

Tom Coop  
Hosea 1:1-11, 3:1-5  
July 16, 2017

### **A Tale of Scandalous Love!**

I can just see it ... It must have been front page news at the supermarket checkout counters in Israel, right next to the olive oil and flip flops:

“Local Prophet Marries Prostitute” screams the headline of the *Israel Inquirer*.

“Holy Man Hosea Hooks Up with Hooker” shouts the *Samaritan Post*.

You can just imagine the pictures—the paparazzi following Hosea around, the seductive poses of his wife Gomer there in the centerfold.

If the Israelites had had Google, Hosea and Gomer would have been the number one search term in about 750BC.

Americans love a good scandal. Whether it’s a government official getting caught in an affair or celebrities hooking up in secret, we want to see the pictures.

Somehow, it makes us feel more self-righteous, which may be why most people feign disgust at the tabloids, but then secretly buy them.

And it’s all because, as we read in Chapter One, Verse Two – God’s commanding Hosea to marry the harlot Gomer.

Now undoubtedly, Hosea was very puzzled by God’s strange command, just as Abraham was puzzled by God’s command that he take his son out and kill him, put his own son, Isaac, to death.

The difference, between Abraham and Hosea, though, is that Hosea has to go through with it.

God indeed does strange things at times, things we don't always understand, things we can't categorize, things that don't fit into what we think we know of him. And this is one of those strange things.

And not only that, after the birth of their three children, Gomer up and leaves Hosea, probably for another lover.

It seems not to have gone too well for her, because eventually, she gets in debt and has to be sold, ostensibly, into slavery, which, by the way, was a common way of paying off debt in ancient times.

And you thought having a high credit card balance was bad!

At this point, you would assume that Hosea would just write Gomer off. No one would have blamed him. But, in chapter 3, God commands Hosea to buy his wife back.

The prophet is now in the humiliating position of bidding for his own wife at a slave auction.

I'm sure, Hosea looked like a fool in public!

And to top it all off, in those days, slaves were sold naked, so buyers could see exactly what they were getting.

So, Gomer is on the auction block, stark naked. Everyone sees her shame. And, ultimately, Hosea buys her for fifteen shekels of silver, and eight bushels of barley.

He pays the fee, covers her nakedness with his robe, and tenderly takes a weeping Gomer home.

Can you imagine? Pretty scandalous!

Okay, now you know about Hosea's dysfunctional marriage to Gomer. But, what do we know about Hosea, the man? Not much, actually.

We do know that he was the son of Beeri (but we don't know who Beeri was, so that isn't very helpful).

We do know, however, he is a prophet of God (as we learn in the opening words of the book).

We know that Hosea prophesied in approximately 750-725 B.C.; just before the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Hosea is believed to be the first prophet to use marriage as a metaphor of the covenant between God and Israel.

Hosea also was the first to emphasize the moral side of God's nature.

And, Hosea was one of only two writing prophets who ministered to the Northern Kingdom of Israel AND the only one to actually come from Israel. Who was the other? (Amos).

At the beginning of Hosea's ministry, the Northern Kingdom was seemingly prosperous under the stable reign of Jeroboam II. But the nation had forsaken God.

People were “living it up,” as we might say, and didn’t have much time for God. They wouldn’t have put it that way, of course. Nobody ever says that, especially when it is true.

Instead, they may have said something like we do – “I just don’t have quite enough time; I’m sooo busy with so many other important things.

The spirit was willing but the flesh was ready for the weekend.

So, people didn’t pay much attention to Hosea, certainly, when he spoke of judgment and chastisement.

He said that God was going to raise up the Assyrian nation to punish Israel. But the people said that Hosea’s God sounded like a pretty vengeful sort to talk like that.

Hosea tried to tell them that wasn’t so. He said God was merciful and forgiving.

But then, he also accused Israel’s leaders of failing to understand the true cause of the nation’s downfall, telling them that they didn’t have a clue about what they were doing.

That they were like a dove, easily deceived and senseless. That the nation resembled a bird that is without brains.

That they have been following a stupid policy, trying to save their country by making it strong, instead of making it morally right.

I can’t imagine why they wouldn’t listen to him after those descriptions of them!

If they didn't get this message through his preaching, they certainly should have gotten a hint through his kids.

God told Hosea that he wanted to be able to name their children. So, when his son was born, Hosea asked God, "What should we name the boy?"

To his surprise, God picked the name Jezreel. Now Jezreel means "cast-away" and was a name of shame in Israel.

He was so named because God had declared that he would avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu.

And, interestingly enough, Jehu's descendants were the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

In the course of time, another child, a daughter, was born to Hosea. This one was named Lo-Ruhamah, which means "not loved" or "no pity."

Imagine naming your little baby girl "not loved." It meant that God would no longer have pity on his people if they continued their stubborn rebellion.

Finally, Gomer conceived again and bore a third child, another little boy.

And this one God named Lo-Ammi, meaning "not my people," for God was saying, "you are not my people and I will not be your God."

The child bore this name of shame to show that the Northern Kingdom would also be shamed, for its people would no longer be known as God's People.

In other words, the Northern Kingdom was being rejected by God.

If you think you had problems on the playground growing up with malicious nicknames from 11 year olds, mine was Thugy, by the way – think about how these three kids must have been abused!

And to top it off, the last two kids were most likely not Hosea's.

Of course, we need to remember that these were warnings. For just as Hosea pursued Gomer, not once, but twice, God pursued the Israelites and God continues to pursue us.

God loves you and me with a long – suffering love, much like Hosea loved Gomer.

God sticks with us through thick and thin, like the prophet stuck with his wife.

God loves us “for better or worse,” and goes to great lengths to “buy us back” from slavery to sin, when our disobedience lands us in trouble – as it always does, just like Hosea did with Gomer.

And that's Good News because often, you and I abandon God, chasing after false gods.

Some of us have made a god out of our career. We pursue success at any cost.

Sometimes, especially in tough times, financial security becomes our god. We obsess over money.

A person or a relationship can occupy a god-like place in our lives.

We can make a false god out of our health, becoming obsessed with exercise, diet, vitamins, fitness.

We can make a false god out of golf, a hobby, or a favorite team.

We can become addicted to, or make a false god out of, alcohol, sex pornography, or drugs.

We can make a false god out of a grudge, holding it until it begins to consume us.

Anything or anyone that dominates our lives or captures our attention **more** than God, is a false god. You've got yours. I've got mine.

We run after them and that saddens the living God, like Gomer's adultery hurt Hosea.

Yet ... again, the good news is, that Hosea bought Gomer back. And God stops at nothing to buy us back.

If you take the time to read the Book of Hosea, and can actually make it through the last eleven chapters, you will be impressed by Hosea's conception of God.

For Hosea, God is a god of love and mercy.

Punishment for wrongdoing is indeed necessary, but according to Hosea, the purpose of punishment is not to meet the demands of justice, but rather to restore the ones who have done the wrong.

In other words, for Hosea, punishment is restorative rather than retributive, it's an expression of God's love for his people, not his anger.

We learn from Hosea's story that God does not love you because of what you do. God always loves you, in spite of what you do.

God does not love you because of who you are. He always loves you, in spite of who you are.

It's a hard lesson for us to learn. Many of us bring over from the old life a bookkeeping mentality.

The bookkeeping mentality is "I will do certain things for God and then God will do certain things for me."

That's heresy. That is not the gospel. That's not the truth of God.

God doesn't bless us or reward us because of what we do; it's in spite of what we do.

If you decide tonight to give your life to God and become a missionary in some distant place, and if you spent your life there, God would not love you any more than he loves you right now.

If you were to give all your money to the church, or a Christian organization, or to someone serving Christ — give it all to them, make that kind of sacrifice — God would not love you more than he loves you right now.

Well, maybe if you gave it ALL to this church. Just kidding.

God chose you and loves you. This love story is your story. Even if you are faithless, He will remain faithful.

If you are lost, God will find you. If you are ashamed, God will cover you. If you wander off, God will bring you home.



If you give up on Him, God will not give up on you. No matter where you are, God sees you, and He loves you.

Many people stay away from church because there's no one willing to pursue them in love, to offer them grace, to welcome them home.

I believe that the church of Jesus Christ has largely lost this pursuit of scandalous love — a radical, unconditional, redeeming love for the world.

Love that costs, love that risks embarrassment, love that reaches out to the broken with an open hand, rather than a clenched fist.

Do you know anyone who is in need of some scandalous, unconditional, reconciling love?

Do you need it?

Are you willing to go out of your way, maybe even risk embarrassment, to extend a hand, a word of grace, an offer of Christ?

Hosea intentionally married a spouse who soon left him. God intentionally came to a people who had left him.

Can we live in, or give in, to that scandalous kind of love?

There's a story of a young man who lived in Chicago and one day traveled to the bluegrass region of Kentucky, where he met and wooed a young woman who he ultimately brought back to Chicago as his bride.

They enjoyed three lovely years of marriage, and then one day, in the midst of a sickness, in a seizure of pain, the young woman basically lost her mind.

After that, when she was at her best, she was a bit demented. At her worst, she would scream endlessly.

One day the family physician suggested that perhaps if he were to take his wife back to her Kentucky home, that something in those familiar surroundings might help her restore her sanity.

And so, they went back to the old homestead. Hand in hand they walked through the old house where memories hung on every corner.

They went down to the garden and walked down by the riverside.

But after several days nothing seemed to change.

So, defeated and discouraged, the young man put his wife in the car, and they headed back to Chicago.

When they got close to the house, he looked over and discovered that his wife was asleep. It was the first deep, restful sleep she had had in many weeks.

When he got to the house, he lifted her from the car, took her inside, placed her on the bed and placed a blanket over her.

He sat by her side and watched her until the first rays of the sun reached through the curtain and touched her face.

When the young woman awoke, she saw her husband seated by her side. She said, "I seem to have been on a long journey. Where have you been?"

And the man, speaking out of months of patient waiting and watching said, "My love, I've been right here waiting for you all this time."

If you ask me, where is God, for me, the answer is very much like that man's response to his wife. God is right here.

Right here speaking to you again.

Right here waiting for you to respond with love to his love. Waiting for you to respond with trust to his promise.

Waiting for you to cast yourself with a reckless abandon upon his grace.

And waiting for you to discover in the depth of your experience, what it means to be loved by God, according to the love he demonstrated through the prophet Hosea.

My prayer this morning is that all of us may be willing to embrace that love and then make it known to those who may have not.

Wouldn't that be great?

*Amen!*