

God's Message to Us in Hosea

Halifax, NS

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Introduction

Today in our sermon series on God's Message to Us in Every Book of the Bible,

- we are doing the first of the books called the minor prophets.
- There are twelve of them.
 - By 300 BC, they were put together on one scroll and looked at as a unit, being recognised as canonical along with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.
 - The first six (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah) were written during the period of Assyrian dominance—including the time of Isaiah and before.
 - The next three (Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah) were written at the time of the decline of Assyria.
 - And the last three (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) were written after the Exile when Nehemiah and Ezra were involved in rebuilding Jerusalem, and after.

We will begin with Hosea today.

- He was a contemporary of Isaiah, but Isaiah ministered in the southern kingdom of Judah (at Jerusalem) while Hosea ministered in the northern kingdom, also called Israel or Ephraim.
 - Remember that the church was divided at this time and had been since the days of Solomon's son, King Rehoboam... when God had given the ten tribes of Israel to Jeroboam who led them (contrary to God's command) to worship Him at Dan and Bethel where he set up calves.
 - This was highly displeasing to God and the ten tribes of Israel, also called Ephraim, never repented until at last they were carried into exile by the Assyrians...

So the prophet Hosea is addressing a people who were not following the LORD, but who were nevertheless, in a nominal way (that means "in name",) His people.

Our concern in this series (really in all preaching) is what we can learn from this book.

- There are three things I want to show you:

First, that the church in rebellion is like an adulterous harlot.

Second, we learn in Hosea how the church can become a harlot.

Third, we learn how God reacts to the church's spiritual adultery.

Let's get underway, shall we?

I. First, Hosea shows us that the church in rebellion is like an adulterous harlot.

A. Hosea begins with what we might call a living parable.

1. What I mean by a living parable is that God makes the prophet Hosea's actual life to be parable.
 - In Hosea 1:2, He actually commands Hosea to marry a woman who will become an adulterous harlot.

- And the purpose of this is to illustrate how “the land,” the people of Israel have been like a harlot toward the LORD.
 - Look at what it says...**Hosea 1:2: When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: “Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the LORD.”**
 - Sometimes people want to know if Hosea married a woman who was already a harlot—if that is what God was asking him to do.
 - Even though it would be contrary to God’s revealed will in scripture for Hosea to do such a thing, the LORD has authority to issue special commands to prophets that *are* contrary to His revealed will.
 - However, I am inclined toward the view that she was not already a harlot, but that the LORD is referring prophetically to what she will become.
 - I say this because he is told to take a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, yet it is clear that she does not yet have children when he marries her.
- But whatever the case may be...
2. The point is that the harlotry of Hosea’s wife, Gomer, is a picture of the church departing from the LORD.
 - When we come to Christ, we are called His bride.
 - The LORD Jesus brings us to live in His Father’s house.
 - We need to learn to be at home with Him and with the ways of His house.
 - I was thinking about that this week as my family was reading through Proverbs—
 - In chapter 8, it speaks about how wisdom has built her house and how it is full of beauty and order.
 - When a child is adopted into a beautiful house where love is the chief way of the house, it can seem so alien to the child that he is uncomfortable and is drawn back to his old house where he understands how things are done.
 - His old home, though his mother was a crack addict and there was no father present, is still familiar—it is comfortable because it is home.
 - And you see, we need to become comfortable living in God’s house, in His ways, so that everything else is alien to us.
 - That is what the Lord Jesus intends when He marries us and what the Father intends when He adopts us...He wants us to live forever in His house.
 3. The church commits adultery when we reject God’s ways and join ourselves to another house.
 - We reject the LORD and His ways to follow another.
 - It is not simply that we fail to live up to the ways of His house... that we come short (which we always do), but that we actually go to another house.
 - Even though God is providing for us, we go as a harlot who is being paid by another lover—
 - God’s intent is for us to be with Him forever, but we have given ourselves to be in the arms of another as our God.

- B. In this living parable, Hosea's relationship with his wife of harlotry illustrates the consequences of harlotry in the naming of his children.
1. In verse 3-5, Gomer bears Hosea a son and the LORD commands him to name the boy *Jezreel*.
 - That name means division.
 - That is what harlotry causes in God's house!
 - If we all follow God's way, then we are united, but if we start to follow other husbands and other gods, we go in different ways and are divided.
 - Obviously, when a woman goes to be with other men, she divides her family from unity in her husband.
 - As a spiritual harlot, we take our children from God's house to another.
 - If we worship like Canaanites, so do our children... not in God's way, but in the way of the world.
 - Jezreel was the place where Jehu (one that God raised up to be king of Israel) destroyed the house of Omri at God's command—for departing from God to follow other gods.
 - But then the house of Jehu also began to do the same, and in the fourth generation, Jehu's family was cut down at Jezreel.
 2. And then in verses 6-7 a daughter is born in Hosea's house, and God says **“Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away.”**
 - *Lo-Ruhamah* means no mercy—*lo* means *no* or *not*, and *raw-kham* means *mercy*.
 - And that too is what happens when we pull our children into the service of other gods, other lovers, other households...
 - We remove them from the mercy of our husband and our heavenly Father.
 - We deprive them of His care and of all the benefits that He has for them.
 - It is a very wretched thing to do—but think about it.
 - If you quit going to church, quit praying with your children, quit reading the word with them,
 - you deprive them of God's gracious provision for them.
 - The word *raw-kham* is a word that refers to the mercy that one shows in a situation where the one receiving mercy has no resources of his own.
 - God is the only source of the mercy that we need to live, and we take our children away... just as Gomer took Hosea's children from the care he would have provided in his house.
 - By leaving, we deprive ourselves of His salvation and all of its benefits... even of eternal life.
 - And that is not all that harlotry does...
 3. A third child is born, a son, and the LORD tells Hosea to name him Lo-Ammi.
 - Once again, *lo* means *no* or *not*, and *ammi* means *my people*.
 - Hosea 1:9 says: Then God said: **Call his name Lo-Ammi, for you are not My people, and I will not be your God.**

- The great blessing that belongs to us is that God has taken us to be His own people...
 - He has given us His name as those who belong to Him and who are called to live in His house forever.
 - We are His possession—and He is our God, our husband, our father, our helper... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- But when we leave Him for another, we are no longer His people.
 - We have taken up with another god and we cut our children off so that they are no longer a part of God’s house.
 - We are estranged from Him because we are following our lust, our covetous desires... whatever it may be.

TRANS> So on account of harlotry, Gomer effectively divides her family, deprives her children of her husband’s care, and cuts them off from him.

- That is exactly what happens to us when we depart from God.
- But good news! The parable does not end there!

C. Hosea is to show how God takes His people back by taking Gomer back.

1. In verse 10 & 11 and verse 1 of chapter 2 God promises to restore them and all that they have lost by departing from Him.
 - Look at how all three things are restored (v. 10-11): **Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living God.’** ¹¹ **Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel! 2:1: Say to your brethren, ‘My people,’ and to your sisters, ‘Mercy is shown.’**
 - Do you see—all is restored:
 - First, He calls them “my people” instead of “not my people.”
 - Second, He shows that when they return to His ways, they will no longer be Jezreel (divided), but will be gathered under one head, even Jesus.
 - And then we are told lastly that mercy is shown to them again.
2. As the living illustration of this restoring love, God commands Hosea to go and buy Gomer, his wife, back and hire her to stay with him.
 - a. First in 2:2-13, he brings charges against her and takes all her provision away so that she will be like the prodigal son and realise that she has nothing outside of God.
 - That is so true, isn’t it?
 - What do you have of lasting value without Him? outside of His house?
 - b. But then, when she has hit the bottom, he is to allure her... to call her back... even to buy her out of her harlotry.
 - You can see this in verse 14: **“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her.** ¹⁵ **I will give her her**

vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope;” it goes on.

- And look at the beautiful words of restoring grace in 2:19-20: **I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; ²⁰ I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD.**
 - Even though we left Him, the LORD is showing that He will take us back.
- In chapter 3 how God instructs Hosea to do this as the living parable of God’s restoring love...
 - Hosea says: 3:1-3: **Then the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.” ² So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. ³ And I said to her, “You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you.”**
 - And what does Hosea’s taking his wife back represent? What God will do? **Hosea 3:4-5: For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. ⁵ Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.**

TRANS> What a powerful picture marriage is of the relationship of Christ to His church!

- The church’s rejection, our rejection of the LORD is as wretched as a woman who has a husband who cares for her, yet lives in the arms of paramours as a harlot.
 - And God’s restoring grace is seen in a husband refusing to give up on her and pursuing her until he wins her back.
 - This illustration is the first great lesson we have in the book of Hosea.
 - It is an image that is meant to stick with us—both when temptation knocks so that we will not depart from the LORD, and when we have fallen, that we might know that God will receive us if we will return Him.
- Now let’s look at the second lesson from the book of Hosea:

II. Second, in Hosea we learn how the church falls or drifts into harlotry.

A. It begins with our failure to know God—to acknowledge Him.

- Chapter 4 opens with this charge: Hosea 4:1: **Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land.”**
 1. Of all places, Israel was the land where there ought to have been truth and mercy (covenant love) and knowledge of God...
 - The land was the land that God had appointed for His people to know Him and to love Him.
 - He had sent prophets there, He had established a priesthood there and He had appointed worship there.

- He brought them into the land that they might know Him and that they might live according to ways of His house with Him as their husband.
 - It was entirely unacceptable that there was no knowledge of God in the land.
 - a. Obviously, the problem was not a problem with lack of access to God or lack of information about Him.
 - They were His people, His son, His bride.
 - They did not know Him because they followed idols instead of God.
 - b. Where the church goes wrong, we go wrong.
 - Instead of looking at the beauty of our husband, instead of worshipping Him and praising Him, instead of seeing His gracious hand of provision...
 - We turn to follow the sinful ways of the world.
 - We are ignorant of the most gracious, majestic, beautiful, holy, wise, merciful, powerful, and good being in the entire universe and the significance and value of having Him as our God.
 - The bottom line is that we do not love Him.
 - The word *knowledge* is a word that means to love, as when it says that Adam knew his wife and she conceived a son.
2. The problem is so deep that even those God has given to lead us do not know Him.
- In chapter 5, Hosea addresses the leadership:
 - Look at Hosea 5:1: **Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For yours is the judgment...**
 - And in verse 4, He says: **They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God, for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, and they do not know the LORD.**
 - God had expressly appointed the priests and the king to be his ministers to lead the people in the way of the Lord...
 - But the spirit of harlotry was in them too—they were worthless guides.
 - They did not call the people back to God, they did not teach of His grace, or His ways, or enforce the ways of His household in the land.
 - Note the end of verse 4—**They do not know the LORD.**
 - Again, they do not *love* Him because their eyes are on their idols.
 - When our leaders love idols instead of loving God, we sink.
 - All too often, church leaders promote syncretism—the blending of false religion with what is true—
 - where you have worship according to what the people want instead of the simple worship that God has appointed... whose house is it?
 - where you have the world's ideas about right and wrong—promoting so-called human rights over against God's authority—such as saying that it is okay for men to have sex with men or for people who are not married to have sex, or that it is okay to kill an unwanted child as long as they are not born or for a person to take their own life—or even saying that

women are not called to submit to their own husbands and that husbands are not to lay down their lives for their wives....

- or when it is not taught that Jesus is the only way of salvation...
- or when oppression is winked at and “legal” forms of transferring wealth are devised...
- In short, when the leaders do not guide the people to love and serve God, such people have rejected the LORD as their husband.

B. Hosea explains that it is a spirit of harlotry that takes our heart away.

1. In other words, the reason we don’t know God is because we have turned our eyes to idols—in whatever form—we are lusting after them instead of after God.
 - Ho 4:12 says: **My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God.**
 - The spirit of harlotry is cultivated by looking to that which is not God to satisfy us, to keep us safe, to give us happiness and blessing.
 - It is thinking that some other way than God’s way will help us.
 - This is not to say that it is wrong to find happiness in things like wealth and marriage... but that it is wrong when we look to these things for happiness apart from God... especially when we look for happiness in using or obtaining them in ways not appointed by God.
2. Harlotry traps you and keeps you from turning back to God—you get in bondage to your idols—be it porn, drugs, food, romance, being admired, security, riches, success... whatever...
 - As Hosea 4:11 says, **Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart.**
 - You give your life up to them and reject God...

TRANS> That is right...

C. The result of harlotry is covenant breaking.

1. We break the covenant we made with God as our husband.
 - We forsake Him all over again, the way Adam did in the beginning.
 - We, who have been graciously restored to His house, walk out on Him, rejecting Him as our God.
 - Hosea speaks of this covenant breaking like Adam did in chapter 6:7.
 - **Hosea 6:7: But like men they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt treacherously with Me.**
 - When it says *like men* the word *men* is *Adam*.
 - The idea here is that like Adam, God’s own people whom He had restored, have broken His covenant.
 - They have rejected God as their God.
 - In the verse before, Hosea 6:6, the LORD shows that He is not interested in mere sacrifices without covenant love...
 - Hosea 6:6-7: **For I desire mercy** (*hesed*, covenant love) **and not sacrifice** (outward worship alone). **And the knowledge of God** [loving God] **more than burnt offerings** (outward worship).

- God wants our true covenant fidelity, not just our offerings, but all He gets is offerings when the church turns to other lovers...
- 2. The LORD goes on, describing all the ways that they have rejected Him and His ways and how they have pursued other gods.
 - Here are three ways...
 - a. First, that they do not treat each other as He commands.
 - In Hosea 7:1-4, it speaks of how they have lived contrary to the ways of God's house: **When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered, and the wickedness of Samaria. For they have committed fraud; a thief comes in; a band of robbers takes spoil outside. ² They do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness; now their own deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face. ³ They make a king glad with their wickedness, and princes with their lies. ⁴ They are all adulterers.**
 - b. Second, they rely on human government to take care of them instead of God.
 - In Hosea 8:9, the LORD speaks of how they turned to Assyria, as if the LORD was not their husband to look after them...
 - **Hosea 8:9: For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey alone by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers.**
 - c. Third, they worship idols instead of God their husband.
 - In 11:1-2, the sad reality is described: **When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. ² As they called them, so they went from them; they sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images.**
 - The majority of church leaders today believe that people can be saved if they faithfully follow their own religion.
 - Those who don't go that far do their own thing in worship—female pastors, entertainment for worship, ceremonies not commanded by God.
- 3. We are not talking here about merely struggling in our walk with God.
 - We are talking about rejecting Him as our God the way Adam did.
 - We are talking about abandoning His ways to pursue other ways.

TRANS> What an awful thing spiritual harlotry is—it utterly ruins us and renders us unable to come to the LORD.

III. But now let us look at how the LORD responds to our harlotry.

- A. He refuses to let us go on in it.
 - 1. He will not let us continue in His house if we reject Him as our husband.
 - Again, I am not talking about our daily shortcomings as those who are devoted to the LORD and who struggle with our sins in His house.
 - I am talking about those such as Hosea describes who reject Him for other gods... who do not just struggle to keep His ways, but defiantly abandon His ways.
 - 2. He saved us and brought us into His house in order that we might know Him...

- He rescued us from slavery and brought us into His house that we might love Him as sons and daughters, that we might be His wife.
 - That He might delight in us and protect us and provide for us.
3. But He has no interest in having us in His house if we are playing the harlot with other gods,
- if our hearts are enslaved by harlotry and new wine so that we refuse to keep the covenant He made with us.
- B. Reluctantly, He takes everything away from us that He had been providing for us as our faithful husband.
- We saw that in the picture of Hosea's marriage to Gomer...
 - Remember—*Jezreel* (division), *lo ruhamah* (no mercy), and *lo ammi* (not my people).
1. His plan is described in chapter 5.
- He is going to turn against them and remove His blessing until they repent.
 - Look at Hosea 5:10-15: **“The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark; I will pour out My wrath on them like water. ¹¹ Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked by human precept. ¹² Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house of Judah like rotteness. ¹³ When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb; yet he cannot cure you, nor heal you of your wound. ¹⁴ For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue. ¹⁵ I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”**
 - He will do this in order that they might see that it is the LORD who has been taking care of them... not these idols or these other nations they are trusting in.
 - And notice that this is not done to get rid of them, but it is done to win them back: *then they will seek My face.*
 - The goal of God's chastisement is that they might return to Him.
2. He has no pleasure in rejecting them.
- Hosea 11:8 shows how He laments to do so: **“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.”**
 - He had been forced to give them up because of their continual backsliding, but He cannot leave it so...
 - They are His people upon whom He has set His love.
 - He will restore them.
3. This is God's way with His people!
- He cannot utterly reject us.
 - When He punishes us, He all the while yearns to take us back—
 - Despite all our sins, when God ultimately punished our sins in Christ, He could not leave Him there.

- As soon as atonement was made, He embraced Him and all of us with Him, and raised Him up to sit at His right hand forever.

C. So in the end, He restores His people... He restores us to Himself.

- That is what the last chapter of Hosea is about.
 - God takes His harlot church back to Him:
- Listen, as I read these beautiful words to you (Hosea 14:1-9):
 - **Hosea 14:1-9: O Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity; ² take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, “Take away all iniquity; receive *us* graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. ³ Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, ‘*You are our gods.*’ For in You the fatherless finds mercy.” ⁴ “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him. ⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. ⁶ His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. ⁷ Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall be revived *like* grain, and grow like a vine. Their scent *shall be* like the wine of Lebanon. ⁸ “Ephraim *shall say*, ‘What have I to do anymore with idols?’ I have heard and observed him. I *am* like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me.” ⁹ Who is wise? Let him understand these things. *Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.*”**
- What a grand thing it is to be restored to the house of our heavenly Father.
 - In His house are pleasures forevermore.
 - It is a house of love and beauty where we know Him and He knows us.
- But note well, those who are His are not those who continue in their rebellion.
 - They are the ones who return to Christ for His mercy and turn away from their idols.
 - Gomer was not blessed outside of Hosea’s house, she was blessed when she came back in.
 - It is in Christ that we find blessing, not in consorting with idols.
 - O Church, return to the LORD your God!
 - He is a gracious Father and He will have you.