

A LOVE STORY Hosea 1-3

I. **Winston Churchill** once said “Those who fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it.” That’s proven true numerous times— —so we’ll begin today by quoting two dead guys from history.

A. Will Durant was a well known American historian from the 20th century. His best known work was the 11 volume “Story of Civilization”. He won 2 Pulitzer Prizes. The **quote** “The greatest question of our time is not communism vs individualism, or Europe vs America or East vs West; The greatest question of our time is “Can men live without God”? Interesting question coming from Durant since he was an Atheist. Although by his own admission, he was a reluctant Atheist.

The **second quote** is from the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky (Crime and Punishment) in the 19th century. “If there is no God (or God is dead) then anything is permissible”. i.e. If men and women turn their back on God, any behavior is acceptable. Similar to living in the post Christian culture of today.

B. I want to address these 2 quotes. In order to do that we need to look at 2 things. First we need to look at the nature and character of God, then at the nature and character of men and women who turn their backs on God. But I want to do that in an indirect way by reviewing a story from the O.T. albeit a love story about an O.T. Prophet (Hosea) and his wife (Gomer).

C. Why are humans so attracted to love stories?

1. It’s fairly simple. As the Apostle John says in 1 John 4:16, “God is love.” And since we are created in His image, we are made to both receive love and give it. It’s in our DNA.
2. All love stories contain 3 elements: 1. Some level of sin or wrong doing. 2. Some level of tragedy—often a consequence of sin.
3. Some level of redemption.

This story certainly contains all 3 elements. This story is recorded in the first 3 chapters of Hosea.

- a. Chapter 1 introduces us to Hosea and Gomer.
- b. Chapter 2 details the sins of Gomer and Israel and God's response to the sin.
- c. The 3rd chapter deals with redemption.

II. Read 1:1-9, 3:1-3

A. Some background on this story is needed.

1. Hosea represents a view of God in this story. That is he represents the character and nature of God. This is seen even in his name which is derived from the Hebrew verb *yasha* which means to save or deliver. It's the root of Joshua and Yeshua also. Then Gomer represents the people of Israel. So she represents the character and nature of people who turn their backs on God.

B. Hosea is one of 3 prophets to the northern kingdom of Israel. In 930 BC after Solomon's death the nation divided into 2 kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. God raised up Hosea around 760 BC for the purpose of calling the people to repentance from their sins, or God would bring discipline from other nation (Assyria). It was a time of great turbulence in Israel as the people were committing spiritual adultery by worshipping the false god Baal. Baal worship included drunkenness, self-mutilation, human sacrifice including child sacrifice, and rampant sexual immorality of every imaginable kind. It mostly intensified in Israel in the previous century under King Ahab, who disobeyed God by taking a wife from the Phoenician city of Sidon (modern day Lebanon) a Canaanite culture. His wife's name was Jezebel and her father was a king and high priest of Baal. So she brought Baal worship with her, and Ahab built a temple to Baal in the capital city of Samaria where worship included the use of temple prostitutes. Baal was the Canaanite god of weather and fertility and the female goddess counterpart was Ashteroth or Ishtar, the goddess of war and love and fertility. Remnants of Baal worship went on for years even to the time of Jesus. (Matthew 12:24) The pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul the prince of demons.

Anyway, to say it was a bad time in Israel when God called Hosea into ministry would be an understatement. So Hosea is spending his days and nights calling the people to repent.

While Hosea's wife, Gomer probably captured the young prophet's heart with her beauty, she was from a culture devoted to idolatry and pleasure-seeking that was not of God's design. Hosea was happy at first especially when his first child, a son, was born. The Lord said to name him Jezreel—a name that meant coming judgement from the Lord for the blood that had been shed there. The Valley of Jezreel was northwest of Samaria and Ahab had built a palace there. One day Ahab was gazing out his window and saw a beautiful vineyard that belonged to a man named Naboth. Ahab wanted it, but Naboth refused to sell because it was his inheritance. So when Jezebel comes in and sees Ahab pouting in the palace and asks what's wrong, he tells her. She says that she will take care of it. She then gets Naboth convicted of blasphemy and stoned to death. Because of this God sends Elijah to prophesy of the deaths of Ahab and Jezebel—1Kings 21. Ahab died in battle from an arrow intended for "whom it may concern". And just as Elijah had prophesied his blood was licked by dogs in the same place Naboth's blood was shed. And Jezebel was executed at the order of Jehu and was eaten by dogs at Jezreel. 2Kings9:33. With all that happened at Jezreel, you can just imagine the look on people's faces in the marketplace when Hosea would call out to his son, "Jezreel, come here." It would be similar to a Jewish man today naming his son Auschwitz!

Well by now the marriage is going downhill, and the young prophet's heart is starting to ache, as he is up at night with his son while Gomer is out looking for a good time with other men. Then Gomer because pregnant again, but sadly the child is not Hosea's because she had begun taking on other lovers frequently. So a daughter is born, and The Lord says "name her Lo-Ruhama, which means 'no mercy' for the House of Israel if they did not repent of their sins. As Gomer's adultery continues, she becomes pregnant yet again with a son. Once again Hosea is not the father of this child. The Lord says "name him Lo-Ammi" which means not my kin or not my people. It verifies Hosea is not the Father, but also speaks to how the Lord views Israel. They too are faithless adulterers. But even though Gomer was living a life of continual adultery, Hosea still loved her and

refused to divorce her. But now things go from bad to worse with the birth of the 3rd child.

Picture in your mind this probable scenario.

Hosea comes home to find a note on the kids' bedroom door from Gomer. It said "I'm leaving because you can't give me what I desire, and I'm tired of being tied down. She's bored living with a prophet and his moral lifestyle. She wants fine wine, rich food and excitement. These are what she lusts for. But even though she has left Hosea's home she has not left his heart. His sadness and pain are great. You can imagine what the townspeople are saying: "HA! She left him. He was so busy telling everyone else how they were supposed to live, and he couldn't even hold on to his own wife. Serves him right." But some others probably said "he's better off without her."

Meanwhile Gomer thinks she's really free to pursue an exciting and fulfilling life. But as it usually happens in such situations, what starts out seeming good quickly spirals downward. She ends up with a man who uses her and won't even provide her with the necessities of life. Hosea hears about it and goes to the house where Gomer is and knocks on the door. The man comes to the door, and Hosea asks "Are you the man who lives with Gomer?" The man says "What if I am, and who are you?" Hosea replies "I am her husband." You can almost see the man double up his fists ready for a fight. But Hosea says "Wait, you don't understand. I'm here to give you gold and silver so that you can buy her what she wants and needs." The man must have looked at Hosea and thought 'what kind of nutcase is this?' But he takes the money and then goes to buy everything. And when he comes back, Gomer embraces and thanks him while not acknowledging it really came from Hosea who is watching from a distance. So Gomer continually seeks her satisfaction from the world—like Israel and they even used the money for Baal worship. But Gomer does not change even with the provision that Hosea gives, so he finally withdraws his hand of support. THEN things really get bad for Gomer. But as is stated in Chapter 2, God says that He will lead Israel into the Valley of Achor (trouble), but there He will open a Door of Hope.

So the Valley of Achor finally comes to Gomer. The man she lives with won't support her after Hosea stops giving money, But he doesn't just kick her out. Evidently he takes her to the auction block to be sold as a

slave to the highest bidder. And as was the custom of the times, she was probably stripped naked so the bidders could see what they were bidding on.

As the crowd gathered, Hosea appeared at the back of the crowd. You can imagine what some of the people were probably thinking— “Well he’s here to see that she gets what she deserves!” Then the bidding begins: 5 shekels (silver), 10 shekels, 15 shekels—then Hosea’s voice comes from the back—15 shekels and 9 bushels of barley. Stunned silence! Nobody can believe it! The prophet is actually bidding on his adulterous wife. Then the auctioneer’s gavel comes down—SOLD! To the prophet! And Hosea buys her back—He pays the ransom! That’s what the word redeem means: ‘to buy back; to pay the ransom that is due’. And he says to her you shall not play the whore or belong to another man and so I will be to you.

It’s important to remember that here Gomer doesn’t just represent the people of Israel, but she represents all of us sitting here who are in Christ. For you and I once stood on that auction block as slaves—slaves to sin. Completely dead in our trespasses and sins and without hope (Eph 2). But our Redeemer stepped up and paid our ransom. As Peter says (1 Peter 1:18), we weren’t redeemed with gold and silver, but with the precious blood of Christ. We weren’t redeemed by just a man, but by ONE who was fully God and fully man. By the One who created the universe; The One who created the trees that the lumbermen cut down and fashioned the beams of his cross; The One who created the minerals in the earth that were fashioned into iron nails to drive into His hands and feet. Jesus who conquered death and paid our ransom, He is our redeemer.

There are the 3 elements; sin, tragedy, and redemption that make up the greatest love story in the world. Towards the end of his life Will Durant was asked “What is the most practical and desirable thing in the world? He answered “The most practical and desirable thing in the world is LOVE. And then he quoted John 13:34.

III. So what does this story of Hosea and Gomer from almost 2800 years ago say to us today? What does it say about the essence of love? How about marriage? Marriage? Didn’t Hosea according to Matthew 19 have

the right to divorce Gomer? How could any man love such a woman? We're given a glimpse of how in Chapter 9 where it says the prophet was a man of the Spirit. You can only love like that through the power of the Holy Spirit. I think the main thing it shows us is that God doesn't look at situations the same way we often do. God's love is unconditional. He didn't divorce us though we deserved it.

The real key to marriage is to love God more than you love your spouse, because only He can meet our deepest needs and satisfy our souls. If we look to our spouse for that we will always be disappointed and dissatisfied.

There's a word in the English language that must never be separated from love. It's the word commitment. Jesus made a commitment to love us by going to the cross and He made that commitment before the foundation of the world according to Scripture. Quote: "When confronted with a great challenge the committed heart always searches for a solution; the uncommitted heart will always search for a way of escape."

THE REDEEMING LOVE OF GOD is the most powerful force on the planet, because it delivers people from the guilt of their sins FOREVER, and that love is continuing to daily set us free from the power of sin. It will one day set us free from the very presence of sin when we see our Redeemer face to face!

I'm sure there is probably someone here today who has never experienced the power of that redeeming love. Or maybe someone who would say "How could anyone love me like that? They don't know me or what I've done." But God doesn't love us for who we are or what we've done. He loves us in spite of who we are and what we've done. The same way Hosea loved Gomer. And the same way our Redeemer loves us.

So how do we respond to this redeeming love? The most obvious response is WORSHIP! It's not about the posture of worship, but what's in our hearts to express to the one who bought us back from the auction block of sin to spend an eternity with Him.

But there's a second level response captured in the words of the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:8—"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Peter is thinking of more than just words. Are our lives proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. What would that look like. 1 Peter 1:15 But as He who called you is holy, you be holy in all your conduct. John 13:34, 1 John 4: 19.