

*Redemption: Hosea 3*  
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The message of Hosea is a powerful one. As we've been seeing in recent weeks, there is the heart-wrenching story of a husband and his adulterous wife. And there is also the heart-wrenching story of God and his idolatrous people. Chapter 1 sets up the drama for us, and spells out the significance of the main characters: Hosea, Gomer, and the children, and what these relationships signify about God and His people. We saw, then, in chapter 2 God's redemptive discipline of His people, and then the amazing promises in the latter half of the chapter showing God's great mercy upon His people. Chapter 3, which we come to this morning, brings the focus back to Hosea and Gomer for a brief moment, and gives us a very powerful description of redemption.

James Montgomery Boice, who was the pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, calls this the greatest chapter in the Bible. He writes, "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."<sup>1</sup>

I would have to agree. This is the Gospel put into concrete terms for us. This is the Gospel message put into a real-life scenario that we can get our minds around. The prophet Hosea was instructed by God to go and take a wife who would be unfaithful to him. That woman was Gomer. As we noted in chapter 1, the first child was fathered by Hosea, but the text seems to imply that the second child and third child were the result of Gomer's adultery. She had abandoned Hosea and gone after other lovers. In chapter 3 the Lord instructs Hosea to go again and love this woman, this adulteress.

And this is where we see the amazing grace of the Gospel. We are Gomer. We have run away from God and gone after other lovers. We have worshipped idols. But God pursues us and redeems us.

This morning I want to go through these few verses of chapter 3, first making some comments about Hosea and Gomer, and then God and His people. And then I want to explore some implications of this message for human marriage, and implications for understanding our redemption in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, page 28.

## Hosea and Gomer

In chapter 3 we get some more details about the relationship of Hosea and Gomer. Chapter 1 described the start of this relationship, and how it was a picture of God's relationship to His people. But then chapter 2 focused on God and His people, and Hosea and Gomer faded into the background. Chapter 3, now, returns to give us some of the continuing story about this human marriage.

An interesting difference between chapter 1 and chapter 3 is that chapter 3 is in the first person. Chapter 1 described things in the third person—"the Lord said to *him* . . ." But now it's, "The Lord said to *me* . . ." So we're seeing this from a bit of a new perspective here, and a more personal one. This is Hosea's first person account of an amazingly significant event in his life. It is something that was intensely personal and private in terms of his own marriage, but also public and important in terms of his prophetic ministry and the Gospel message that is for our instruction even today. On many levels, it's hard to put into words the gravity of what took place here.

Hosea writes, "And the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress . . .'" Gomer is not named, but in the context of these chapters and the way that this marriage points to God and His people, we know that the Lord is instructing Hosea to go and love his wife, Gomer. Gomer has left Hosea. She has become an adulteress. She is living with another man. She has even sold herself in prostitution. This is very blatant, gross sin. Hosea doesn't tell us how he felt about this. I guess that's not important to the real point of what this is all about. But it sure makes me wonder what was going on in Hosea's heart and mind through all of this. He had been hurt and humiliated by Gomer's sin. I would imagine he struggled with bitterness and anger and apathy concerning the relationship. And now God tells him, Go and love her.

And that's what Hosea did. Verse 2, "So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley." This tells us that the situation was even worse than we would have previously thought. Gomer was not only an adulteress, not only a prostitute, but also a slave. That's how far she had fallen in her rebellion. That's how grievously she had dishonored Hosea and how desperate she was in her situation. These other lovers had not provided for her as she hoped, but rather enslaved her.

So now Hosea must purchase her out of slavery. This is the redemption idea. Hosea goes to redeem, to buy back, his own wife. Again, we're not given many details. We don't know who owned Gomer, or how they arrived at this price. But the significant point is what we are told, namely, that Hosea had to pay

a price in order to bring his wife home with him. He could not simply go and get her and bring her home. Her condition was such that Hosea had to actually give up some of his own resources in order to free her.

And then the other thing we see in Hosea's relationship with Gomer is that Hosea's redemption of her also comes with some clear expectations. Hosea writes in verse 3, "And I said to her, 'You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.'" This redemption will mark a new chapter in Gomer's life. As she is delivered from bondage, she is bound to her husband. And she must remain with him and be faithful to him. Hosea's instruction is blunt, and it highlights how grievous her actions have been. She has been a whore. She has belonged to other men. But that lifestyle must now end.

The last phrase of verse 3 is a little difficult to understand. Hosea says, "so will I also be to you." What is he referring to? What is it about these instructions that Hosea is saying he, too, will live out? Well, in the previous phrase, the ESV translates it, "or belong to another man." But it could more simply be translated, "or be with a man," implying *any* man, including Hosea. In other words, Hosea is saying that during this undefined time of these "many days," Gomer must not have any sexual relations whatsoever, outside the marriage or even within the marriage. And then in the last phrase, Hosea is committing to do the same. The two of them will be chaste during this time, with the expectation, of course, that at some point in the future the relationship will be fully restored.

But sin has its consequences. When there has been such separation in the relationship, and such harm done to it, there will be repercussions that last many days. And so Gomer's redemption is accompanied by clear expectations and also some lack of intimacy while the relationship heals.

### **God and His People**

Now let's look at what all this means for God and His people. Verse 1 makes the connection between Hosea's love for Gomer and God's love for Israel.

"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.*'" I've always been amused by this verse, particularly because of the curious reference to raisin cakes. We'll get to that in a minute.

First notice the clear parallel between the two relationships. Hosea is to go and love Gomer, even though she is with another

man and is an adulteress. Likewise, the Lord loves Israel, even though she is worshipping other gods and is idolatrous. This is the message of Hosea's life. Gomer's adultery represents Israel's idolatry. And Hosea's steadfast love to Gomer, in spite of her sin, represents Yahweh's steadfast love to Israel, in spite of her sin.

Now, the raisin cakes are curious, indeed. It catches us off guard in such a somber passage to read something that sounds so silly. And I think that's exactly the point.<sup>2</sup> Israel's sin is ridiculous. They have turned away from Yahweh, who loves them with such steadfast love and offers them the infinite enjoyment of knowing Him, and they have turned to other gods and love cakes of raisins. This shows us the silliness of idolatry.

These raisin cakes would not have been inherently evil. To eat cakes with raisins in it, that's nowhere condemned in Scripture (and I'm glad for that, because I like cake and I like raisins, and I wouldn't object to eating them together. The problem must have been that these raisin cakes were somehow associated with their idolatry. They were somehow a symbol of their pagan worship and part of their pagan worship. And the statement in verse 1 highlights how utterly foolish they have been. To turn away from the Almighty God of the universe so that you can enjoy some raisin cakes—that's insanity! That's the insanity of sin.

What would be the parallels in our lives? Maybe it would go something like this . . . They have turned to worship their sports teams and love the Steelers and Penguins and Pirates. They have turned to worship entertainment and love the TV, internet, and cinema. They have turned to worship fashion and love the mall. They have turned to worship fitness and love the gym. They have turned to worship success and are addicted to their job. These are the silly things that could be said of the church today. These things aren't necessarily evil, but if we prop them up and put them in the place of God, then we have made idols that are every bit as ridiculous as Israel's precious raisin cakes.

But that's not the main point of this verse. The main point is that even though Israel turns to other gods and loves cakes of raisins, the Lord loves the children of Israel. That's the glorious point here! Even though God's people have turned away from Him, God loves them still. Even though they have committed spiritual adultery, even though they have played the whore and prostituted themselves before other gods, Yahweh, their true Husband, still loves them.

The parallel between Hosea's love for Gomer and God's love for His people is clear. And it's implied that just as Hosea redeems Gomer, God redeems His people. I'll talk more at the end of the sermon about the implications of this for understanding our

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<sup>2</sup> See Ray Ortland, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, page 73.

redemption in Christ. Verses 4-5 give the rest of the explanation of how Hosea's actions toward Gomer describe God's actions toward Israel. Just as Gomer will not immediately enjoy intimacy with Hosea, Israel will not immediately have full fellowship with God. There are these continuing consequences due to her sin. Again, there's reference to "many days." The restored-but-still-strained relationship will go on like this for some time, but not permanently. For these many days they will be without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. This is basically the equivalent of Gomer not committing adultery, and also not being intimate Hosea.

But then verse 5 points to a bright day beyond that. This will be fully realized in the consummation of all things. It will happen in the latter days. God's people will one day enter His presence to enjoy Him without any hindrance. They will seek the Lord their God, and David their king. David is a messianic figure, and in Revelation 22:16 Jesus describes Himself as "the root and the descendant of David." What we have in Hosea 3 is a glimpse of that great day when God's people will all come before Him. As it says, they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days. And this will include not only Jews but also Gentiles, as we saw last week in the New Testament quotations of Hosea. God is redeeming a people for Himself from among all the nations.

To summarize, there is sin on our part. And there will be some ongoing consequences of our sin throughout this life. But one day we will be fully united to our God and will abide with Him forever.

### **Implications for Human Marriage**

I want to turn, now, to some implications we can draw from this short, but powerful, chapter of Scripture. And I first want to talk about the practical matter of human marriage. When we look at Hosea and Gomer, we see the message of the Gospel. And we see the Gospel being lived out in the context of a very difficult marriage. So if you're in a difficult marriage (whether it's a little bit difficult or a lot difficult), then there's some important things here for you to consider. And, by the way, I'm thinking of all marriages as fitting into that category somewhere—either it's a little bit difficult or a lot difficult, or somewhere in between. But no marriage is without difficulty, because we're all sinners. So we should all think about what we need to take away from this story that shapes our understanding of God's design for marriage. If you're not yet married but hope to be married someday, this is extremely important for you to consider as well.

I think the message of this book should have a huge impact on us in terms of the permanence of marriage. It's a very sad thing to think about how our culture views marriage. And one of the very sad things is to see the devastation that divorce brings into a family. When a man and woman marry, and then at some point divorce, the tearing apart of that relationship and that family will leave scars that last a lifetime. And that's because the union of that man and woman in marriage is supposed to be a lifelong union. You can't rip apart something like that without causing some very deep wounds.

It seems that the mentality in our culture is, "If my spouse doesn't hold up their end of the bargain, then I have the right to be done with this marriage." That's a very self-centered view of marriage, and it's not at all what the Bible teaches us about marriage. This is why I want us to consider Hosea's relationship to Gomer. I want us to see Hosea's love for Gomer as a model for how every husband ought to love his wife and how every wife ought to love her husband.

Imagine what your marriage might be like if you were sincerely striving to emulate Hosea in his relationship to Gomer and ultimately striving to emulate God in His relationship to His people. It might be easy to love your spouse when he or she is being really nice, and responsible, and considerate, and honest, and helpful, and faithful. But that's not what this story is about. This is a story about the worst marriage imaginable. And so the point, as it relates to our marriages, is: How are you going to love your spouse when he or she is NOT being nice or responsible or considerate or honest or helpful or faithful? How are you going to love your spouse when the opposite is happening?

Maybe your spouse has deeply wounded you emotionally. Maybe your spouse has neglected you and ignored you. Maybe your spouse has been hurtful and hateful toward you. Maybe your spouse has lied to you, done things behind your back, sinned against you in unspeakable ways. Maybe your spouse has committed adultery. Maybe your spouse has deserted you. What are you to do?

The example for us in this very moving passage of Scripture is that we should respond as Hosea was instructed to respond. We should extend grace to our spouse just as God has extended much grace to us.

What Hosea's marriage illustrates for us about God's unfailing love is something for us to emulate. The fact that Hosea pursued his wife and redeemed her and brought her back home and forgave her even after the devastating things that she did, that should land on us with a massive amount of impact. My challenge to all of us is this: look for ways to be a living, walking

demonstration of redemption. Forgive because you have been forgiven. Act in redemptive ways toward your spouse, because you have been redeemed by Christ. When you were committing spiritual adultery, He purchased you out of your slavery to sin. That's redemption. Therefore when your spouse is acting in ways that are destructive to your marriage, you should be thinking and praying about how to extend mercy in a way that will bring your spouse out of their bondage to sin.

If your spouse has committed adultery my counsel to you is to do what Hosea did for Gomer, and what God has done for His people. If your spouse has deserted you my counsel is to do what Hosea did for Gomer, and what God has done for His people. I know there are different kinds of situations, and in some situations a time of separation may be needed. You should seek godly counsel on these things. But the principle that emerges so clearly in the book of Hosea is that no matter what your spouse has done you should remain committed to the marriage and you should be pursuing reconciliation in redemptive ways.

It's a widely-held view that adultery and abandonment are biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage. There are many scholars and pastors I greatly respect who hold that view. But as I've wrestled with this issue, and as I preached in detail on these matters last year in a sermon series on marriage, I have come to a different conclusion. I won't go into the details of the exception clause in Matthew or Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 7, but I would encourage you to take a look at those sermons on the church website. My conclusion from studying what the Bible as a whole says about marriage, and also from a detailed exegesis of those passages that may seem to imply exceptions, is that there are, in fact, no biblical grounds for divorce or remarriage. This may sound narrow. It may sound harsh. But I believe it is what the Bible teaches. The only clear allowance for remarriage is if a spouse dies. 1 Corinthians 7:39, "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." That's the case where remarriage is perfectly legitimate. And, in my view, that's the only case where remarriage is biblically permissible.

Now, I want to follow this up very quickly by saying that there is forgiveness for the sins of divorce and remarriage. If you are divorced, or if you are divorced and remarried, don't despair. Repent of these sins, and ask Jesus to forgive you. I also want to say that if you are divorced and remarried, this view does not imply that you should divorce again in order to reunite with a previous spouse. What's done is done, and you'll only make a bigger mess if you try to undo yet another marriage, even if it was entered into wrongly and sinfully.

My encouragement to you, my exhortation to all married couples, is to be committed to your spouse for life. Whatever mistakes you've made in the past, repent of those sins and seek the Lord's forgiveness, and then resolve today to be committed for life to the person you are now married to. As you said in your vows, "till death do us part." That's what the Bible teaches, and that's what we should strive for, by God's grace. Even if your spouse commits adultery, even if your spouse abandons you, continue to honor the lifelong covenant you entered into before God.

Think about it: If adultery and abandonment were biblical grounds for divorce, Hosea would be justified in divorcing Gomer on two counts. She cheated on him, and deserted him. But God told Hosea to love Gomer, and redeem her, and be faithful to her. And that's why Hosea weighs so heavily in my mind on this question of divorce and remarriage. Hosea didn't divorce Gomer, even though she did the worst things imaginable against him. And the point of that relationship is to put on display God's steadfast love for His people, even though we have done the worst things imaginable against Him. God doesn't divorce His people. Christ doesn't divorce His bride. And therefore we, too, should not divorce.

What I have just presented to you is a minority position among evangelicals, but there are some well-respected individuals who have defended it. John Piper and James Montgomery Boice and a few others have written things in defense of this permanence view of marriage. I want to read you a couple paragraphs from Boice, in his sermon on Hosea 3, as he applies the message of Hosea to this issue of marriage.

He writes, "We are ready to say that such love, demonstrated in the love of Hosea for Gomer, is impossible for us. But it is not impossible if we are truly united to Christ through the Holy Spirit and are allowing Him to love through us. You say, 'Do you mean to tell me that if my wife or my husband runs away from me and commits adultery that I am still to be faithful? Do you mean to tell me that I must continue to love someone like that when I have been wronged and the sanctity of our marriage has been violated?' Yes, that is precisely our standard. . . . Notice, I do not say that the exercise of a Christian standard in the love of a wife for her husband or a husband for his wife will always hold the home together. It did not do so in Hosea's case. Sometimes—it is happening more and more frequently today—one partner in the marriage will walk out. Sometimes even a Christian will do this. In such a case it is impossible to stop the separation, and the one who loves as God loves and who desperately wants to save the marriage must nevertheless let the faithless one go. There is no sin to the one who wishes to save the marriage in that case. But the



faithlessness of the one should not end the true love of the other. That is the point. And the believer (or the one acting by the standards of the believer) should remain free of any second marriage while praying that the love of the erring partner might be restored. You may say, ‘But I cannot do that. I cannot love like that.’ The answer is that you can love like that if you will allow God to help you do it. You may say, ‘But I cannot be happy single.’ Perhaps not. But God does not promise any of us happiness as we define happiness. We are called to faithfulness, and it is in obedience to God in such difficult situations that the great spiritual victories are won.”<sup>3</sup>

I encourage all of you who are married, or who may one day be married, to be mindful of God’s design for marriage. Remember the example of Hosea. Remember the steadfast love of God. And may you, too, honor the marriage covenant and show love in redemptive ways toward your spouse.

### **Implications for Understanding Our Redemption in Christ**

Think again of the raisin cakes. This is the silliness but also the seriousness of our bondage to sin. It’s stuff as petty as raisin cakes that holds us in chains. In C. S. Lewis’s book *The Screwtape Letters*, the demon Screwtape writes letters to his nephew Wormwood, instructing him in the art of tempting mankind. In one place Screwtape tells Wormwood, “an ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula [to want something more and more, even though your pursuit of it and even your attainment of it in some measure is bringing you less and less satisfaction]. It is more certain; and it’s better *style*. To get the man’s soul and give him *nothing* in return—that is what really gladdens our Father’s heart.”<sup>4</sup> And when he refers to Our Father, he means their father who is Satan.

That is the bondage that we all find ourselves in until we are redeemed. We are each born into this world enslaved to sin. And we live in that bondage. The shackles may look different on each individual, but the slavery is just as real. The cravings increase even as the pleasures decrease. And ultimately that road leads to losing your soul and having absolutely nothing to show for it. The bondage of sin is real and serious, and there’s no way out of it except by redemption through Christ.

What makes this bondage so absolutely devastating is that we don’t even want to be free from it. That’s the picture we have of Gomer. It wasn’t like she was even asking to be freed. She was pursuing her lovers and continuing to spiral downward in her life of rebellion. And that’s us, until God redeems us.

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<sup>3</sup> Pg. 33-34.

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Bles, 1942), IX.

The other day my daughter Milaina and I were talking about certain foods that we like or dislike. And she made a really interesting comment that applies to this. We weren't talking theology, but this is a really insightful theological statement. She said, "Isn't it funny that the things we don't like, we don't even want to like. Because if you don't like something, why would you want to like it?" And it's true, isn't it. It's not like you sit around wishing that you liked guacamole if you can't stand guacamole. That was the one Milaina mentioned. Stacy and I really enjoy guacamole, but Milaina doesn't care for it. Maybe for you it's mustard, or anchovies, or red hot chili peppers, or whatever. You don't sit around trying to change your taste buds so that you can enjoy foods that, right now, make you sick to your stomach. Of course, if you're pregnant, your taste buds may change from moment to moment, but that's a different story.

The point is, we enjoy what we enjoy, and our bondage to those sinful enjoyments is such that we don't even want to be free from them. And that's why we so desperately need to be redeemed. We need to be rescued from ourselves, from our own desires.

We need God to come and buy us out of our slavery. We need Him to come and get us and take us home with Him. But in order for Him to do that, He must pay a great price. Hosea paid fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. God the Father pays with the blood of His own Son. I'll close with these two New Testament passages that speak of our redemption from sin that is purchased with Christ's blood.

Paul writes in Titus 2:13-14 that we are "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

And in 1 Peter 1:17-19 we read this, "And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed [redeemed, freed, purchased] from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

God gave up His beloved Son, Christ gave Himself up, in order to pay the price for our release from captivity. He paid it all, so that we can be free and so that we can be with Him forever.