

## REDEEMING LOVE

*Series: Hosea: Unbroken Love From A Broken Heart*

by Doug Goins

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This series in the prophecies of Hosea is examining the heart of God and the heart of the great prophet Hosea. God's word was revealed in Hosea's life as he lived it and in what he wrote and preached to the northern kingdom eight centuries before Jesus was born.

The narrative in chapter 3 returns primarily to the relationship between Hosea and Gomer, after dealing in chapter 2 with the relationship between God and the nation Israel. Verses 1-5:

And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress; even as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.

And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days; you shall not play the harlot, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. 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 came to the prophet and told him to marry a woman who would become a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, and that is what happened, as we have seen in our studies of chapters 1 and 2. Now, try to get inside Hosea's skin and imagine his anguish over Gomer's rejection of his love for her. Try to identify with his growing realization that she is caught in an addictive compulsion that drives her to relationship after relationship. Empathize with his need to steel himself against the gossip about his wife's adultery. Allow your heart to be broken for both Hosea and for Gomer as he learns that she has gone from promiscuity to Baal cult prostitution to slavery. For she is no longer just the plaything of other men, no longer the sexual object of this sensual fertility cult. Now she is actually being sold into the violent debauchery of the slave market. Try to give vent to the sense of outrage, anger, and judgment that Hosea justifiably feels, as well as the shame and humiliation. And hear your own heart echo Hosea's anguish.

Now try to imagine the consternation and utter amazement that Hosea must feel when God commands, "Go again and love this woman." The very idea must send shock waves through his heart. On a personal level, should he set himself up to be hurt and humiliated again? And on a religious level, as God's spokesman to the nation, how can he reverse his justified condemnation of this woman who stands for Israel? It would be anathema to everything he believes in. These are significant questions.

But in verse 1 the how is superseded by the motivation or the why of *Yahweh*'s command: "...Even as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." The source of the strength and the will power to follow God's command will be God's own example and the power of his love expressed toward his people. The choice that *Yahweh* is making to love his own people is the same choice that Hosea has to make. He is to go and be reconciled to Gomer, even though she doesn't deserve reconciliation, and in fact has done every maligning thing she could to ruin his career and scathe his moral sensibilities.

I read a simplistic description of Hosea in one Bible commentary a couple of weeks ago: "A bad wife produced a good prophet." That is not true. The call to love a compulsive, rebellious wife led a faithful prophet to experience the greatness of God. This is really about God much more than it is about Hosea. The essence of

God's greatness throughout this wonderful book is his initiating love and the reconciliation that he is committed to for us. In our study of chapter 1, I suggested that this whole book is a symphony of grace. And chapter 3 in just five verses is like the whole orchestra's playing a wonderful crescendo of that prevenient, before-hand, undeserved favor.

But again, very personally and privately in your own experience, can you really empathize with Hosea? You probably have not had to endure the pain of a spouse like Gomer. But before you write off Gomer's psychological or character disorder as some extreme that you thankfully have never had to deal with, think of the pain and frustration that we all have experienced with friends and family members who have done us seemingly irreparable harm. Consider the people you have cut off because of what they have said or done to you or the violence that you have experienced because of them. Now hear the call of God, "Go again and love!"

Furthermore, and most importantly of all, when we think of our own relationship with God, the full impact of this passage is experienced in identifying not just with Hosea but also with Gomer. None of us naturally desires God; we are all part of a fallen creation. We have a bent toward willful independence and disobedience, and we don't want God to be the sovereign Lord of our lives. Because we find it humanly impossible to make him Lord of our lives, he always has to come first as our Savior-Redeemer, buying us back. Our sin, though perhaps different from Gomer's, is no less serious. And the wonder is what God came to earth in Christ to do for us on Calvary---to atone for our sins and to reconcile us to himself.

This passage presents God's love for humanity and for each one of us personally, and it also presents what our attitude and actions should be toward others who through their sin have fouled up our lives as well as their own. It is through the lens of the atoning work of Christ on the cross that we view these five verses of redeeming love. We never really know how much a person loves us until we know how much they are willing to suffer for us.

### **The "Again-ness" of God's Love**

In verse 1 the word "again" jumped off the page for me---the "again-ness" of God's love. God's repeated, unflinching love for Israel is to be Hosea's purpose and his passion. And God's love is a passionate love, not detached and distant.

The word love appears four different times in verse 1 alone: the love that Hosea is to have for Gomer, the love that Gomer has experienced from her lovers, the love that *Yahweh* has for Israel, and the love that Israel has for the raisin cakes of pagan Baal worship (probably an aphrodisiac or a symbol of sexual performance). I was hoping that there would be different Hebrew words for love here, but the same word is used all four times. Then I realized that this is true in our own vocabulary as well. We use the word love for everything: God, our kids, our spouse, the Forty-Niners, and our new car. The use of the same term for love four different times here highlights the confusion between true love, the fleeting satisfaction of an adulterous affair, the momentary enjoyment of nutritionless raisin cakes, and complicity with the worship of other gods. There is great contrast between what true love from God is and whatever else we settle for that is second best. Yet one word is used to denote them all; it is all blurred together.

But it is the again-ness of God's pursuing, persistent love in action that Hosea is to model. *Yahweh* commands love that has nothing to do with feelings. Hosea is called to deliberate, purposeful, and intelligent action. At this point he is probably too wounded to feel the emotion of love for Gomer. God knows that he will need the liberating reminder of God's own supernatural love for Israel if he is going to be able to do what God's love commands him to. That is true for us also. If we will do what love demands, we really can move out in faith and trust that God will give us the feelings that love requires. But if we wait until we feel like being loving toward the person who has wounded us, we will probably never get around to it.

My wife has an aunt and uncle who live in another part of the state. They were married at a young age. At that time Candy's aunt was a nominal Christian who had been raised in a Christian family. Her husband was a non-believer. After five years of marriage, her husband began to be involved in adulterous affairs, became addicted to gambling, and started drinking heavily. The patterns were so destructive that all the counsel she got

from psychologists, counselors, even pastors, and especially family members was, "Get rid of him. He's never going to turn around." I remember hearing her say that in going before the Lord about what he wanted her to do, there were times that she just wanted to unload her husband. It wasn't worth the effort to wait, pray, and put up with all the betrayal. But she made a choice in the face of human wisdom to trust God to work in her unfaithful husband's life, and after about three years he came back. He said later it was the consistent, faithful love that he received from his wife when he didn't deserve it that brought him back. He was won to Christ. Now they are a favorite aunt and uncle of ours because of the zest with which they live the Christian life and the way they give themselves to others.

The challenge for all of our relationships is nothing less than what this woman did. We all experience times when people have us on the ropes of exasperation and our feelings of love seem to be gone. The question is not how we feel but what we are called to do to show love. We belong to a God who never gives up on us and does not give us the luxury of giving up on other people. We are Hosea's brothers and sisters and part of God's distinctly different people who are called to express again-ness love. Who is the Gomer in your life? To whom are you called to go again and do what love demands?

It is humanly impossible for us to deal with the radical demands of this kind of love without a reference to its source. Romans 5:5-8 tells us where this love comes from and what it looks like: "...And hope does not disappoint [us], because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't wait to save us until we got better and then came around looking for him. No, he took the initiative while we were actively living in defiance of him.

### **The Loving Heart Behind the Loving Act**

Verse 2 shows us this kind of love in action. "So I bought her [for myself] for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley." Basically he pays thirty shekels of silver for her; one-and-a-half homers of barley (fifteen or twenty bushels) was worth fifteen shekels. And in the Old Testament thirty shekels of silver was the price of a slave. So Hosea's love for Gomer begins with his buying her back out of bondage for himself. It is a simple statement, but the act is incredibly profound. God's instructions are clear: "Go again, love her. Bring her back home where she belongs, even if you have to make a fool of yourself in front of others, or you have to go against all the common human wisdom about the chances of this relationship ever working out, or others suggest it is codependency that is driving you." So Hosea obeys the call of God to incarnate God's kind of love for Israel.

This story has as much to do with what is not said in this verse as it does with the very clear meaning of Hosea's declaration. Obedience to God's command requires a loving heart as much as loving acts. I am not talking about loving feelings, but again about God's kind of love, which is purposeful and which knows exactly why it is doing what it is doing. The actions of a loving heart are expressed out of obedience to God's heart. Buying Gomer back will mean nothing to God if Hosea's attitude toward her is judgmental, arrogant, resentful, or self-righteous. And here is the rub for every one of us. We can do all kinds of good and right things in relationships for the wrong reasons, with the wrong spirit inside driving us. How much of our good work in all the ministry opportunities here at Peninsula Bible Church is despised by our Lord because our heart is wrong?

The prophet Amos, who preceded Hosea in ministry to the northern kingdom, made that very clear. Speaking God's word, he said to the nation,

"I hate, I despise your feasts,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies...  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an everflowing stream."

Flowing justice and streaming righteousness have to do with motives for what we do. I have often wondered if this is why our love lacks redemptive power in other people's lives. We do all the right things. I have known a number of people who went to counseling, read every book possible, joined recovery groups, entered into dialogue, and learned better communication skills, but the redemptive influence was never there. As long as we are harboring deep, bitter resentment, God can't honor the activity with redemption.

Verses 3-5 explain the significance of Gomer's redemption for the nation Israel. It is a wonderful plan for bringing her back. There is discipline and then the promise of complete restoration. Verse 3 speaks of the necessity of tough love in Gomer's life: "And I said to her, 'You must dwell as mine for many days; you shall not play the harlot, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.'" That is God's approach to healing, or to recovery if you will. Gomer is going to come home, but it is not to be business as usual when she returns; it is impossible to pick up where things were before when she ran off after her lovers. It is also impossible for Israel to be immediately restored to a place of fellowship by God's side as if nothing has happened. There have been too much pain and too much disobedience in response to the love of God, as well as to the love of Hosea. So, for all of us, when redemption begins there must be a time of learning and limitation, a time of hearing what God wants us to hear in the process of restoration, for working out what God wants to do in our lives. Time is needed for the healing of the hearts of both Gomer and Hosea, for the recovery of trust.

There are several couples with whom God has allowed me to be involved over the years, in which the husband or the wife at some point began behaving destructively toward the marriage relationship. Over a period of years their attitudes and actions all but destroyed the love, trust, appreciation, and respect of the wounded spouse. On a couple of occasions the spouse who had been sinned against made a choice to physically withdraw from the relationship. It worked immediately, like shock therapy, for the offending spouse; there were grief, remorse, and frantic efforts to get their spouse back, expressed in words like, "I've learned my lesson. Please come home and forgive me. Let's start over." But in pastoral counseling I realized that the wounds were so deep, the trust so thoroughly shattered, that they couldn't just pick up where they left off. They needed to experience a time of learning carefully and slowly, repatterning their behavior, being healed from destruction, and learning and practicing new lessons until spiritual sensitivity replaced the carnal abusiveness of old.

In Biblical language, time is needed for the fruits of repentance to be clearly evident. Hosea said, "You must dwell as mine [with me] for many days," because retraining old patterns will take that long. For Gomer, sexual relations with both former lovers and with her faithful husband Hosea are denied. For now at least, there must be a time of quieting and healing her restless, compulsive self-gratification. Hosea's willingness to forgo sexual intimacy for a period of time reinforces his desire to show love. That is what he means by the phrase, "So will I also be to you." Hosea is saying, "There won't be sexual intimacy between us, and I certainly won't force sexual intimacy on you." It is intended not to harm her but to protect her. *Yahweh* is a jealous God. He wants to prohibit Israel from sinning for her own good. So Hosea acts restrictively toward his wife. He redeems her, but it is because he wants to serve her, not make his own life better by gratifying his own ego or needs. He wants to be part of God's redemptive plan for her recovery spiritual, emotionally, and relationally.

## **A Time of Restriction**

Verse 4 reinforces the necessity of that tough love that is also going to be required in the life of the nation Israel: "For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim." The nation has to dwell in limitation many days like Gomer does. While for Gomer it is a time of chastity, for Israel it is a time without leadership, worship, or any real sense of direction for the future. Gomer and the nation Israel are between times of failure and restoration, between times of weeping and rejoicing, between judgment and reconciliation, between death and resurrection.

Notice that as with Gomer, both legitimate and illegitimate relationships are denied Israel for a period of time. First, they are to be without king or prince. And in fact there has been no spiritual ruler in Israel since 70 AD when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the worldwide dispersion of the Jews began. There will not be a spiritual leader on the throne of David until Jesus the Messiah comes and they voluntarily choose to submit to him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

It says there will be a time when they will be without sacrifice or pillar. Again, since the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem by General Titus in 70 AD, there have been no animal sacrifices in any temple for the atonement of sin. And the pillar refers to the sacred stone shrine that represented the idolatrous worship of Baal.

They will be without ephod or teraphim. The ephod was a garment the high priest wore when leading worship. In the pocket of the garment were two dice called the Urim and Thummim, the sides of which were alternately black and white. The high priest would cast the dice to find a specific yes or no answer when the nation was looking for God's leadership. So he is saying there will be a time when they are denied spiritual guidance for the future. And on the other hand, they will also be denied the influence of the teraphim, the little terra cotta household idols that had been brought in from other nations and used for pagan divination, the way people might use Ouija boards today.

All Gomer is going to have in this season is the watchful, ministering presence of Hosea; and all Israel is going to have is the healing, patient, waiting presence of God. And for both, at least in this in-between time, it will be enough.

This week I talked with a dear brother in this body who went through the pattern of Gomer in his life a number of years ago, leaving his wife and our fellowship and defrauding men and women. He ran away for several years. Gradually, through the wooing love of God, he was drawn back. His wife waited for him in obedience to God and in direct contradiction to the guidance of lawyers, marriage counselors, and family members until he came home. He told me that there was an in-between time. There was a time after he had been redeemed and accepted back into a love relationship in this church family and in his home, probably three or four years, when trust had to be rebuilt. It was a time of quietly waiting for God to show him what to do next, just sitting in church on Sunday and not ministering. And he had to earn again the loving trust that he had destroyed in his wife.

### **Hope for Full Restoration**

But we both rejoiced together in my office about the good news that followed, the vindication of God's tough love described in verse 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." There are echoes of Isaiah 40:5 here:

"And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it."

The complete fulfillment of these things in the nation Israel isn't going to come until the millennial reign of Christ. This is the third time in three chapters that we have seen that reality. The extent to which the Israelites sought God after the Babylonian captivity was very limited. The people did cease following false gods, but their worship was cold and formal, and there was much sin among them. To this day in the nation, there is not the kind of repentance described in this verse---the entire nation actively seeking the Lord with fear and trembling. But according to Isaiah 12 and Ezekiel 20, in the millenium they will indeed seek their Messiah, and they will bow before him in submission and worship. Jeremiah promised that day in his prophecy (33:11) 110 years after Hosea's:

"The voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD: 'Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever!' For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the LORD."

There is hope for full restoration. We can have faith even in the midst of our suffering when we know the end of the story, when, say, the doctor gives us the assurance that the pain of surgery will eventually subside and we will be able to go home fully cured. That is when we somehow find the strength to say, "I can live through

the pain. It will eventually be over." I was with my father a year and a half ago when he went through major surgery, and I watched his agony for the first couple of days, even wondering if it was really worth such great pain. But then the young surgeon came and said to him, "Paul, it was totally successful; you're going to have a full recovery. You're going to be fine." And my father's countenance became totally different as he took in the news. The pain and suffering would be worth it.

The good news for us is that we do indeed know the end of the story. Jesus' death was just a prelude to his resurrection. In Romans 8:28 Paul says, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." The end of the story for Gomer is restoration---the restoration of love for her husband and of being a mother to her children again. The end of the story for Israel is that they will some day "return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days."

Which picture most accurately portrays your life today? Are you still pursuing and justifying your sinfulness and disobedience, judged as rebellious and unfaithful by the God who is father and husband to you? Are you between the times, knowing there has been redemption and restoration, but right now deprived of those things that were your former sources of security, both legitimate and illegitimate; feeling that you have nothing and no one to lean on in this healing time except the pervading presence of your loving God? I thought a few weeks ago that this is like the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter morning---the Good Friday of our failure and disobedience, the judgment of the cross, the necessity of dying with Christ to sinful self; and then the Easter dawning of total healing, of resurrection newness of life in obedience.

If you find yourself in a time of waiting and asking God to be at work through the pain and struggle, in the Saturday of restriction, then surrender to the fact that it really is a time of chastening, learning, doing less, and listening to our patient God more. But the good news is that the best days are still ahead. "Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD...." Thank God we know the end of the story---we will live once again in awe of God, gratitude, and appreciation, and live wholeheartedly for his goodness. How do we know that? Because it has been whispered to us by the Lord Jesus, the apostle Paul, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and this faithful prophet Hosea---the husband of an unfaithful wife who represents the spirit of a nation and of each one of us.

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