver only emptiness and shame.*

The **cakes of raisin** were the delicacies that were served at the idol feasts.⁴ Who knows what Gomer was involved with or how far she had gone, but the Prophet Hosea was willing to go to the ends of the earth to find her.

God's Broken Heart

Despite Israel’s idolatry, he loves them and pursues them. He’s a God with a broken heart. We read, “**the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins**” (3:1b). The Lord loves you despite your idols and your sin. He loves you enough to do whatever it takes to redeem you from that slave market.

God says, “Imagine you have a bad marriage, and you experience the worst betrayal you can think of. Your wife goes and puts herself in the arms of other lovers. That’s exactly

⁴ Timothy J. Keller. *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. “The True Bridegroom” (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

what happens when I love my people and I love human beings, and they put other things before me, and they worship other gods before me.”

Part of the sinfulness of sin is that your sin is not against a God who hates you, but who loves you and is pursuing you. You do not understand the impact of wrongdoing on your God until you understand this image. When the person you love most in your life is putting him or herself in the arms of another lover, that's **agonizing**. Some of you have been through that. There's nothing like that pain, and God says, “Until you've been through that, you don't understand the impact of your wrongdoing, your coldness and your waywardness upon me.”⁵ God's love is astounding here in this chapter isn't it?

Free Indeed

We learn something amazing in John 8. Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Can anyone here testify today that this is true in your life?

2. THE PRICE OF REDEMPTION: 30 PIECES (3:2)

THE PRICE OF A SLAVE

When God says, “**Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man**” (3:1a), he's saying, “Go to the slave market. Go back and love the woman who was used up by other men.”

3:2 | So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.

There was an auction, and Hosea would not be outbid the others. He didn't have thirty shekels of silver, which was the full price of a slave, so he said, “I will give you fifteen shekels of silver for her and the rest in grain.” Hosea offered **15 pieces of silver** and a homer or lethech of barley. **A lethech of barley** is nine bushels, which is another 15 shekels, and so basically, she was bought for 30 shekels. What does this mean? All we know is 30 shekels is how much it costs to buy a slave in Israel in those days. That must mean she had sunk down to the place where maybe her lovers were just sending her around. Maybe they were pimping for her.

Finally, she ends up so poor that she's at the slave market, on the auction block. She is up for sale. She's in the marketplace. What a terrible thing that was. We know she was probably standing there, stripped naked, because the people who were about to buy wanted to see what their merchandise looked like.⁶

What a picture we have. “Silver” is what nobility and those who were more well off would have used to purchase things. “Barley” is what the poor would barter with. And so, we see a shadow of Christ here. Christ gave the silver of his deity and the barley of his humanity for our redemption.

Let's not forget that it was Christ who was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Mt 26:15). He was sold for 30 pieces of silver in order to purchase our redemption.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

THE PURCHASE OF GOMER

“**So, I bought her ...**” (3:2). Do you know what that must mean? From what we can tell, Israel in the eighth century BC, which is when Hosea and Amos were prophesying, had really decayed spiritually and culturally and was pretty much like all the other pagan nations around it. She had adopted many of the customs of the pagan nations around it. Therefore, there's a very, very good chance this was a public auction, that Gomer was being auctioned as a slave in a public marketplace. Israel was forbidden to have these markets, but they had them anyway. She was likely put up for sale in the capital city of Samaria.

The custom in the pagan markets was to unclothe the slaves. Gomer lost her dignity. Hosea, a holy prophet, humbled himself to pursue Gomer.

There's Gomer, up for sale. The bidding starts. It's not hard to imagine that she probably would have had her eyes closed, because it's not much to do, but it's about the only thing she had left to shield herself just a little bit from the moment of her greatest degradation. She hears the voices: “Five shekels,” “Eight shekels,” and suddenly she begins to realize one of the voices is her husband.

She's thinking, “What is he doing here? After all I've done, what is he doing here?” Hosea pipes up, “Ten ... Twelve ... Thirteen ... Fifteen. Fifteen and a lethech.” **Fifteen** and a homer of barley, which is the equivalent of about **thirty shekels** of silver, about the average price for a slave. “Sold!” to the undistinguished prophet.

Hosea would have come up and he would have covered her nakedness with a cloak and led her away. She must have been saying, “Why would he still want me?” Probably her first response was, “Oh, I get it. Revenge. Now you can do what you want with me.” But verse 3 shows Hosea has no bitterness. He speaks tenderly to her.⁷

THE PRICE OF YOUR REDEMPTION

Christ was sold for 30 pieces of silver, but what he gave in exchange for your freedom is breathtaking. What is the price of your redemption? Jesus paid it all! What radical comfort. He paid it all for you. Your sins are washed away. Your guilt is gone. He came after you. He “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). The price he paid was “his own blood on the tree” (Heb 10:10).

Jesus Paid it All!

You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Pet 1:18-19).

What a price that was paid for your salvation. That's why at this moment, there is now “no condemnation” for those who simply believe and trust in Christ's sacrifice (Rom 8:1).

3. THE POWER OF REDEMPTION: TRANSFORMATION (3:3)

Hosea is told to take Gomer back. What glorious hope we have in this picture of Hosea and Gomer.

⁷ Ibid.

THE POWER OF LOVE

3:3a | And I said to her, 'You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man.'

No Revenge, just Love

Hosea purchases his wife from the slave market. What does Hosea do? It looks like he wants revenge. We can tell from the text. He must've walked up, and instead of treating her as a slave, he covers her nakedness. He veils her head and covers her shame. He gives her back her dignity as a woman, takes her by the hand, and leads her away. Imagine what she's thinking. Imagine how she looks at him as he approaches her.

Imagine her saying, "How could he love me? He couldn't love me. He has bought me as a slave. He's now going to tyrannize me. He's going to get revenge!"

Not My Slave but My Wife

Hosea 3:3 indicates that the prophet Hosea leads Gomer to a place of privacy, and he turns to her and he says, in effect, "I didn't purchase you to humiliate you as my slave." Do you see what he says? "I don't even want you back in the house just to be back in the house. If you come back, I want you to be my wife. I don't want you to sleep with other men. I want you to be faithful to me, and I will be faithful to you. We are married, and we belong to each other *exclusively*. I want you to be my wife."⁸ Hosea, like God, keeps his end of the covenant of marriage, even when Gomer did not keep hers. Hosea does whatever it takes to redeem his wife.

The Unrelenting Love of Christ

This is the power of love! It's a pursuit to unthinkable proportions. Christ's love for us is unrelenting. Even when we didn't pursue him, he pursued us. Look at the unrelenting love of Christ.

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

Here is this holy, dignified prophet pursuing his wife to the very slave market. And look at God how he sends his Son to pursue us, even if it means a violent death on the cross. What love is this that does not redeem us merely to be servants, but to be **sons and daughters** of the living God.

This is exactly what happened when Jesus Christ came into the world. He's the Lamb sacrificed to bring us back into relationship with God. He's the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). It required total commitment from Hosea. Even more, our Lord Jesus was totally committed to our redemption. He held nothing back. What love!

THE POWER OF RENEWAL

Listen to Hosea's recommitment to his wayward wife:

⁸ Ibid

3:3b | ...so will I also be to you.

In other words, “I want to dwell with you. I will persevere with you. I will work hard to be an agent of healing.” He says, “No, I don’t want you as a slave. I want you as my wife. I want to build a home again. I want to have a life together with you.” Hosea says: “I will indeed be yours.” Do you know what he’s saying? He says, “I want to rebuild our lives together. Of course, there’s going to have to be a period here in which we do all the hard work of rebuilding. I will indeed be yours.”

How amazing that Hosea, by loving Gomer as a husband when she doesn’t deserve it, brings renewal to her life. That’s what God’s love does for us. Like it says in the Song of Solomon, “I am my beloved’s and he is mine” (Song 2:16). That amazing love fills us. It transforms us. It cleanses us. Just to know that I belong to Jesus, and nothing can separate me from his love. That’s powerful.

Paul says, “I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

Thomas Brooks Quote

The love of Christ and his ownership of you is incredibly transforming. Listen to Puritan Thomas Brooks:

I am Christ's by purchase and I am His by conquest; I am His by donation and I am His by election; I am His by covenant and I am His by marriage; I am wholly His; I am peculiarly His; I am universally His; I am eternally His. Once I was a slave but now I am a son; once I was dead but now I am alive; once I was darkness but now I am light in the Lord; once I was a child of wrath, an heir of hell, but now I am an heir of heaven; once I was Satan's bond-servant but now I am God's freeman; once I was under the spirit of bondage but now I am under the Spirit of adoption that seals up to me the forgiveness of my sins, the justification of my person and the salvation of my soul.

– Thomas Brooks

His love keeps transforming us on a daily basis. God promises to renew you and daily conform you into the image of Christ.

“I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Phil 1:6)

What was Hosea doing? He’s painstakingly showing Gomer the love of God, daily through love, rebuilding their covenant relationship. What love!

Derek Kidner says in his commentary: There “were the disloyal habits of years to be broken, and the realities of personal relationship, which had hitherto stopped at the physical level, to be unhurriedly explored together.”⁹

Hosea doesn't have any of this naïve, sentimental, “Oh, God will just make everything okay.” No, he's paying a price. He's doing the hard work of renewal.

That's what God does with us. Christ says: “You're my bride, and I'm not going to leave you. I'm not going to forsake you. You belong to me!” But you have to do something to receive his love on a daily basis. You have to open your arms to Christ. You have to welcome him in when he is “standing at the door” of your heart knocking (Rev 3:20).

Monergism and Synergism

Can I make an application here? Our regeneration is **monergistic**. God has to raise you from the dead. You are passive. God is active.

Our sanctification (the growth of our love relationship with God through Christ), on the other hand, is **synergistic**. You have to cooperate with the Spirit of God and surrender, moment by moment, applying the Word. You obey the Spirit. You do not trust your own feelings or understanding (Prov 3:5-6).

Daily we need to “put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:22-24).

The great breakthrough that we all need is not to just know the Word of God and think that is enough. No we have to **surrender** to the Word as the voice of God. We have to surrender to God in his Word. It's our only hope. We have to work hard at mind renewal. That's the only way to change. We need to take the time to renew our mind and be *empowered* by the Word of God and the Spirit.

4. THE PERSON OF REDEMPTION: JESUS (3:4-5)

Now we come to some verses that are clear only if you understand that the whole Bible is a love story, where God pays a price in his pursuit of a Bride for his Son. To the one who does not know the story line of the Bible the story of Hosea is just a shocking story. But we know there's more to the story than Hosea and Gomer. The whole idea is that Hosea is an image, an illustration, of God's love for his people: for you and me.

MESSIAH'S PREPARATION

We come to the prophecy of what historians call the captivity. It starts with Northern Israel being taken off by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and then in 539 B.C., the Southern kingdom (Judah) is taken by the Babylonians. It's the time when the children of Israel are stripped from their idols as well as their homeland, the sacrificial system, their annual

⁹ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless*, ed. J. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 42.

feasts, and most importantly, their king. No one's going to sit on the throne of Israel during this time. Hosea talks about it in Hosea 3:4.

3:4 | For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.

We see clearly that Hosea first refers to the timing of Jesus coming into the world. This is clearly the time of Israel's captivity. It climaxes in the Judean captivity for 70 years. God sends his people into exile. First, he sends the people of Northern Israel to Judah, then ultimately, he sends the Southern Kingdom of Judah into a 70-year captivity. And they come out of their captivity without their idols. They also don't have a king. They come out and wait in the land for like 400 years after the last prophet Malachi. And Hosea says, basically, there's coming someone who's going to pay the price, rule on the throne, and bring you to God.

Even though this is the Hebrew Scriptures, the book is just crying out with the question: *Where does God come into the marketplace? Where does God pay the price to get his people back?* The answer is in verse 5. It's a bit hidden, because it's a prophecy. He pays it by coming personally for his Bride. It's ultimately a verse that points to the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

MESSIAH'S INCARNATION

There is coming a time when David their king shall return with Israel and point them to God. King David is the one who will one day heal Israel's relationship with God, just like Hosea paid a price to heal his relationship with Gomer. King David is coming!

3:5 | Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

Wait a minute. **David is dead**. This must be a descendant of David, and it is.

The prophecy is unveiled a few pages over in Matthew 1. Verse 1 reads, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Aha! Here is our king. We've got to go to the incarnation. We've got to go to the genealogy in Matthew to find out who the true King David is. King David is dead, but the true David: Jesus Christ is very much alive. He's our king. Now the prophecy makes sense. He's the King David that Israel will see "**in the latter days**". After the captivity, the Messiah's coming.

3:5 | Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

The name King David refers directly to Christ, who, as Paul says, "was born according to the flesh of the offspring of David" (Rom 1:3).¹⁰ In Jesus Christ, God entered the world. He entered the marketplace. He humbled himself. He paid the daunting, infinite, impossible price. He clothed us and covered our nakedness with his righteousness. On

¹⁰ Augustine of Hippo, "The City of God," in *St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 375.

the cross of Calvary, Jesus Christ died and paid the price to buy us away from any competing enslavements, away from any other lover.

The word “**afterward**” in 3:5, introduces a great turning point, for here is the longed-for climax. That climax centers on three actions that indicate a radical conversion: “return,” “seek,” “come in fear.”¹¹

God works with us the way he worked with Israel. He may bring discipline and difficulty into your life. But while that discipline is taking place, he “stands at the door and knocks” (Rev 3:20). He calls with the voice of the divine Lover of his church. Our Lord Jesus is the Husband and lover of his Bride and he will never leave nor forsake her. He will never stop pursuing, edifying and building his church. And he promises, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). Sin and Satan and this world cannot prevail against you. God has lavished his love upon you and made you alive in Christ (Eph 2:1-10).

Can you say in your heart of hearts that you have sought Jesus Christ as your King? Knowing you are truly born again and belong to him is amazing. He's King of kings and Lord of lords. But he's even more than that. He's the Bridegroom and you are his bride. He loves you and cares for you like a husband. He will never cast aside his responsibilities and vows to you to care for you and to bring you into his eternal kingdom. What amazing love is this!

Conclusion

You and I were bought out of the slave market of sin by the precious blood of Christ. We are Gomer. We are the slave sold on the auction block of sin. The world bids for us. The world bids fame, wealth, prestige, influence, power—all those things that are the world's currency. But when all seemed lost, God sent the Lord Jesus Christ, his Son, into the marketplace to buy us at the cost of his life. If you can understand it as an illustration, God was the auctioneer. He said, “What am I bid for these poor, hopeless, enslaved sinners?”

Jesus said, “I bid the price of my blood.”

The Father said, “Sold to the Lord Jesus Christ for the price of his blood.” There was no greater bid than that.¹²

Remember that it was not we who sought him. It was he who sought us and who joined us to himself through spiritual marriage. He courted us. He won our love.

Had he not sought us, we'd still be living in the slave market of sin. “We love him because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19).

¹¹ H. D. Beeby, *Grace Abounding: A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids; Edinburgh: Eerdmans; Handsel Press, 1989), 40.

¹² Boice, 36.