

Hosea 3  
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Hey folks, it is good to be with you this evening. My name is Walker Byrd, and I'm on staff here at Citizens. We're glad you are here with us this evening to worship

Today is a special Sunday – it's Mother's Day! Happy Mother's Day to all the moms out there. We wanted to take a moment to wish you all a happy Mother's Day. We are grateful for you and the role you play in the lives of your children and in the broader life of our church. Thank you. We love you and appreciate you.

There are others of us here, however, who feel the sadness that comes with a day like today. Whether you are grieving your own mother – maybe she was not the mother you had hoped for or maybe you have lost her too soon – or you desire to be a mother, yet you are wrestling through having that dream deferred. We are sorry. We lament with you that it is not how it should be.

We're continuing in our mini-series of stand-alone sermons. Garrison knocked out two great ones on John 3 and John 4, and this evening we are going to do a little overview of the book of Hosea, with most of our time spent in chapter 3. But first, let's pray.

I want to ask you a question. But before I do, you are not going to be graded on it. Nobody is checking your answer. In fact, just answer to yourself. But I want you to think about it for more than just a quick second:

Are you convinced God loves you?

PAUSE. REPEAT.

I'm willing to bet there were maybe three potential answers in this room:

The first, was a confident yes. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Some of you were probably quick to answer the question in your head and are resolutely confident in your answer.

The second was an honest, "No." Your mind ran to all the things that make you unlovable. The natural follow-up to your no was, "How could God love somebody like me??"

The third answer was a questioning, "I'm not sure." The idea of a loving God is maybe a new or different concept than the god you have pictured in your mind. Can a creating, powerful God also be loving?

Our passage this evening speaks to each group:

- To the confident yeses, our passage will be the proof in the pudding – it will be where you can turn when you struggle, when you suffer, when an old sin rears its ugly head.
- To the honest Nos, this passage is going to challenge your assumptions about yourself and about God. Maybe better than that, it's going to feel like a big, cold glass of water when you're really thirsty and your throat is cracking
- To the questioning maybes, this passage might reshape the way you view the God of the universe. The God who by His word created everything and by His will sustains it also deeply loves you.

So, the passage that Ellen just read is Hosea chapter 3, but we need to do a little background work to get us there. I just want to warn you, also, that this story is a little PG-13. It can be hard to listen to at times, but it's one we must listen to. In fact, I would suggest that the depth of our understanding of the gospel is directly related to the depth of our understanding of the story of Hosea.

So, in the beginning of the book, we are introduced to Hosea as a prophet of God. In OT times, prophets were sent by God to bring His Word to His people. Typically, what happens is that the people of God rebel against God, and the prophets are sent into the fray to lead the people back to God. Wasn't always a fun job trying to convince stubborn people to stop what they were doing and listen to you... But it was a noble job.

So, Hosea's one of these prophets. He's sent into the fray of the rebellion and idolatry of Israel at the time to call the people back. But his role as a prophet is unique because there is an extra layer added to it. Look at what we find out in chapter 1, verse 2:

"When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.'"

Whoa – now remember I did warn you this was a little PG-13. God isn't pulling any punches here. Right from the jump we get the picture. Israel's been unfaithful, and your marriage is going to be a representation of that.

So, Hosea being a faithful man of God goes and marries Gomer, a wife who he knows is going to be faithful to him. They get married, they settle down, and they have a family.

And God takes it a step further. Not only is he going to use Hosea's marriage to represent the condition of Israel, but He is also going to use Hosea and Gomer's children. Listen to what God tells them to name their children:

Hosea 1: 4-5: And the Lord said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

Jezreel is a reference to Jehu's massacre where he kills a family of 70, all for selfish, lustful gain. Jehu perpetuated idolatry, so this name would have carried the same idea. Not great...

Hosea 1:6: "She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all."

Skip down to v. 8-9: "When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. And the Lord said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

So, it's gone from bad to very bad. Israel's spiritual condition was not just kind of bad – it wasn't just that they had dabbled in sin – no, it's terrible. And God's judgment of them is holistic.

If you keep reading in chapter 2, it goes from very bad to worse. Remember how we had said that Gomer was unfaithful? Well in chapter 2 she is back to her old ways. She runs off and goes back to her adultery and prostitution. Chapter 2 is a rousing speech from faithful Hosea, calling his bride back.

It's almost as if he is trying to argue with Gomer via his children. Bad form on Mother's Day, Hosea. Look with me again chapter 2, verse 2:

“Plead with your mother, plead—  
for she is not my wife,  
and I am not her husband—  
that she put away her whoring from her face,  
and her adultery from between her breasts;”

As Hosea pleads with his bride, we get more and more details as to her condition. In v. 5, we see she has gone to live with her lovers:

“For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’”

The pleasures and comfort of her sin and her lust have mattered more to her than her faithfulness. She dives headfirst into her sin, but it only pulls her deeper and deeper down.

We find out a couple verses later than ever faithful Hosea hears about the state of his bride as she pursues her lovers. He hears about the terrible conditions she is living in, how she wants for the bare necessities, and he is actually the one who takes the bread, water, wool, flax, oil, and drink to the house of her lover. Her lover just pawns them off as his own.

As you read chapter 2, two things become more and more apparent, one, Gomer is in dire straits. Her sin is pulling her deeper and deeper, and it’s not a pretty sight. Two, Hosea’s heart is broken. He’s torn up over the state of his marriage and how his bride is suffering because of her sin.

Despite all of that, we end chapter 2 with a glimmer of hope. Look at chapter 2, verses 21-23 with me:

“And in that day I will answer, declares the Lord,  
I will answer the heavens,  
and they shall answer the earth,  
22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,  
and they shall answer Jezreel,  
23 and I will sow her for myself in the land.  
And I will have mercy on No Mercy,  
and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’;  
and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”

These are sweet words, but is there going to be any actual resolution? It’s one thing to talk the talk, but it’s a whole other thing to walk the walk. This sets the scene for what we’ll find in chapter 3. Let’s pick up in verse 1:

“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.”

God commands Hosea, again, to go and love his wife. Despite all the ways she has sinned against you, Hosea. Despite all the ways she has broken her marriage vows to you. Despite all the ways she has made you the scorn of the public – think about scandalous it would have been for a revered prophet of God to marry an unfaithful woman like Gomer! Would have been wild! And not just to marry this woman, but to relentlessly pursue her! Despite all the ways her actions might mar people’s view of your credibility as a prophet. Go, again, and love.

Do you wonder what was going through Hosea’s head? He had to have been like, “God, how faithful do you want me to be? Have I not been faithful enough??” He had to have been astonished that God was calling him back to this woman. God uses the word ‘again’ for us to understand just how bad it’s been. Gomer has chosen time and time again to leave,

chase her sin, and return to her immorality. Surely, there's a breaking point, right? A man can only handle so much. Could God really be serious that He would command Hosea to go again?

Now, we are going to come back to the last part of the verse that talks about Israel and God – I know you probably have some questions but hang with me for a little bit.

Look back at verse 2: "So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lettech of barley."

So, Hosea goes. And he finds her. And he buys her back. We aren't sure exactly what has happened, but Gomer is being sold as a slave. Her sin has spiraled out of control. Her sin has gone from adultery to prostitution and now to slavery. She's an object. Her sin has drug her to the bottom.

In that day, a slave would be presented up on the auction block and stripped entirely of their clothes so that the merchants can see what it is they're buying. It's lower than the lowest point. This is the moment of Gomer's greatest shame.

Gomer up on the auction block, stripped of her clothing, made a public mockery for all to see. Truly at rock bottom. Her shoulders are stooped, carrying the weight of her guilt and shame. There's Hosea, out in the crowd, watching his bride be treated as property. The auctioneer starts the bidding:

"5 sheckels"

"8 sheckels"

"10 sheckles"

She hears a voice she remembers. The more she hears it, the more she recognizes it. Could it really be him?? What in the world is he doing here? Is he buying me? Why does he want me??

"15 sheckels"

"15 sheckels and a homer"

"15 sheckels, a homer, and a lettech of barley"

Going once, going twice, sold!

Hosea steps into the marketplace to buy back his bride. Hosea acts on his love. He goes and finds his bride, and he pays the price to bring her back, to bring her home, to call her his own. It was at the point of purchase that Hosea's love for Gomer burns the brightest. He puts his reputation, his title, his status, his position, himself on the line to buy back the one he loves.

It should be noted, too, that 15 sheckels, a homer, and a lettech of barley was not the common price for a female slave like Gomer. The going rate was 30 shekels. So, why does Hosea use those other things? It's all he has. You can almost picture him finding Gomer up on the auction block, realizing he was going to have to buy her back, and running home to round up all his money. He gets to 15 shekels, and he gets anxious. He looks under the bed. He looks in the couch cushions. Nothing. He runs out to the field, grabs a homer and a lettech – it's all he has, but he is willing to trade it all for his bride.

This is shocking, but what happens once he buys her back equally shocking if not more so. Look with me again at 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."

Once Hosea buys back Gomer, he had total ability to do whatever he wanted to her. He was his property. He could have handed her a certificate of divorce. He could have enslaved her. He could have punished her. He could have made her pay for all the disrepute she had brought him, how terrible she had made his life, how much she had broken his heart. But he does just the opposite.

He comes to her, and he covers her nakedness. Surely this would have shocked her. What kind of man does this? What kind of love must he have for me?? And he speaks tenderly to her. He says, I want to have a life together with you. I want you to be mine, and I want to be yours. I don't want anything or anybody to get in the way of us. We are going to have to work on this, but I want this. I want to rebuild our lives together. We are going to rekindle our love; we are going to work on our relationship. You will be mine, and I will be yours. Hosea's love for his bride compels him to pursue and buy back his wife, and his love for his bride also seeks redemption for her and their marriage.

Hosea and Gomer, their story, their love, their marriage, point to a greater spiritual reality going on here. V. 4-5 bring the story to us. They put the ball in our court, so to speak. We got a taste of it with the second half of v. 1 (I told you we would come back!), and we get the rest with v. 4-5. It's almost as if God has one eye on Hosea and Gomer as this is playing out and one eye on you. And as we think about God having His eye on you. Look with me again at v. 4-5:

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

God's talking about the children of Israel. He's using this story between Hosea and Gomer to make a point to His people, to make a point to you. I think there are three things God wants us to see from this story. We'll briefly unpack each:

1) God loves you.

Regardless of how you answered the question at the beginning, I'd invite you to hear this: God loves you. Yes, He loves the world and His creation broadly, but this story shows us that God loves you, specifically. God loves you. Full stop.

God uses Hosea to show His commitment to you. Again, and again, and again, God will go to love you.

As you read the Bible, you'll start to see how marriage is used as the ultimate metaphor of God's relationship to His people. God uses the binding marriage covenant to point to the greater reality of how He loves His people. God has committed to love His people, and He swears by Himself to do it.

Think about marriage vows and what they mean when a bride and a groom vow these to one another:

"I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my wedded wife/husband, and I do promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful husband/wife, in plenty and want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live."

What you are saying is that come hell or high water, I am loving you, pursuing you, fighting for you. Whether we live in the best house in the best neighborhood or we don't have two nickels to rub together; whether we live until we are 100 or if one of us gets sick and has to battle intense illness for years on end; whether things go well for us, and all our dreams come true or if we have heartbreak after heartbreak. As long as we are living, I am pursuing her. I am loving her. I am fighting for her. That's what these vows mean

Hosea upholding his marriage vows to his bride is the proof of how God loves us. God will go again and again to love you. This is a grounding reality for us. When doubts creep in, Hosea is proof God loves you. When suffering comes and you

question God's goodness, let Hosea be a reminder to you that God loves you. If you have never considered the character of God or how He relates to people, let Hosea be a model for you, pointing you to the love of God.

God's love doesn't stay at an intellectual level – just good words that we hear that makes us feel good. God's love compels Him to act.

## 2) God pursues you.

God gives us the visual of how Hosea pursues his bride and buys her back to point us to the way God pursues us. We are Gomer.

We've sinned. And it's not just a dip your toe in kind of sin. We have plunged headfirst into the deep end of sin. We are dominated by it. We are consumed by it. Sin is in us and of us and on us. In the moment, sin is alluring, right? You feel incomplete without it – anything from the smallest thought of bitterness towards a friend to the biggest act of infidelity you could commit – all of it is enticing in the moment. Yet, it does not satisfy...

And most significantly, it is rebellion against God. We've turned our backs on Him. We've rejected Him. We've chosen lesser idols. It brings guilt and shame. We end up on the auction block like Gomer, except this is the marketplace of sin and death. We are slaves to our sin.

But God proves His love for us in how pursues us. God's love is scandalous. He created us, yet we rebelled. We've brought disrepute to Him in our sin. We are Gomer. Yet, God's love for us compels Him to pursue us. God's love for you compels Him to pursue you.

God steps in to buy us back, but it costs Him way more than 15 sheckels, a homer, and a lethech of barley. But, like Hosea, God puts all His chips in. God offers up His son, Jesus Christ. And Jesus willingly goes to the cross, for you! He goes to the cross because He knows it is the will of the Father. He knows that He is to give His life as a ransom for many. He knows going to the cross is the only way to buy you back. The only price that would satisfy your ransom is Jesus Himself.

The Bible says that the price due for sin is death, so somebody must die – either you or somebody else. You are on the auction block, but Jesus steps in and says, "I'll pay the price. My blood, my body, my death. I'll do it for you."

Many of us have wrestled and continue to wrestle with the kind of internal dialogue Gomer did up on the auction block. What does God see in me? How could He love me? With my history and my sin patterns, there is no way God could love me. Even if you answered a confident yes to that question at the beginning.

When those questions arise – and inevitably they will – remember this story. Let Hosea point you to Jesus, the One who pursues you to buy you out of your slavery to sin and bring you into freedom in life with Him.

When He purchases us, it is more than a get out of jail free card. Jesus buys us back that we might be redeemed – that what Hosea says to Gomer in v. 3 might be true for us, as well.

## 3) God redeems.

God is a redemptive, restorative God. He wants His people to be made whole. He wants restoration for His people. But this is not some snap your fingers kind of redemption. He wants every fiber of your being to be redeemed back to Him.

He wants every wayward thought, every sinful act, every evil word to be redeemed. He wants your first thought in the morning – when you dread waking up the face another day – to be redeemed. He wants your late-night internet surfing, where you continue to test the boundaries to be redeemed. He wants the way you treat your spouse or your roommate to be redeemed. He wants the way you act when you are not at church activities to be redeemed. He wants all of you! He wants to convince us that He is better than the world's best thing.

The good news of v. 3 is that God has promised Himself to us in this redemption. He doesn't just pursue us in love and buy us back to leave us alone. His love becomes real to us in a moment of our salvation, but He has promised to love us the same way over a lifetime. He has said, "I will be your God, you will be my son/daughter. We are going to work at this. We are going to build a life together."

He wants to convince us of the beauty and goodness and richness and sweetness of His love for us in Jesus. This is what we are practicing when we confess our sins every Sunday. We are shedding light on the darkest parts of who we are, and we are being reminded that God has pledged Himself to us, and us to Him in the good news of Jesus.

This is what our sanctification looks like. It is our joy to repent. We get to repent. We get to come and bear our dark and shameful parts before God because we know that God loves us the way Hosea loves Gomer. The Holy Spirit works in us to convict us of our sin, lead us in repentance, and remind us of the love of God. He is the down payment for the fullness of your redemption!

In Ephesians 3, Paul prays that believers (we) "may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

The story of Hosea helps us catch a glimpse of what Paul is praying for. The way Hosea loves Gomer, pursues Gomer, and redeems Gomer is shocking. It shows us the breadth, length, height, and depth of love of Hosea for his bride. It surpasses knowledge. But it's just a sliver of how God loves us. How much more does God's love for us in Christ surpass knowledge? How much deeper, and longer, and fuller, and higher is the love of God for us in Jesus Christ, our Savior, Redeemer, and our Lord?