

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: HOSEA.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Sermon Texts: Hosea 1:1-3; 3:1-3; 4:1-2

“God told you to do What?!? Right, God told you to marry a prostitute. Have you lost your mind? You need to go back and listen again. God hates adultery, God hates sexual immorality. There’s no way he told you to marry a prostitute.”

There are all kinds of adjectives we use to describe a bride. Beautiful, lovely, stunning, striking, attractive, exquisite. But adulterous isn’t one of them, adulterous bride sounds harsh in our ears. Something in us recoils, that’s not nice, that’s not pretty. Something is very wrong.

That’s the point of Hosea’s prophecy. Something is very wrong. God wants us to be gripped by the sheer horror of our sin and the magnitude of our unfaithfulness in our idolatry.

Hosea.

Hosea begins like other prophets by giving the specific time frame of his prophecy. His ministry spanned the reigns of the kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah in Judah and from King Jeroboam II in Israel until the time of Israel’s exile in 722BC. From 754 to 722 Israel went through six kings (Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea), five of them assassinated by their successor.

In the time of Jeroboam Israel was in the height of her glory, having military power, political influence and material prosperity. Israel boundaries were at their furthest extent. But Jeroboam did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not depart of the sins of earlier kings (II Kings 14:24).

There’s an ancient proverb, “A fish rots from the head down.” That certainly was the case in Israel. As went the king, so went Israel. The people matched the king’s moral and spiritual decay. Idolatry and immorality went hand in hand.

Israel was in a death spiral. They were disintegrating from within. Hosea has been called the death-bed prophet of Israel because he was the last prophet sent by God to prophecy to the northern kingdom of Israel before Israel fell to Assyria around 722 BC under Shalmaneser V, King of Assyria.

Never forget, God always warns, rebukes, corrects and send messengers to tells us the truth. He who has ears to hear let him hear while there is still time.

Hosea’s wife of whoredom and his children of whoredom.

Hosea 1:2 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.”

Hosea's personal tragedy matched Israel's national tragedy. Hosea's prophecy reads like a daytime soap opera.

Verse two is hard to read, it sounds harsh to our sensitive, spiritual ears. God's command to Hosea to marry an adulterous woman and to have children is God's graphic way of revealing Israel's unfaithfulness toward God, of exposing their sin of idolatry and spiritual infidelity.

Hosea's wife and God's bride have a history of infidelity, a history of having a roving eye, and a wandering spirit, of being disloyal and of breaking her vows.

Hosea 4:1-2 Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; [2] there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. (ESV)

Israel's idolatry was adultery both to the Lord and to their wives, because the idolatry of *Baal* involved cult prostitutes. It was double perversion, a double abomination.

We tend to think of idolatry as an ancient problem, something uneducated people did long ago. Carving idols out of wood, stone or metal just seems so barbaric or foolish. Who would ever believe praying to a manmade object would do any good?

Idolatry is not an ancient problem, *idolatry is a human problem*. It goes on today in two forms. One form is still the ancient form, physical idols like a bronze Buddha or some Hindu god. But it's also very modern every time we elevate anything above God.

Each of us have things that are of great value or importance to us, things we love and consider sacred, precious.

Everyone is religious, even people who say they aren't religious. Everyone has gods, idols. The most pagan and secular person reveres something, success, intellect, power, sex, status, ambition, patriotism, money, comfort and pleasure.

Idolatry is ingrained in our hearts. It begins when we forget the Lord and forget all He has done for us.

Deuteronomy 8:19-20 And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. [20] Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God. (ESV)

Hosea 8:14 For Israel has forgotten his Maker.

Hosea 13:6 when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore *they forgot me*. (ESV)

They forgot God. After all He had done, in all their prosperity, they forgot God. Material blessings bring spiritual curses.

The Bible has to be brutally honest to get us to see it and to expose the folly of it.

“Why does God tell Hosea to marry an adulterous prostitute?” Because that’s exactly what God has done. He has pledged Himself in a vow to people who are nothing but a bunch of prostitutes whoring after all kinds of other gods.

Hosea’s marriage is a vivid picture of the sin of idolatry, it’s nothing less than the wicked unfaithfulness of adultery. What a picture of a dysfunctional and broken family.

Picture a bride at a great wedding, arrayed in all her splendor with her groom. And picture her in a room filled with wedding gifts, hundreds of gifts, beautifully wrapped, some large some small, all of great value and benefit and blessing.

Imagine the bride becoming completely absorbed in the gifts, enamored by them and so taken in by them that she completely ignores and even forgets about her groom. She starts to love the gifts more than anything else.

It’s so upside down, so foolish, yet that’s what nation after nation and family after family has done. Loving the gifts more than the giver. Loving goods more than God.

Just as we tend to sympathize with the spouse of someone who commits adultery, so God wants Israel to feel the effects of their unfaithfulness on Him. Hosea’s prophecy is filled with allusions to the breaking of the marriage relationship.

4:1 – no faithfulness

4:12 – spirit of whoredom has lead them astray

4:18 – they continue in prostitution

5:3 – Ephraim turns to harlotry

5:4 – the spirit of whoredom is within them, adultery is in their hearts.

5:7 – their unfaithfulness leads to illicit/illegitimate children

7:4 – they burn with adultery

8:9 – Ephraim has sold herself into prostitution and hired foreign lovers

9:1 – they love the wages of a prostitute

9:15 – their false love will lead to God driving them out of his house and loving them no more.

The consequences of Israel’s sin.

A man who commits adultery often destroys and loses everything once valuable to him, his marriage, his children and family, his home, his reputation, sometimes his job and livelihood.

The consequences of Israel’s sin are devastating. They lose everything precious and valuable and good that God has given them. It’s revealed in the names of the children.

Jezreel – God scatters

Lo-Ruhamah – not loved

Lo-Ammi – not my people

With each name God’s judgment gets more serious, from being scattered to receiving no mercy, to no longer being my people. Like Ichabod, the glory has departed.

Israel will be scattered, driven away, stripped of the most precious things, her status before God, of his love, his divine favor and protection.

Exile is inevitable.

Hosea 5:9 Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; (ESV)

Hosea 9:3, 6-7 They shall not remain in the land of the LORD,
but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria.
[6] For behold, they are going away from destruction;
but Egypt shall gather them; Memphis shall bury them.
Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver; thorns shall be in their tents.
[7] The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it.

Mercy returns:

Can you ever imagine saying these words to someone: “I can be nicer to you longer than you can be mean to me.” (Dan Schmidt, *Unexpected Wisdom*, p. 116).

As stunning and incomprehensible as the sin of unfaithfulness is, even more stunning and incomprehensible is the faithful love that God continues to offer.

Hosea’s marriage is in ruins, Israel’s judgment is sealed. Yet God makes the stunning demand to Hosea. Take her back. What? After repeated adultery and prostitution. After multiple men. After children whose very names remind him every time he sees them of her past.

Gomer was now a slave, used and abused, naked in the slave market. She’s available to the highest bidder. Right there in public, in full view of everyone, in front of God and everybody. And Hosea obeyed and paid 15 shekels of silver and several bushels of barley.

He takes her home to provide for her and protect her and be her husband. Hosea’s first marriage is a picture of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. Hosea’s second marriage is a picture of God’s forgiveness and grace.

God has a way of making His forgiveness and grace very dramatic, very memorable.

Hosea 11:9 I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. (ESV)

Amazing love. Amazing grace.

Faithfulness.

Hosea’s prophecy ends with an image of faithfulness. Baal and the other gods had made all kinds of promises, promises of prosperity and material blessing, success, growth, abundance. But only the Lord can deliver and make good on such promises.

Hosea 14:4, 7 I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.
[7] They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain;

they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. (ESV)

And this blessing and promise will spread even to the Gentiles.

Romans 9:24-26 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? [25] As indeed he says in Hosea,
“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”
[26] “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (ESV)

Not only will Israel and Judah be reunited, but Jews and Gentiles will be reunited into the new covenant people of God.

Jesus.

One great preacher (James Montgomery Boice) called Hosea 3 the greatest chapter in the Bible because it is a picture of the greatest story in the Bible, Jesus laying down His life for His people.

Jesus went into the marketplace and despite our pitiful condition and wretched state paid a much higher price. He rescued us and redeemed us, forgave us and took us to be His own. He loves us and cares for us and provides all our needs. Infinite love and amazing grace.

Instead of being *Jezeel*, of being scattered, Jesus promises to gather for God people from every nation, tribe, tongue and people (Rev. 7:9).

Instead of being *Lo-Ruhamah*, of being not loved, Jesus demonstrated the love of God, while we were yet sinners, God first loved us.

Instead of being *Lo-Ammi*, of being not his people, Jesus comes to make us the “people of God” (I Peter 2:10).

I Corinthians 6:19-20 You are not your own, you have been bought for a price.

“Agorazo” (bought) is the term for buying something in a marketplace.

1 John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (ESV)

And He promises never to leave us or forsake us all at very great cost.

No Christian can fully grasp the magnitude of what Christ has accomplished for us without some understanding of our being a part of an adulterous generation, of our own betrayal, our own broken vows, our own whoring after other lovers.

Application and conclusion.

Children have a very naïve and simplistic view of adulthood. They look at their parents or other adults and see that they get to make all the rules. And they look at us and see that we have all the money. We have all the power and all the freedom to do whatever we want. Wow, who

wouldn't want all that? And they day dream about what they would do if they had that much power and freedom (see Derek Kidner, *Love to the Loveless: The Message of Hosea*, p. 11ff).

But in some regards we never grow up. Adults look at God who is all-powerful, who makes everything and controls everything and is all-loving and they think why doesn't God just get rid of all evil and sin? If He has all the power and all the freedom why doesn't he use it the way we think He should or the way we would if we had all that power and freedom?

God answers this with the prophecy of Hosea. "I am God and not man."

There's no sin so great that His forgiveness is not greater still. Do you know how much God loves you, and how far He has gone to love you? God really loves the loveless, God loves the ungodly and even goes so far as to pay a ransom and at great expenses to Himself, buys us back.

Are you deeply and profoundly moved by the deep love of God for us? Every one of us here would counsel Hosea to dump Gomer and be done with her. Send her packing and leave her alone in the miserable mess she created. She deserves it and nothing better.

But Gomer is us. How would we want God to treat us? Hosea's relentless pursuit and unfailing love for Gomer is a perfect picture of God's own relentless pursuit and unfailing love for us.

God doesn't treat us as our sins deserve. He loves the ungodly that through repentance and faith in Christ we might love Him, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Ephesians 3:14-19 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] 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. (ESV)