

Scripture Introduction: Hosea lived in an agricultural society in a third world country. He was an upright man in a generation, in a country, of wickedness. He was well-respected. But then, the God of the universe spoke to him. God told him to go take a wife of wickedness. He did. And this woman continued in her wickedness in spite of Hosea's care. She went after other men instead of her husband. She bore children that were not Hosea's. Furthermore, she became indebted if not enslaved to these other men in her pursuit of foolish things. What should Hosea do? Have her stoned for adultery? Let her have the sad consequences of her sin and leave her? Or should he buy her back? What would you do? What would God do, if it were you? Let's read and find out.

Prayer of Illumination: O Jesus, we do not know how to do life on our own. We cannot trust our own hearts. And even if we knew what to do, we don't have the strength to do it on our own. Therefore we need wisdom and strength. I need wisdom and strength to preach your word. We all need wisdom and strength to hear your word, to hear and obey. Come, Holy Spirit, comfort us. Convict us. Enlighten us. Strengthen us. Advocate for us. It is in the name of Jesus that we pray.

Scripture Reading: Hosea 3

Introduction: How much do you owe? Add it up. Home. Cars. Credit Cards. Student loans. What does it come to? Then you have to add on what each American worker owes. As of 2010 our national debt was roughly 14 trillion and there were 153,910,000 American workers. That means that each American worker owed 90,962.25. Part of this debt is owed to foreign nations. For instance, you owe 3,719 to China, 2,926 to Japan, 491 to Taiwan and 290 to Canada. In addition, the American worker has also promised to pay somewhere between 66 and 116 trillion in Medicare, Medicaid, and social security. This is money we don't have. Literally. Our government owes more dollars than actually exist.

How did we get here? Let me tell you how I got into debt when I was in college. Now, since then God has taught me to be much more prudent but there was a time when I wasn't. I could have gone to school for free. But I chose to pay to go to a four year institution. I could have lived at home for free but I chose to live on campus for four years. And even though my parents were helping, I was working and I received scholarships I still went significantly into debt. I could have bought an economical car to get me to work, but I bought a sports car that I had to take out two loans to get. I could have made choices that would have lessened my car insurance instead of raising it. I could have spent only what money I had in the bank but instead I accrued modest credit card debt. A mixture of pride, lack of planning, lack of self-control, and foolishness led me into debt. Although partly well-intentioned there was a component of sin which led me into debt, debt that I couldn't pay off on my own.

Fallen Condition Focus: Sometimes our sin gets us into debt and debt is enslaving.

In the story before us today, Gomer was in debt. Someone had to be paid in order for her to be free. How did she get there? It wasn't through a war. It wasn't because of the color of her skin. It was because of her sin. Her sin led her away from her husband and into the arms of men who she somehow became indebted to. So too our sin gets us into debt. Whether it be through a sinful addiction where we lose self control in pursuit of our addiction du'jour or we could go into debt

because our pride leads us to always want more and especially to want popularity. And so we spend money we don't have on things that don't satisfy to accomplish goals that aren't met.

There's two types of people in this room: those that already identify with Gomer and those that haven't yet realized the sinfulness of their own hearts.

There was only one way out for Gomer. And there's only one way out for you. Someone else must pay. But why would anyone else pay your debt for you? What would motivate someone to bail out a broke sinner? What kind of relationship could survive that much sin and yet make a recovery?

Main Point 1: The Lord loves his people in spite of their sin.

Explanation: Let's take a look at our text: And the Lord said to me "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins."

Notice how the Lord says to Hosea, "go again." The Lord had initially asked Hosea to take a promiscuous woman as his wife. Here God asks him to do it again. Gomer's name is not mentioned but certainly that's who God means or else the whole force of the argument of enduring covenant love breaks down. The Hebrew word for 'again' can be interpreted "still" or "continually." God is saying to Hosea, "Love her still, in spite of all of this. Love her again. And love her continually. Love is not something you do once or twice, it is ongoing, it is again and again and again. That's the kind of love that God is asking for here because that's the kind of love he's giving.

God is not just asking Hosea to take Gomer back. He's not just asking him to pay her debts. He's asking for so much more. He's telling Hosea to love her, to love this person who has sinned against him so terribly, so personally, so tragically. Can you imagine what God is asking here? He's asking Hosea to love someone, to open himself up to more hurt, more pain, more rejection. He's asking Hosea to love someone who has repeatedly hurt him. Gomer had trampled on Hosea's heart and at the moment when there's finally a chance for her to get what she deserves... God tells Hosea to love her. Again. There's something deeply painful about a wound caused by a spouse. And God is telling Hosea to love a spouse that has hurt him deeply.

God is telling Hosea to love, just like he loves. But in order to love as God loves one must first feel the headache, the stomachache, the bone ache that is covenant rejection. When people get married they make vows, promises. They give symbols of their promises and then they live together. God had made a covenant with his people. They had made vows to one another. He had said "I will be your God." And they had said "We will be your people." And they had exchanged symbols of their vows. But God's people rejected the Lord. They didn't follow his commandments and they even worshipped other Gods. Again and again. Continually. Still. And so how did God respond? By loving his people again. Continually. Still.

Is that the kind of love you need? Is that the kind of situation you're in? Where you've committed to God or you've committed to your spouse and yet you sin against them again and

again. Continually. Still. If that's the kind of love you need and you admit it, then that's the kind of love you can receive from God in Christ. He loves his people with an "everlasting, unending, never-ending, always and forever love (sic)" to quote the Jesus storybook Bible.

But I have a scary thought for you. If that's the kind of love you need and, in Christ, that's the kind of love you receive, then God can ask you...God does ask you...God does tell you...to go and love likewise. First of all that means loving God even if you think he's left you over and over, even if you feel like God has wronged you, or preferred others to you. You must see that it's the opposite, God loves you in spite of *your* repeated sin. Second, if you accept this love, you are bound to extend it to others, especially those you are in covenant with, those you're stuck with by oath, spouses, church members, etc.

Did you notice the last words of verse 1? "love raisin cakes." What? Why raisin cakes? I've never had a raisin cake but I'm imagining it was a cross between a fruitcake and oatmeal raisin cookie. Fruitcake is almost universally despised and oatmeal raisin cookies are always the last cookies chosen. Raisin cakes! So what was in those raisin cakes that the Israelites would love them over their Lord. *sigh* It isn't really about what's in the raisin cakes, it's about what's in sinner's hearts, sin. Our sin leads us to love foolish things that don't satisfy, like raisin cakes. So what is it for you? What foolish, silly or small thing do you love more than God? Bring it out into the open. Confess your sin. See it for what it is, foolish. (Is it winning card games? Is it knowledge of football? Is it diet coke? Is it shoes? Is it legos? Is it xbox? Is it coins?) What silly, foolish, or small thing are you more passionate about than Christ?

Illustration: Let's say there was a brother who owed a lot of money on his expensive car. The bank was coming to take the car back. So the brother went urgently to his sister to ask her for money. The sister said "I don't have that money. I can't give you any money today. Why don't you pray and sleep on it another day." And the brother became very angry at this because he supposed that his sister had much money. And so the brother angrily yelled "I know you have the money and would you withhold it from me? Would you have your own brother walking through mud and snow to work every day?" And he stormed off to go to the bank to try to plead with them. And as he sat down with the loan officer at the bank he began to plead for an extension of time in order to get the money to them. And the bank responded "Your loan has been paid in full." The brother was amazed, he couldn't believe this would happen in a million years. He asked the loan officer how his debt had been paid. The loan officer replied, "Your sister sent us a check for that amount in your name." And then it all became clear that his sister said she didn't have the money because she'd already paid the bank off. Imagine how the brother would feel as he drove in his newly paid off car to his sister's house, the sister, who he had just yelled at. He would return with fear, a holy fear, a humble bewilderment at the grace he had received in spite of all his sin. That's what returning is like for God's covenant people who have experienced his grace.

Application: If you've been bought you will return to the Lord your God with fear. Return to the Lord with fear. Hosea 3:5 Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God (and David their king.) They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days. It's obvious why they should return to the Lord, why we should return to the Lord, but why with fear and trembling? Because his grace is so great in spite of all our sin. Just like

Gomer, just like the brother, we have sinned against the very one who bought us, who paid dearly for us. Once we realize that we have been bought at a great price, Once we're honest about the great depravity of our sin and God's merciful forgiveness we will return trembling in excited amazement to the Lord. But as long as you think that your sin is small, as long as you think God owes you one, as long as you think that Jesus is holding you back from freedom, you will never return to him with trembling. So be convinced by the power of the Holy Spirit this day that you are a terrible sinner. In spite of all the grace God has poured out on you, on me, we have spurned him over and over again. We've treated him like trash and in response, he treasures us like a most precious jewel. Can you see that the Lord loves you in spite of all your sin? If you can you will return to him with bewildered, amazed, mouth open trembling at the sheer magnitude of his grace toward you.

Main Point 2: God buys his people back with a price.

So in our story today Gomer is captive to her debtors. Why not just let them have her? Because Hosea loves her. If he loves her, why not just take her back by force? Why not just gather a posse and get his wife back? It's not that simple. They own her. She owes them. She's complicit in the abduction/enslavement. Hosea must win her fair and square. And so he can't just rush in and take her by force even if he was capable. He must pay her debt. He must buy his beloved back with a price.

Let's take a look at that price for a second. He says that he bought her back with fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and lethech of barley. The traditional price of a slave was 30 pieces of silver. 30 pieces of silver is going for \$10,000 on the internet today. But Hosea seems to cobble together a sum of 15 shekels of silver and 810 pounds of barley. 16 bushels 3.5 pecks of barley. Imagine 17 bushel buckets up here. That is a lot of grain. 810 pounds of barley on the internet costs about \$1,611 at 1.99 a pound. This amount took awhile to gather, to get together and to transport. Imagine what Hosea was feeling as he got together this vast amount to buy his own wife back. Many men would have thought better of it. Other men would rather divorce, rather have their wives killed than spend all their savings on a ransom. They would have been ashamed and angry and anything but dutiful. But that's what Hosea does. He gets together this vast amount and pays his wife's debts.

That's what love looks like. It's grace in spite of horrible, heart wrenching sin. It's hard work in the face of departure. Love steps into shame and sacrifice instead of running away. Love digs deep in its pockets and pays cash. Love is witnessed in the wallet. Money talks. Hosea's sacrificial, significant payment reveals his gracious love for his recalcitrant, wayward wife.

Behold beloved, this is the love that's on offer for you today! Does this story not remind you of one greater than Hosea who bought a bride worse than Gomer back. It is Jesus! It was Jesus who paid not with silver and grain but with flesh and blood! Great was the cost to Hosea but far greater was the cost to Christ! To win your wife back Jesus you must give a mere 180 pounds...of your own flesh and blood, every ounce. Only through your death can you buy back that harlot, the church, that you call your beloved bride. Jesus paid the price in spite of horrible, heart wrenching rebellion against him on every side. He came to his own people but his own people knew him not. Jesus came to the religious reformers and they said he was from the Devil though he came from the very throne of Heaven. Jesus came to the priests and they said he

blasphemed though it would be impossible for the most high to think too highly of himself. Jesus came to his friends and they left him and ran away, though he would never leave them. Jesus loved his people even though it was a shame-filled process. He was tried by a rigged court. He was passed over for a barbarian Barabus. Jesus was stripped near naked and flogged. He was mocked with a crown of thorns. Jesus was given the most despicable criminal punishment reserved for the basest of thugs, crucifixion. And finally Jesus' own Father turned his face away from him. What a price! What a humiliating indignant price. And what cost! All of him, all he had, all given for you, church.

Firstly, they're going to dwell without king or prince. Israel's kings had horribly abused the office of king. After Hosea, Israel is taken into captivity where they have no proper king. Even when God allows a remnant to return they don't have a proper Davidic king until Jesus. There were Hasmonean and Herodian dynasties but these were Levites and Edomites respectively. Imagine if America abused the office of the president so badly that the austerity measure imposed upon it was that there should be no president. Would that help people understand how serious the situation is? Interestingly though, when the monarchy isn't working God doesn't throw out the idea of a monarchy and say... "Let's do a republic." He's still going to govern his people with a monarchy it's just going to be with a better, a much better, king.

Second austerity measure: No sacrifice or pillar. As a consequence of Israel's sin there was going to be a time where there would be no temple. After Hosea's time the temple was indeed destroyed and even when it was rebuilt it didn't have the impressive pillars at either side of the entrance. God was saying, "I'm taking that away. I'm even taking away your ability to offer me sacrifices." That's crazy. Why would God inhibit his people from offering sacrifices to him? Because they were sacrificing in a twisted, abominable way as a license sin. So he shuts the temple down. God is not pleased by zealous religious observance motivated by pride and as an excuse for sin.

Third austerity measure: No ephod or household gods. The ephod was part of the holy garb that the high priest would wear and had affixed to it many precious stones. It was used in part, to make inquiries of God. Nehemiah and Ezra testify to the fact that this is gone after the exile. When the people don't want to consult God and hear his judgment, he doesn't give his consultation or judgment. Household gods would be little carved statues that were considered a cross between a family heirloom and a good luck charm. In a time of recession and oppression these things would be sold. These historically did become scorned in Israel from 2nd century BC onward. Austerity can have painful consequences but it can also remove much temptation from God's people and so it did.

The point is that God disciplines his people by taking things away from them that they weren't necessarily using for good. Israel's experience would mirror Gomer's experience, a time of forced austerity to radically reprioritize. Recession, oppression, persecution can be God's way of helping his people put first things first, namely God. Do you stand in need of God's discipline today? Would it be helpful for you to submit to some of God's austerity measures for your life? Let go of those things, even those political things, even those religious things, even those family things that are leading your heart away from Jesus himself.

Jesus, it's all about Jesus. God was using all these austerity measures, all this discipline, in order to bring his people back in submission to their Davidic King. Not David himself, no, he was long dead, and moreover he was a weak, warlike sinner. No Hosea is referring to great David's greater son. Behold when Jesus walked this earth he was called "Son of David." And he was a descendent of David but much more than that he was the inheritor, the heir of the Davidic dynasty, the Davidic legacy. He wasn't just a man after God's own heart, He had the very heart of God beating within his breast for he was God incarnate.

And after a time of recession, oppression, persecution, and divine silence for Israel, King Jesus did come. At first his people didn't return and seek him, instead they shunned him, spurned him, spit on him, slay him. But then, oh glorious then, he rose from the grave having been found guiltless by the Father and was seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, the king sat down on his throne. He was perceived by his followers as the great ruler of all, seated in majesty. And they did come back to him, by the thousands. And behold we are still in those latter days when God's people return and seek the Lord and David his king, king Jesus, by the thousands and millions.

Application: The application for you today is to return and seek the Lord and Jesus his king. Especially if you are of the people of Israel. Jesus did it himself and Paul said it himself that salvation was for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. Jesus is king of kings, ruler over all nations. Son of Abraham, Jesus is the promised Davidic king of Israel. Son of Adam, Jesus is the king over all creation who has crushed the head of the serpent, Satan. Has he not paid the price for you to return and seek him? You are free to run to him. You are free from your slavery to sin. It can't hold you from him anymore. Don't hide for fear of condemnation, your salvation has been bought by the shed blood of Christ. Oh come, return and seek him. Whether you've been backsliding or just bored. Return to him. Seek him for he is the one!

Context of Reality: As a final note of application, someone in this room may have experienced something similar to what Gomer experienced. You may have been enslaved to crushing debt and someone set you free by paying the price. Someone here may even have been involved in prostitution. Someone listening may have even been a slave. This message is especially for you today. You have been bought. All your debts have been paid. You have been freed from your slavery, stopped in your sin. The one who has done this is God almighty. King Jesus paid to set you free from all that, so come to him.

Grace: Jesus bought you at a great price. Though he was sold for 30 pieces of silver you weren't such a bargain. Jesus didn't have a coupon or a gift card. He paid full price for you and you were expensive. How expensive were you? It took every ounce of Jesus flesh and blood, his bone and sinew to buy you back. God let go of his most precious treasure, his one and only son, to buy you. And this isn't just business, it's personal and it's reciprocal. He wants you to belong to him. So will I belong to you he says.

Proposition: God has bought his people at great cost to himself so God's people should dwell with him. **Conclusion:** God's grace empowers us, pushes us, moves us to love even those who have sinned terribly against us. For we, having sinned terribly against God, were not left in our sins. God freely, lovingly, mercifully, forgave us, paid for us, takes care of us, and welcomes us into His eternal embrace. Amen.