

Buying back the Worthless ~ Hosea 3

Ransomed and Loved, Undeserved

Luke Thorne

The previous chapter of Hosea expounded upon just how far God was willing to go to break the stubbornness of the “whore” Israel. It also showed just how much God loves her and what he was willing to do to reconcile her to himself.

In this chapter, however, God makes it practical. He instructs Hosea to seek out his wife (who has returned to prostitution), pay her slave price, and take her back. “Where, I say, do we find anything like this save in the parables of Jesus? For the love of Hosea was as the love of that greater Galilean.¹”

I can’t imagine how difficult that would have been—to be betrayed and abandoned (for a life of prostitution no less) and then to go and find her and bring her home. But that is what God told him to do, and today we’re going to dig deep into the *why* and explore what it tells us about God and his desires for us.

A Woman Who Loves Another

Hosea 3:1 (ESV)

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.”

Go, Love Again

The Hebrew is much more imploring: “Go again! Love!”² or “give her your love!” Of course, the woman in question is Gomer who, in chapter one became Hosea’s wife after living a life of “whoredom.”³

Apparently, she had left her husband of many years after their three children were born and returned to her old master. Sound familiar? We were all once playing the prostitute—whether to the whims and fancies of our appetite or the promises of wealth or security of physical—and we have all, at some point or another, returned to that prison.

How many times I have sought those old dead things that once brought me some passing measure of happiness, thinking that they will satisfy. Have you?

¹ The Expositor's Bible - The Book of the Twelve Prophets.

² NET Bible. Hosea 3:1. Note 1tn

³ See Hosea 1:2-3

The Enticement of Sin

The funny thing about sin is that it is fun at first. Drugs, alcohol, pornography, gossip, slander, lies, hate—they all, at first, offer delicious satisfaction... but then less and less until one day, they offer nothing. But by then you can't see that anymore. All you have are the fancies of what it used to be like and you fool yourself into thinking this time will be like the first time. It never is.

Following is an excerpt of a correspondence (The Screwtape Letters) from one demon to another about the proper use of pleasure to draw someone away from God:

“[God] made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and **least pleasurable**.

An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it's better *style*. **to get the man's soul and give him *nothing* in return** — that is what really gladdens our [Unholy] father's heart.” — C.S. Lewis. The Screwtape Letters. ch.IX, p.17 (Emphasis added)

And so, Gomer, believing the same lie we tell ourselves, left her *husband* and *children* and returned to prostitution.

Unworthy Lovers

The phrase “who is loved by another man” may be a bit misleading here. The Hebrew vocalizations in the ancient manuscripts disagree⁴ with the Masoretic (what our Old Testament in translated by) reading “who loves another man.” So which is it? Honestly, I suppose both.

On the one hand, “loved by another man” implies her sexual infidelity. On the other, she “loved” the attention and physical affection being a prostitute brought her—certainly more than she loved Hosea.

Redemption Regardless

God was commanding Hosea to go and love her again. Why? Because that was what the LORD was doing with Israel. Even though they “loved another,” he was going to redeem them. In fact, he was going to redeem the sin debt of any and all who would come to him.

⁴ “The MT vocalizes אַהֲוָת (‘ahuvat) as a construct form of the Qal passive participle and takes רֵעַ (rea) as a genitive of agent: “who is loved by רֵעַ.” However, the ancient versions (LXX, Syriac, Vulgate) all vocalize אַהֲוָת as an absolute form of the Qal active participle, and take רֵעַ as the accusative direct object: “who loves רֵעַ.” The English translations consistently follow the MT. The editors of BHS suggest the revocalization but with some reservation.” NET Bible. Hosea 3:1. Note 3tc

Buying the Worthless

Hosea 3:2 (ESV)

2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.

There's a few facts about this purchase (and it was a purchase as in, of a slave) that we should pause to consider.

15 shekels was exactly half the price of a common slave.⁵ And what's more, the seven bushels of barley was no great price. Barley is stock feed, good only for animals to eat and it was used as an offering of one accused of idolatry, "an expression of worthlessness and degradation."⁶

In other words, at this point in her life, Gomer wasn't worth even the common price of a slave to her owner. She was worthless.

Have you ever stopped to consider what you were worth? We talk a lot about how much Christ was willing to pay to redeem us, but I think we sometimes forget that what made that ransom so unexpected and so filled with *grace* was that we weren't worth it. It's what Paul in 1 Corinthians calls the "foolishness of God⁷." It confounded Satan and it confounds us too. The fact that we literally had no value and God paid *everything* for us is the very definition of grace. Apart from that grace, our lives are futile; they are a vapor in the wind. But in Christ, we are made worthy and blameless and immeasurably valuable.

And you know what? There are people all around you that haven't taken hold of that promise yet. They haven't been washed white and given the seal of God. They are still dead in their futility, and it's up to you to wake them from their spiritual death. It's up to you to shine the light to the lost and despairing and lead them to hope and security.

A Demand and a Promise

Hosea 3:3 (ESV)

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."

There were qualifications to Gomer returning to her husband and home. She had to prove, all over again, her fidelity and trustworthiness to Hosea. She was forbidden what, at first glance, seemed obvious: sleeping around.

⁵ See Ex 21:32;

Preacher's Complete Homiletical Commentary on the New Testament: Volume 25: The Minor Prophets.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ See 1 Corinthians 1:21-25

Slaves to That Which We Serve

The children of Israel, like us—like Gomer—can enter into the rest of God only because of his mercy. There is no earning it. We cannot come home because we *deserve* to, or because it's what ought to be done. We left—each of us—on our own volition when we chose to exchange the goodness of God for the appetites of our sinful nature.

But what is so incredible is that God invites us home. Sure, there is a cost, but he has purchased our debt so that we *can* choose. Though sin may still rear its ugly head in our lives, we are free from its total domination. We are free from it...

Galatians 5:1 (ESV)

1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

but we are not free from God's righteousness. We are slaves to it.

Romans 6:16-19 (ESV)

16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?
17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.
19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

There is a notion that a man can be truly free—an island of will. Rousseau said in his *Social Contract*, “man is born free and everywhere is in chains.” He was talking about the restrictions of law on a man's God-given liberty. But I would hazard a correction: “man is born *thinking* he is free and everywhere is in chains.”

The fact of the matter is each one of us is subject to one of two masters: sin leading to death or righteousness leading to everlasting life. There is no middle ground. You are either yoked to your appetite and pride or to God. Jesus said, “my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”⁸ Which do you choose to submit to daily?

God Remains Faithful Too

But what is so interesting about this verse is the last seven words: “so will I also be to you.”

⁸ Matthew 11:30

This is a promise, on Hosea's part, to remain faithful to her as well. To understand this promise's full significance, we need to understand what this says about God.

He has never forgotten his beloved. Though she has forgotten him, he remains steadfast in his faithfulness toward her. Did you know that God cannot "give up" on you? He calls everyone back home—pays the price of their folly—and never quits. Sometimes he hounds you, sometimes he chastens you, but he *never, ever* gives up on pursuing you. Do you know why? Because he loves you unconditionally and without regret.

No Worship, No Sacrifice

Hosea 3:4 (ESV)

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

Because of this hardship, the children of Israel will renew their worship of YHWH. He, Himself, withdrew from them in order that they might reflect the cries of Daniel:

"Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline your ear and hear.

Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. **For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.**

O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name." Daniel 9:17-19 (Emphasis added)

What's more, the LORD was promising to take away their *lovers*! Just as with Hosea and Gomer, the Children of Israel were being cut off from any consolation or comfort their "household gods" might offer.

Remembering and Returning

Hosea 3:5a (ESV)

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.

This is a prophesy that hasn't been fulfilled yet. True, the children of Israel were restored to the promised land in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, but that was only a foreshadowing of

what Paul proclaimed in Romans 11⁹.

“...a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” Romans 11:25b-27 (ESV)

In God’s “upside-down kingdom,” he chose to use the rebelliousness of his *chosen* people to save the goyim—the outsiders. And by the faithfulness of the outsiders, he will save the chosen. There will be a day when the remnant of Israel will turn back to him¹⁰ because of his mercy and grace. On that day, it will be finished.

It is important for us to realize that God has not chosen a new people. True, the Church *is* Israel, but his heart and passion for the children of Abraham has never waned. He awaits the moment of their return—like Gomer—with patient anticipation, and we should too. The King is returning soon!

The Kingdom of David, Anew

As Pastor Paul W. Alluded to in last week’s sermon (on Luke 17:20-37¹¹), David the King was referring to Jesus the Messiah, who would:

“...fulfill the promises of crushing the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). He would be like Moses and liberate His people and guide them to the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 18:15). He would reign on David's throne forever. He would be called such names as God with us, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).¹²”

That King has come, and he’s coming again to finish what was begun. He’s coming to call his lost children home and raise the cry across the land. But why does the text say “they shall come in fear to the LORD in his goodness...”?

We are commanded to fear because the LORD *may choose* to cut us off if we persist in unbelief—that is, persist in playing the whore¹³. Recall, Gomer was taken in under the command that she put off her old ways forever. Failure to do so would result in a loss of all that was promised as Hosea’s wife.

Remember, we are all of us slaves to something. And the way you can tell what you are chained to is by what you *choose* to do; what you present your body and mind to.

He is there, waiting and available to any who call on his name.

⁹ See Romans 11:1-27

¹⁰ See Zechariah 13:8-9

¹¹ Wallace, P. “The End” <https://Waysidechapel.sermon.net/main/main/21539047>

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ See Hebrews 3:12-14 and 4:11-13

“Jehovah will be found of them that seek him with solicitude. He is our only hope and dependence. If we abandon idols and turn to him, we shall again taste his goodness and rejoice in the light of his countenance.¹⁴”

Are you ready today to yolk yourself to him? God is love, and he is patient and kind, but he is also jealous¹⁵ and his patience is not eternal¹⁶.

Conclusion

Sometimes its easy for us to muse in broad colors about God’s love for us and how warm and fuzzy it makes us feel without truly acknowledging that he implores us—commands us—to love those around us the same way. In fact, as recorded in the Gospel of John—right after he got through washing his disciples’ feet—Jesus said,

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35 (ESV)

The same love with which I have loved you? The *same* love? That is a daunting statement! Keep in mind, Jesus washed Judas’ feet too! He knew that this man would betray him and that he would suffer a horrible death because of it, and he washed his feet anyway. I’m sure I speak for all of you when I say I fail at that all the time, but we ignore it at our peril. 1 John 4:20-21 says,

“If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

Let us take pause in our busy lives to consider what it means to love those around us. I’m sure our standard response to most is polite indifference (how did you treat the gas station clerk, or the waiter, or the person beside you in the elevator?). But God has shown a great deal more to us than polite indifference. Ought we endeavor to do the same to our neighbors? Take a moment with me in silence and let the Holy Spirit speak to you.

Our God is a God of reconciliation and love. He has lost children given over to prostituting their souls like Gomer—like us before grace—all around us. It’s our duty and amazing privilege to share that good news with the world. Let’s stop putting limits on his love and do that instead.

¹⁴ Preacher's Complete Homiletical Commentary on the New Testament: Volume 25: The Minor Prophets.

¹⁵ See Deuteronomy 6:15, Nahum 1:2

¹⁶ See 2 Peter 3:8-10

Questions:

1. Who is the woman God commands Hosea to wed?
2. Is it “who loves another man,” or “who is loved by another man”?
3. What is the significance of “purchase her”?
4. Why 15 shekels of silver?
5. What cost is required of the redeemed woman?
6. What promise is offered?
7. What are “pillars, ephod, or household gods”?
8. Who is “David, their King,” whom they seek in the latter days?
9. Why do they come to the LORD’s “goodness” in “fear”?
10. What is the Holy Spirit putting on your heart from today’s message?